

McKinney-Vento Act

Susquehanna Township School District Student-Family Handbook

Who is considered homeless?

- Under the McKinney-Vento Act, the term “homeless children and youths” means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes children and youths¹:
 - who are sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters, or are abandoned in hospitals¹;
 - who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;¹
 - who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;¹
 - who are migratory children who live in one of the above circumstances.¹

Retention

- Homeless students who move have the right to remain in their schools of origin (i.e., the school the student attended when permanently housed or in which the student was last enrolled, which includes preschools) if that is in the student’s best interest¹.
- STSD MKV liaison works with the district’s building counselors, transportation department, truancy officer, registrar, and student services department to remove barriers to retention.

Identification *(How School Staff Can Help to Identify and Support Homeless Students)*

Every LEA has the responsibility to designate a liaison for children and youth experiencing homelessness. STSD has a district liaison and a liaison for each building who help to identify and support students. They provide support and services to the students and families that include coordination of services within the LEA and the local community. In addition, the liaisons facilitate training and other useful awareness activities to support overall knowledge of MKV in the district.

- While it is important to avoid jumping to conclusions about students due to their appearance or performance, there are often warning signs that a child or youth is experiencing homelessness. For example, a child may fall asleep repeatedly in class, wear the same clothes multiple days in a row, have poor hygiene, fail to complete homework, or be regularly late or absent. Instead of punishing a student for these behaviors, it would be beneficial to get to the root cause and find out what supports you may be able to provide¹.
- Create a welcoming climate and build trust with all students. Many homeless students hesitate to identify themselves as homeless due to shame, fear of stigma, and concern about the possible consequences of this identification. By not being identified, however, these students miss out on critical supports. Building a safe and supportive environment in your school or classroom can benefit all students and alleviate these concerns for homeless students¹.

Enrollment

The McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to enroll students experiencing homelessness immediately, even if the student is unable to provide documents that are typically required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, records of immunization and other required health records, proof of residency, or other documentation. Enroll means

permitting the student to attend classes and participate fully in school activities. STSD focuses on enrolling students so that they may begin attending classes and participating fully in school activities without delay².

- If it is in the student's best interest to change schools, homeless students must be immediately enrolled in a new school, even if they do not have the records normally required for enrollment¹.
- Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youths have the right to dispute an eligibility, school selection, or enrollment decision¹.
- Unaccompanied youths must be accorded specific protections, including immediate enrollment in school without proof of guardianship¹.

Transportation

STSD ensures that all MKV students are transported to and from school to their current address. The liaisons ensure that adequate and appropriate transportation is provided for all students to eliminate this barrier to education.²

- Districts must transport homeless students to and from the school of origin at a parent's or guardians' request (or at the local liaison's request for unaccompanied youth).
- Districts must also understand that homeless students move frequently and adjust transportation plans accordingly.
- Districts must ensure that transportation is offered without delay. The best practice is to have transportation set up within three-five days.

Community Partnerships

- STHS Alumni Association
- HANNA Education Foundation
- HANNA's Pantry
- United Way of the Capital Region
- Ray's Place (Linglestown United Methodist Church, Rockville Campus)
- Dauphin County Library System
- Communities in Schools

Unaccompanied Youth

The MKV act guarantees educational rights and supports for unaccompanied youth. Unaccompanied youth are eligible for services under the MKV act regardless of the circumstances that led to their separation from family.

Unaccompanied youth is defined as a homeless child or youth, not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. The MKV Act does not provide an age range. Thus, a student whose parent retains legal custody of a youth, but not physical custody, is considered an unaccompanied youth². The group identified as unaccompanied youth can be categorized into sub-groups:

- Runaway Homeless youths: Youths who stayed away at least overnight without parents' or guardians' permission³.
- So-called 'throwaway' youths: These children left home because their parents encouraged them to leave or locked them out of the home³.
- Independent youths who feel that they have no home to return to due to irreconcilable familial conflicts or have lost contact with their families³.

Academic Supports

McKinney-Vento liaisons are required to ensure that children and youth in homeless situations have a full and fair opportunity to succeed in school. Homeless students must have access to all programs and services for which they are eligible, including special education services, preschool, school nutrition programs, language assistance for English learners, career and technical education, gifted and talented programs, magnet schools, charter schools, summer learning, online learning, and before and after-school care¹.

Furthermore, STSD MKV liaisons ensure that homeless children and youths who meet the relevant eligibility criteria do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities, including summer school, career and technical education, and advanced placement courses.² Enrichment programs clearly support that requirement. To the extent that individual students experiencing homelessness can benefit from such programs, they must be provided access to the programs.

Supports for MKV students include, but are not limited to:

- SAP (Student Assistance Program)
- Credit Recovery
- Summer School
- AAP (After School Assistance Program)
- Truancy Prevention/intervention services
- HANNA Cyber Academy (Online learning/cyber option)
- Graduation Plan

Physical Health Referrals

When dental, medical, and other physical health services are provided, STSD building liaisons ensure that students experiencing homelessness have access to them. Outside of school, McKinney-Vento liaisons are required to provide referrals for health, mental health, dental, substance abuse, housing, and other appropriate services in the community. Liaisons worked with the district's health services department to identify a list of Community Health, Dental, vision, and Hearing Care Providers *[add links to the list of providers]* who accept patients with medical assistance, CHIP, and without the ability to pay.

Building MKV liaisons provide support to students by coordinating other appropriate services, which may include job training, public assistance, food and nutrition, transportation assistance, and legal services².

Family Engagement Opportunities

School-level family engagement events and opportunities are listed annually on the district website. In addition, each school has a Title I web page that lists family engagement events.

Sources

1. Supporting the Success of Homeless Children and Youths. A Fact Sheet & Tips for Teachers, Principals, School Leaders, Counselors, and other School Staff. (2016). U.S. Department of Education.
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/160315ehcyfactsheet072716.pdf>.
2. The Most Frequently Asked Questions on the Educational Rights of Children & Youth In Homeless Situations. (2017). National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.
https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.3/Ova.b42.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2017-10-16_NAEHCY-FAQs.pdf.
3. Aratani, Y. Homeless Children and Youth; Causes and Consequences. (2009). National Center for Children in Poverty.
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