

# McKinney-Vento Homeless Education



*Wilson County Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability in admission to, access to, and treatment in its programs and activities. Wilson County Schools is an equal opportunity employer.*

## **Guidelines for Educating Homeless Students**

Pursuant to the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, all children meeting the criteria outlined in the statute as homeless must have equal access to the same free appropriate public education (FAPE), including preschool education, provided to housed children and youth. This shall be the policy of the Wilson County Board of Education as stated in [Board Policy 4125](#).

Children and youth experiencing homelessness will be provided the opportunity to meet the same challenging state content and state student performance standards to which all students are held without being stigmatized or isolated. WCS will make every effort to provide homeless children and youth with a stable school environment by enrolling students in the school of origin and providing them with transportation to and from the school of origin as required in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act unless the parent/guardian declines transportation services.

Parents, guardians, or unaccompanied youth, may decline enrollment in the school of origin if they determine it is not in the student's best interest. The school may decline enrollment in the school of origin if they determine that doing so is well beyond what is reasonably feasible for the student's best interests (for example, the student is staying sixty miles away from the school of origin, which would be an unreasonable amount of time for the student to commute).

The enrollment of children meeting the statutory definitions of homeless shall not be denied or delayed due to any of the following barriers:

- Lack of birth certificate
- Lack of immunization or health records
- Lack of proof of residency
- Lack of transportation
- Student does not reside with their parent or guardian due to some identified reason

In the event any of these documents are lacking, the student will be immediately enrolled, and school personnel will continue to follow up to assist in obtaining the necessary documentation.

The WCS will increase awareness of the Homeless Education program by sharing posters in schools where students and parents can read them, as well as ensuring staff is trained on the definitions, policy, and procedure for identification and ensuring students have equal access to quality educational opportunities.

Wilson County Schools shall regularly evaluate its Homeless Education program to determine its effectiveness. The system will adjust practices and procedures as needed to improve the effective implementation of the statutory requirements and the achievement of identified students.

## **Homelessness Defined**

Wilson County Schools will use the McKinney-Vento Act's definition to identify children and youth who are homeless. The Act defines children and youth who are homeless as:

- (A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and
- (B) includes—
  - (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons 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 hospitals;
  - (ii) children and youths 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 (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));
  - (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
  - (iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

The term “unaccompanied youth” includes a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

[42 U.S.C. §11434a]

**School of origin** is the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

## **Identification and Registration Procedures**

Students who experience homelessness often go undetected. The district will conduct training sessions with the appropriate school personnel to inform them of methods of identifying homeless students without using stigmatizing terminology.

Unaccompanied youth may enroll himself or herself. In such cases, the data manager will immediately contact the appropriate WCS school counselor to report the enrollment of an unaccompanied youth so that he/she may assist the school and the youth with obtaining the educational and community services for which he/she may be eligible. The WCS Homeless Liaison should be contacted to provide assistance and support to the school counselor and/or the

school social worker. Using the WCS [McKinney-Vento Identification Survey](#), school counselors and school social workers should report all students experiencing homelessness to the Homeless Liaison.

The application process for the Free and Reduced Lunch program for students who have been identified as homeless can be expedited. The determination for free meals may be made without completing the full application process.

### **Identification of Homeless Preschoolers**

The WCS Homeless Liaison will collaborate with local community agencies and school personnel to identify homeless preschoolers. The district will also include homeless preschoolers and homeless children in Title I programs and in the “Child Find” process as required by the Individuals with Disability Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. All preschool programs within Wilson County Schools will adhere to all McKinney-Vento policies.

### **School Placement**

- The school system will make placement decisions in the “best interest” of the student who has been identified as homeless.
- Students will continue in the *school of origin* for the duration of homelessness when a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year and for the remainder of the academic year if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year.
- Students may also enroll in any public school where non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the student is actually living are eligible to attend.

When a dispute arises regarding enrollment in a school, the student who is homeless will be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought by the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, and the enrolling data manager will refer the parent to the school administrator who will pursue a resolution of the dispute. The school counselor, school social worker, and the WCS Homeless Liaison should be enlisted to assist in investigating details to resolve the dispute.

Based on the details of the investigation, the school administrator will decide on the student’s enrollment that complies with the McKinney-Vento Act. The school shall assist the parent in notifying The WCS Homeless Liaison of the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth's desire to appeal the school’s decision, if applicable. The WCS Homeless Liaison shall expeditiously take steps to understand and resolve the dispute.

## **Dispute Resolution Process**

Below are six key points for resolving disputes regarding school selection and enrollment for homeless children and youth:

- If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the student must be immediately enrolled in the school in which he/she is seeking enrollment, pending resolution of the dispute [42 U.S.C. §11432 (g)(3)(E)]. Enrollment is defined as "attending classes and participating fully in school activities." [42 U.S.C. §11434a].
- School personnel such as the school counselor, school social worker, and any other appropriate staff will investigate the details of the student's residence status and report their findings to the school administrator in addition to any other relevant information. Based on the information collected, the school administrator will decide on the student's enrollment that complies with the McKinney-Vento Act.
- A written explanation of the school's decision regarding school selection or enrollment must be provided if a parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth disputes such a school selection or enrollment decision, including the right to appeal [[42 U.S.C. §11432 (g)(3)(E)(ii)]. The written explanation shall be complete, as brief as possible, simply stated, and provided in a language that the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth can understand. This decision will be provided no later than 30 days from the time of the appeal.
- In the event the student, parent, or guardian is not satisfied with the school's decision, the school must refer the student, parent, or guardian to WCS Homeless Liaison to carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible. The Homeless Liaison must ensure that the dispute resolution process is also followed for unaccompanied youth.
- If the dispute remains unresolved or is appealed, then the Wilson County Schools Homeless Liaison shall forward all written documentation and related paperwork to the state homeless liaison with the NC Department of Public Instruction.

School districts must enroll students experiencing homelessness immediately. If, after enrollment, it is determined that a student is not homeless as defined in the law, school districts should follow the district policies that are in place to address any type of issues of fraud. Written notice should be given to the parent, guardian, or youth, including his or her right to appeal the decision.

### **When working with parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth, schools should:**

- Inform parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth that they can provide written or oral documentation to support their positions about school selection or enrollment.
- Provide a simple dispute form that parents, guardians, or unaccompanied youth can complete and turn in to the school to initiate the dispute resolution process.
- Provide a copy to the parents, guardians, or youth for their records when the dispute form is submitted to the school.
- Provide a copy to the parents, guardians, or youth for their records of the outcome of the

dispute, even when the dispute is immediately resolved satisfactorily without a referral to the district Homeless Liaison.

### **Summary of Procedures for Identification & Enrollment of Students Experiencing Homelessness**

- Students enrolled in a school, and then identified as homeless, should be referred to the school counselor, who will notify the WCS Homeless Liaison and the school social worker.
- Students identified as homeless during the enrollment process:
  - If there is no enrollment dispute, the data manager will email the school counselor to notify him/her of the student and make the counselor aware if not all documents are available at the time of enrollment.
- In the event there is an enrollment dispute:
  - The student who is homeless will be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought by the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. The enrolling data manager will notify the school administrator of the referral.
  - The school administrator will pursue a resolution of the dispute, enlisting the assistance of the school counselor and school social worker, as needed.
  - The school's designated transportation/bus coordinator will contact the WCS Homeless Liaison regarding the student's transportation needs.
  - The school counselor and school social worker will assist the school administrator in investigating details to resolve the dispute, consulting with the WCS Homeless Liaison as needed.
  - Based on the details of the investigation, the school administrator will make a decision on the student's enrollment that is in compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act.
  - If the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth would like to appeal the school's decision, the school shall assist the parent in notifying the WCS Homeless Liaison, who will assist in resolving the dispute.
- With all Students Experiencing Homelessness:
  - The enrolling data manager will make the school counselor aware if not all documents are available at the time of enrollment.
  - The counselor or social worker will contact the WCS Homeless Liaison regarding the student's transportation needs. The Homeless Liaison will complete the transportation process with the parent/guardian and work with the WCS Transportation Department.
  - Students experiencing homelessness will be enrolled in the Free and Reduced Lunch program.
  - The school counselor or social worker will submit the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education student documentation form (Google form - located in Student Services Shared Drive([McKinney-Vento Identification Survey](#))) for each student identified as qualifying for assistance through McKinney-Vento.