

# Telfair County Schools

## Homeless Policy

(Revised March 14, 2022)

In accordance with the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act, the Telfair County Board of Education adheres to the guiding principle that all eligible children and youth who reside within the Telfair County School District are entitled to a free, appropriate public education. The Superintendent shall designate an appropriate staff person to be the Telfair County School District's liaison for homeless students and their families. Students identified as homeless will be given full opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards and will be included in state- and district-wide assessments and accountability systems. The Telfair County School District will ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are free from discrimination, segregation, and harassment. Any information regarding each student's homeless status shall be handled in a confidential and professional manner by school and district personnel.

Information regarding this policy will be distributed to all students upon enrollment and once during the school year, and posted on the district website and in every school in the district, as well as other places where children, youth and families can readily see the services provided, including local businesses and health department.

### Definitions

- Children and youth experiencing homelessness means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, and who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who:
  - are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
  - are living in motels, hotels, campgrounds or trailer parks due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
  - are living in emergency or transitional shelters;
  - are abandoned in hospitals;
  - are awaiting foster care placement;
  - have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
  - are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting; and
  - are migratory and living in a situation described above.
- A child or youth shall be considered to be experiencing homelessness for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above and to the end of the school year in which the student moves into permanent housing.
- Unaccompanied youth means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian,

who is experiencing homelessness as defined above. The more general term youth also includes unaccompanied youth.

- School of origin means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.
- Liaison is the staff person designated by a Local Education Agency (LEA) as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Immediate means without delay.

### Identification

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the liaison or designee will identify children and youth experiencing homelessness in the district, both in and out of school, and maintain access to data regarding homeless students. The liaison or designee will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth as experiencing homelessness, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the liaison. The liaison will also instruct school registrars and secretaries to offer homeless education information to families and to forward information indicating homelessness to the liaison.

### School Selection

Each child and youth experiencing homelessness has the right to remain at his or her school of origin, or to attend the appropriate school that serves students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living. Therefore, in selecting a school, children and youth experiencing homelessness shall remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent's or youth's wishes. Students may remain at their school of origin the entire time they are experiencing homelessness, and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing between academic years.

### Enrollment

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students experiencing homelessness may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth experiencing homelessness. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment. Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling or the LEA liaison. If complete records are not available, IEP teams or other committees or school officials, as appropriate, must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

## Transportation

Transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth experiencing homelessness. Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance, in addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth experiencing homelessness shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to housed students. The homeless liaison will train transportation department personnel on the transportation of homeless students.

## Services

Children and youth experiencing homelessness shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected, including:

- Transportation;
- Title I;
- Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners;
- Vocational and technical education programs;
- Gifted and talented programs;
- School nutrition programs; and
- Before-school and after-school programs.

Teachers will report academic achievement to parents on an ongoing basis by personal contacts, phone calls, emails, parent portal, or regular mail.

Evaluations of children and youth experiencing homelessness suspected of having a disability shall be given priority and coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary, to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school shall immediately implement it. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams should use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

## Disputes

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth experiencing homelessness shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the rights of a homeless student all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals and Title I services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or youth to the liaison. The liaison shall ensure the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The liaison shall keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are repeatedly creating barriers to student enrollment and academic success. The parent, unaccompanied youth or school district may appeal the liaison's decision as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

### Credit for Full or Partial Coursework

Upon enrollment, Telfair County School System's school administrators or designees will work with McKinney-Vento students to ensure that they receive appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with state, local and school policies. The Homeless Liaison will ensure these procedures are implemented for unaccompanied youth. The schools within the Telfair County School district will work with prior schools to calculate, award, and receive partial credits. Further, any necessary adjustments will be made to a student's schedule to permit the student to complete courses started at previous schools and to participate in credit recovery opportunities.

### Free Meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are available for learning, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible for free meals. This is not an issue for any Telfair County School District students because all students are provided free breakfast and lunch. When a child or youth experiencing homelessness enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the district nutrition office for immediate processing.

### Training of Personnel

All school staff members complete a Compliance Director module to review McKinney-Vento requirements and procedures for the identification and reporting of suspected homeless students. This module is completed in the first month of each school year, and documentation will be maintained on file. Also, information regarding homelessness is presented to and discussed with school administrators and counselors at technical assistance meetings at each school. Additionally, the Homeless Liaison is consulted if any staff member suspects that a student qualifies for homeless services. The Homeless Liaison or designee then investigates the situation and makes the ultimate determination on whether or not students qualify. The liaison will inform parents of homeless children about educational and related opportunities available to their children, assist parents of homeless children in accessing school transportation, and provide public notice of the educational rights of homeless children.

## FASFA

To ensure that McKinney-Vento high school students are informed of the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) process, the liaison is responsible for the following:

- Remove any barriers that may be prohibitive to completing the FAFSA process
- Ensure that McKinney-Vento students are informed of their independent student status and can apply for financial aid on their own
- Collaborate with school counselors to disseminate information and guidance
- Share and present resources that assist students with applying for financial aid

## Notification to Stakeholders of the Homeless Liaison Contact

Posters related to the Homeless Program that include the name and contact information of the Homeless Liaison are posted at each school and at various locations within the community. The same information is also available on the system website in English and Spanish.

## Coordination

The district's homeless liaison will coordinate with local social service agencies, liaisons in other school districts, state and local housing agencies, and pupil transportation department. Linking families with community resources can have a positive impact on the education of children.

## Title I Schools

Children and youth experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible for Title I, Part A services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness puts students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The Telfair County School District sets aside Title I funds for resources for homeless students. Reserved funds are used to provide educationally related support services to children and youth experiencing homelessness, both in school and outside of school, and to remove barriers that prevent regular attendance.

## Preschool

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Homeless children have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. To facilitate preschool enrollment and attendance, the provisions of this policy will apply to preschools. Our district will ensure that children experiencing homelessness receive priority enrollment in preschool programs operated by the district, including exempting children experiencing homelessness from waiting lists.

Homeless children with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Homeless children under age three will be referred for at-risk services under Part C of IDEA and screened to determine if referrals for additional Part C services are appropriate. The liaison will collaborate with Head Start and Even Start and other preschool programs to ensure that homeless children can access those programs.