

Meridian Public School District Procedures for Enrolling Homeless Students

The Meridian Public School District in compliance with the guidelines of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Reauthorized 2002, Title X – Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act – Sec 725) ensures that homeless children and youth, including preschool children, are afforded equal access to the same free, appropriate public education and services as provided to other children and youth.

Definition: The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, homeless students are individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Homeless students include:

Children and youth who are:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- (sometimes referred to as doubled-up).
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camp grounds due to lack of alternative accommodations;
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- Abandoned in hospitals; or
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; and
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.

Requirements

All school districts are required to maintain compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act which provides specific rights for homeless students. Every school district must designate a McKinney-Vento Liaison to assist in identifying, supporting, and ensuring the rights of homeless students and families. These rights include waiving certain requirements, such as proof of residency, when students are enrolling and allowing categorical eligibility for certain services, such as free lunch. The Act also states:

- Students who are homeless may attend their school of origin or the school where they are temporarily residing.
- Parents or guardians of homeless students must be informed of educational and related opportunities.
- Students who are homeless may enroll without school, medical, or similar records.
- Students who are homeless and their families receive referrals to health, dental, mental health, substance abuse, housing, and other needed services.
- Students who are homeless have a right to transportation to school.
- Students must be provided a statement explaining why they are denied any service or enrollment.
- Students must be enrolled in school and receive services, such as transportation, while disputes are being settled.
- Students are automatically eligible for Title I services.

- School districts must reserve a portion of Title IA funds to serve homeless students.
- School districts must review and revise policies that serve as barriers to homeless students.
- Schools must post information in the community regarding the rights of homeless students and unaccompanied youth in schools and other places where homeless families may frequent and written in a language they can understand.
- School districts must identify a McKinney-Vento Liaison to assist students and their families.

Eliminating Barriers to Enrollment

The LEA has an ongoing obligation to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youths. (See sections 721(2), 722(g)(1)(I)). A school selected on the basis of a best interest determination (see I-2 and I-3) must immediately enroll the homeless child or youth, even if the child or youth is unable to produce the records normally required for enrollment (such as previous academic records, records of immunization and other required health records, proof of residency, proof of guardianship, birth certificates, or other documentation), has missed application or enrollment deadlines during a period of homelessness, or has outstanding fees. (Section 722(g)(3)(C)(i); see also 722(g)(1)(H)). The enrolling school must also immediately contact the school last attended by the child or youth to obtain relevant academic or other records. (Section 722(g)(3)(C)(ii)). In addition, an LEA should ensure that homeless students are attending classes and participating fully in school activities immediately upon the student being identified as eligible for McKinney-Vento rights and services.

If a child or youth needs to obtain immunizations or other required health records, the enrolling school must immediately refer the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth to the local liaison, who must assist in obtaining the immunizations, screenings, or immunization or other required health records. (Section 722(g)(3)(C)(iii)). Any records ordinarily kept by the school—including immunization or other required health records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, and evaluations for special services or programs—must be maintained so that they are available in a timely fashion when the child enters a new school or school district. (Section 722(g)(3)(D)(i)). To facilitate immediate enrollment, timely transfer of records from school to school should also take into account procedures for inter-State record transfers.

MPSD will ensure that homeless students receive appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school. (Section 722(g)(1)(F)(ii)). Examples of such procedures include:

- Working to keep students in their schools of origin so they can avoid the challenges associated with school change;
- Providing support to enable students to attend school consistently and progress academically;
- Complementing regular classes with independent study programs, including on-line learning, and computerized models;
- Using Multi-tiered Systems of Support, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or Response to Intervention teams to identify if students are struggling due to issues related to mobility and homelessness or if there are other needs that must be addressed in order for the students to demonstrate progress academically

Homeless Education Liaison

The Director of Federal Programs shall serve as the Homeless Education Liaison for the Meridian Public School District.

Process for Identification:

Step 1: Administrators, counselors, and/or social workers will notify the Homeless Education Liaison when a homeless student enrolls within the school district. Per the definition of homeless, any parent or student that present themselves to school personal shall receive all services.

- All school personnel must be aware and sensitive to the signs of homelessness and work to actively identify homeless children and youth in a respectful and appropriate manner.
- As part of the ongoing efforts to identify homeless children and youth, school personnel will rely on information given in the Student Data Form. This form is provided to new students or their parents who seek to enroll at a school. Applicants who identify that they are in any of the housing situations identified above are considered “homeless” and should be immediately referred by school personnel to the school-based Homeless Education Liaison. They will then notify the district Homeless Education Liaison.

Step 2: Students within the Meridian Public School District who meet the definition of homelessness will be provided the following services:

- The school-based Homeless Liaison shall immediately confirm whether a student is homeless and proceed with immediate school enrollment and full participation in educational activities, even when records normally required for enrollment are not available (i.e. birth certificates, school records, medical records, residency documents). The district’s Homeless Liaison and/or designee will provide immediate assistance in obtaining immunization records, medical records, cumulative school records, and other pertinent information; however, the student must be enrolled while these documents are being obtained.[Section 722 (g)(3)(C)]
- The opportunity to remain in their school of origin (school last attended when permanently housed or in which last enrolled). Students will be permitted to remain in their school of origin for the duration of their homelessness. [Section 722 (g)(3) (A)]
- Transportation to the school of origin if the school is within the local district. [Section 722 (g)(1)(J)(iii)]
- The opportunity to attend school in an environment that does not stigmatize, isolate, label, or penalize the student or his family for being homeless.
- Access to programs and services including special education services, preschool services, free school meals, Title I services, English language learner services, vocational/technical education, gifted and talented services, and before- and after-school care. [Section 722 (g)(4)]
- The support of the Homeless Education Liaison, social workers, and school counselors to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified and provided full and equal opportunity to receive all educational services for which they are eligible in order to succeed in school. [Section 722 (g)(6)(A)]
- The school-based homeless liaison with the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth will complete the McKinney-Vento Service Report.

Step 3: Students will receive a copy of the McKinney-Vento Services Report. This copy will serve as notification of services to be received.

Step 4: The school-based homeless liaison will send a copy of the McKinney Vento Services Report to the district homeless liaison's office. The district office will be responsible for updating the Mississippi Student Identification System (MSIS) and PowerSchool indicator for homeless.

Enrollment of Unaccompanied Youth

The term “Unaccompanied Youth” includes a youth who is not in the physical custody of a parent/guardian (McKinney-Vento Act Sec. 725[6]). These youth may have been denied housing by their families, left home voluntarily, or been abandoned by their parents or guardians.

Unaccompanied homeless youth are ensured the same educational rights that the McKinney-Vento Act provides for other homeless students, which include the right to:

- enroll immediately, even if they do not have paperwork normally required for enrollment or have missed application or enrollment deadlines [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(C)(i)];
- attend either the local attendance area school or the school of origin, with the placement decision based on the student’s best interest, giving priority to the youth’s request [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(B)(ii)];
- attend either the local attendance area school or the school of origin, with the placement decision based on the student’s best interest, giving priority to the youth’s request [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(B)(ii)];
- remain in the school of origin (including the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools) for the duration of the homelessness and until the end of the school year in which the student becomes permanently housed [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(A)(i), 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(I)(ii)].
- receive transportation to and from the school of origin [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii)];*
- receive educational services, such as free school meals and Title I services and participate in gifted and talented programs, vocational and technical education, alternative education, programs for English learners, and any other services comparable to what housed students receive [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(4)]; and
- not be stigmatized or segregated on the basis of their status as homeless [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(I)(i)].

In addition to the provisions that apply to all homeless students, the McKinney-Vento Act includes the following provisions specifically for unaccompanied homeless youth:

- Unaccompanied homeless youth shall be immediately enrolled without proof of guardianship [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(H)(iv)];
- During a dispute over school selection or enrollment, unaccompanied homeless youth shall receive a written statement explaining the school’s decision, the youth’s right to appeal the decision, and a referral to the local liaison, and students must be enrolled in school immediately while disputes are resolved [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(E)];
- Local liaisons must ensure that unaccompanied homeless youth
 - are immediately enrolled in school;
 - have opportunities to meet the same state academic standards as other children and youth; and
 - are informed of their status as independent students for the purpose of applying for financial aid for higher education and provided verification of such status for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(x)].

MPSD will ensure that homeless students receive appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school. (Section 722(g)(1)(F)(ii)). Examples of such procedures include:

- Working to keep students in their schools of origin so they can avoid the challenges

- associated with school change;
- Providing support to enable students to attend school consistently and progress academically;
- Complementing regular classes with independent study programs, including on-line learning, and computerized models;
- Using Multi-tiered Systems of Support, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or Response to Intervention teams to identify if students are struggling due to issues related to mobility and homelessness or if there are other needs that must be addressed in order for the students to demonstrate progress academically

Unaccompanied youth will be referred to the District Homeless Liaison, who is responsible for

- Helping unaccompanied youth choose and enroll in a school, after considering the youth's wishes.
- Attempting to identify an adult in the youth's life who can act as a caregiver. If such person is identified, the District Homeless Liaison will request that the caregiver completes the District's "Caregiver Authorization Form" at the chosen school of enrollment. However, the identification of a caregiver and the completion of a "Caregiver Authorization Form" are NOT required for enrollment.
- Informing unaccompanied youth of their rights to transportation and assisting youth in accessing transportation.
- Providing unaccompanied youth with notice of their right to appeal school or school district decisions and ensuring that youth are immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of disputes.
- Serving as the youth's advocate during the dispute resolution process. The youth shall remain in the selected school while the dispute is being resolved.
- Informing school personnel of the specific needs of runaway and homeless unaccompanied youth.
- Referring youth to federally-financed youth shelters, the local social service agency, and other programs available.

The McKinney-Vento Act requires that schools enroll unaccompanied homeless youth immediately, even without a parent or guardian, and remove any barriers to enrollment. Because the McKinney-Vento Act is a Federal law, the immediate enrollment provision overrides any local policies that may be a barrier to enrolling unaccompanied homeless youth. There are three common

methods for enrolling unaccompanied homeless students:

- the student enrolls him or herself,
- a caregiver enrolls the student, or
- the local liaison enrolls the student.

Despite the absence of parents or guardians for unaccompanied youth, schools will still be able to acquire student records, as parent or guardian consent is not required in order to transfer student records to an enrolling school, according to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). (See 9.12 Useful Links for more information on FERPA.)

A school district cannot require a caregiver to obtain legal guardianship at any point prior to or following an unaccompanied homeless student's enrollment. A school district also cannot

discontinue a student's enrollment due to an inability to identify a caregiver, guardian, or parent following enrollment or an inability to produce guardianship or other paperwork.

*Please see the Meridian Public School District Procedures for Enrolling Homeless Students for further details regarding enrollment of unaccompanied youth.