Propel School
scholars Experiencing Homelessness Policy

PURPOSE

Propel Schools recognizes its obligation to ensure that homeless scholars have access to the same educational programs and services provided to other Propel scholars. Propel Schools shall make reasonable efforts to identify homeless children within their schools, encourage their enrollment, and eliminate existing barriers to their attendance and education, in compliance with federal and state law and regulations under The McKinney-Vento Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.

Propel Schools shall waive policies, procedures and administrative regulations that create barriers for enrollment, attendance, transportation and success in school of homeless scholars, based on the recommendation of the Superintendent.

Scholars shall not be discriminated against, segregated nor stigmatized based on their status as homeless.

DEFINITIONS

Homeless scholars are defined as individuals lacking a fixed, regular and nighttime residence, which include the following conditions:

- ❑ Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason
- ❑ Living in a motel, hotel, trailer park or campground due to lack of alternative adequate accommodation
- ❑ Living in emergency or transitional shelters
- ❑ Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations or similar settings
- ❑ Living in substandard housing (no running water or working utilities, infestations, etc.).

School of origin is defined as the school the scholar attended when permanently housed or the school in which the scholar was last enrolled. When the child or youth completes the final grade level served by the school of origin, the school of origin shall include the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools.

Unaccompanied youth is defined as a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Migratory children is defined as children who are or whose parent(s)/guardian(s) are migratory agricultural workers, including migratory fisherman, and those who have moved from one school district to another in the preceding thirty-six (36) months, in order to obtain or accompany such parent(s)/guardian(s) for temporary or seasonal employment in agricultural or fishing work.

DELEGATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Propel Schools designates the Superintendent or designee to serve as the District's liaison for homeless scholars and families.

The Propel Schools' liaison shall coordinate with:

1. Local service agencies that provide services to homeless children and youth and families.

2. All Propel schools, as well as other school districts, on issues of prompt identification, enrollment, records transfer and transportation.

3. Network staff responsible for the provision of services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with with Disabilities Education Act.

4. State and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies.

Propel Schools' liaison shall provide public notice of the educational rights of homeless scholars in its schools and in community locations frequented by parents/guardians of homeless children and unaccompanied youths.

The Superintendent or designee shall develop and implement administrative regulations for the provision of educational programs and services to homeless scholars in accordance with federal and state law and regulations. scholars shall not be discriminated against, segregated nor stigmatized based on their status as homeless.

Propel Schools' liaison shall provide reliable, valid, and comprehensive data to the Coordinator of Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness(ECYEH).

Enrollment/Placement - To the extent feasible, and in accordance with the scholar's best interest, a homeless scholar shall continue to be enrolled in his/her school of origin while s/he remains homeless or until the end of the academic year in which s/he remains homeless or until the end of the academic year in which s/he obtains permanent housing. Parents/Guardians of a homeless scholar may request enrollment in the school in the attendance area where the scholar is actually living or other schools. If a scholar is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, the LEA's liaison will consider the views of the scholar in determining where s/he will be enrolled.

The selected school shall immediately enroll the scholar and begin instruction, even if the scholar is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment pursuant to Local Education Agency (LEA) policies. However, the LEA may require a parent/guardian to submit contact information. The homeless liaison may contact the previous school for oral confirmation of immunizations, and the school shall request records from the previous district, pursuant to Board policy. Homeless families are not required to prove residency regarding school enrollment.

School/Health Records - The receiving LEA may contact the LEA of origin for oral confirmation that the scholar has been immunized, but must not be a barrier to enrollment. Oral confirmation between professionals is a sufficient basis to verify immunization with written confirmation to follow within thirty (30) days. The instructional program should begin without delay after the enrollment process is initiated and should not be delayed until the procedure is completed. The enrolling LEA's liaison will assist the parent/guardian/scholar in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records.

Transportation - The last permanent residing district and the temporary residing district shall agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and cost of providing transportation for scholars experiencing homelessness to the network school in which they are currently enrolled.

Placement/Disputes/Complaints - If the LEA is unable to determine the scholar's grade level due to missing or incomplete records, the LEA shall administer tests or utilize appropriate means to determine the scholar's placement. If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the scholar shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent/guardian/scholar will be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision on the dispute, including the right to appeal. The parent/guardian/scholar will be referred to the LEA homeless liaison, who will carry out the state's grievance procedure as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. In the case of an unaccompanied scholar, the LEA liaison shall ensure that the scholar is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

If disputes or complaints of noncompliance arise regarding the education of homeless scholars, the following steps shall be taken:

1. The person filing the complaint shall first contact the school or LEA through the LEA Homeless liaison, the principal, or Superintendent to present their concerns to the people closest to the situation and most likely to be able to resolve it quickly.

2. If Step 1 is not successful or is not possible under the circumstances, contact should be made with the Homeless Project Education Liaison, or the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will accept complaints directly through the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.

3. Individual cases may be referred to the PDE's Office of Chief Counsel and the Office of the Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, as needed, by the State Homeless Coordinator.

PDE will deliver a response within fifteen (15) business days of the receipt of the complaint. The complaint may arrive in the form of a copy of the school/ LEA letter or on the Dispute Letter Form if given directly to a Liaison of the Homeless Initiative.

Propel's Updated Policy adheres to the ESSA Updates provided in executive summary below. Please see Propelschools.org for the complete update: "The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program is authorized under Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.) (McKinney-Vento Act). The McKinney-Vento Act was originally authorized in 1987 and most recently reauthorized in December 2015 by the Every scholar Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The McKinney-Vento Act is designed to address the challenges that homeless children and youths have faced in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. This particularly vulnerable population of children has been increasing; from the 2006-2007 school year to the 2013-2014 school year, the total number of homeless children and youths approximately doubled from 679,724 to 1,301,239 scholars, according to EHCY program data.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, State educational agencies (SEAs) must ensure that each homeless child and youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as other children and youths. Homeless children and youths must have access to the educational and related services that they need to enable them to meet the same challenging State academic standards to which all scholars are held. In addition, homeless scholars may not be separated from the mainstream school

environment.3 SEAs and local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to review and undertake steps to revise laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as barriers to the identification, enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and youths. The McKinney-Vento Act includes, among other things, new or changed requirements focused on:

1. Identification of homeless children and youths;

2. Preschool-aged homeless children, including clarification that local liaisons must ensure that these children and their families have access to and receive services, if eligible, under LEAadministered preschool programs, including Head Start, Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities), and other preschool programs administered by the LEA;

3. Collaboration and coordination with other service providers, including public and private child welfare and social services agencies; law enforcement agencies; juvenile and family courts; agencies providing mental health services; domestic violence agencies; child care providers; runaway and homeless youth centers; providers of services and programs funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act; and providers of emergency, transitional, and permanent housing, including public housing agencies, shelter operators, and operators of transitional housing facilities;

4. Professional development and technical assistance at both the State and local levels;

5. Removing enrollment barriers, including barriers related to missed application or enrollment deadlines, fines, or fees; records required for enrollment, including immunization or other.

6. School stability, including the expansion of school of origin to include preschools and receiving schools and the provision of transportation until the end of the school year, even if a scholar becomes permanently housed;

7. Privacy of scholar records, including information about a homeless child or youth's living situation; and

8. The dispute resolution process.

In addition, the ESSA removes "awaiting foster care placement" from the definition of "homeless children and youths."

The McKinney-Vento Act strongly emphasizes the importance of school stability for homeless children and youths. Changing schools multiple times significantly impedes a scholar's academic and social growth. The research on highly mobile scholars, including homeless scholars, indicates that a scholar can lose academic progress with each school change. Highly mobile scholars have also been found to have lower test scores and worse overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools frequently. Therefore, the McKinney-Vento Act calls for LEAs to maintain scholars in their school of origin to promote school stability and greater educational outcomes overall, unless it is not in the scholar's best interest.

Significantly, a number of the changes that the ESSA made to the McKinney-Vento Act highlight and respond to the needs of homeless children and youths across the educational spectrum. There is an increased focus on services for preschool-aged homeless children, which data show compose a major share of the overall homeless population;7 this includes the explicit inclusion of preschools in the definition of "school of origin." A number of changes also draw attention to the need for homeless youths in secondary school to be college- and career-ready, and the important role that school staff play in the transition to postsecondary education. The ESSA also

requires that SEAs implement procedures to ensure full and partial credit transfer for these scholars. Additionally, the McKinney-Vento Act now has a strengthened emphasis on the unique needs of, and supports for, unaccompanied homeless youths, such as through the verification of independent scholar status for the purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and improved coordination with other federally funded homeless assistance programs for which these youths may be eligible.

Additional Supports

Comparable Services
Homeless scholars shall be provided services comparable to those offered to other LEA scholars including, but not limited to:

1. Transportation services
2. School nutrition programs, including free meals
    a. All scholars, including scholars experiencing homelessness, regardless of financial standing, have access to free meals including breakfast and lunch.
3. Education programs for which the homeless scholar meets the eligibility critera, such as:
    a. Services provided under Title I or similar state or local programs
    b. Programs for English Language Learners
    c. Programs for scholars with disabilities

Family Engagement
Families are encouraged to attend family engagement opportunities provided by LEA throughout the the school year. Families with scholars who are experiencing homelessness will be provided with the option for transportation supports/services in order to attend such events.

Community Partnerships
Propel Schools recognizes the importance of community engagement to support families. Propel Schools partners with community agencies and organizations across the network to provide a myriad of supports and services for families. Propel's community partners also provide programming for scholars inside our school communities.

Training/Professional Development:
The LEA's liaison shall participate in professional development programs and other technical assistance activities offered by the Coordinator of Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program. The LEA's liaison shall arrange professional development for school staff, including office and enrollment staff, in order to:

- Improve identification of homeless children and youths and unaccompanied youths;
- Understand the rights of such children, including requirements for immediate enrollment and transportation; and
- Heighten awareness of, and capacity to respond to, the educational needs of such children.

McKinney Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvement Act:

https://www.education.pa.gov/k-12/homeless%20Education/mckinneyvento/pages/default.aspx

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Approved By	**Date**
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