

Family Guide to McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

In compliance with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), PA Distance Learning Charter School is attempting to identify all children within the district that may be experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied homeless youth.

The term homeless children and youth is defined as individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. This includes individuals:

- 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 accommodations;
- 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.).

VGSD attempts to identify homeless students during the initial enrollment process and on an ongoing basis. If a student or family has indicated they are homeless, or if a staff member has reasonable suspicion that a student or family is homeless, they are required to alert the Homeless Liaison. All procedures in place are designed to ensure this identification does not create or exacerbate educational barriers.

Students shall not be discriminated against, segregated nor stigmatized based on their status as homeless. To the extent feasible, and in accordance with the student's best interest, a homeless student shall continue to be enrolled in their school of origin while they remain homeless or until the end of the academic year in which they obtain permanent housing. Parents/Guardians of a homeless student may request enrollment in the school in the attendance area where the student is actually living or other schools. If a student is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, the VGSD Homeless Liaison will consider the views of the students in determining where they will be enrolled.

The selected school shall immediately enroll the student and begin instruction, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment pursuant to VGSD policies. However, VGSD 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. Homeless families are not required to prove residency regarding school enrollment.

VGSD may contact the district of origin for oral confirmation that the student 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 as soon as possible after the enrollment process is initiated and should not be delayed until the procedure is completed. The Homeless Liaison will assist the parent/guardian in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization and medical records.

Homeless students shall be provided services comparable to those offered to other VGSD students including but not limited to: programs for students with limited English proficiency; and educational services for which students meet eligibility criteria, such as programs for

disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities. Homeless families will also have access to all parent involvement activities and initiatives. Students automatically qualify for free lunch services. VGSD has staff members who will work with local community agencies to coordinate services in the student's community. The staff includes: (liaison, Social Worker, counselor etc) as well as those involved in the Student Assistance Program. Additionally, VGSD has certified nurses on staff that work to ensure necessary referrals take place to appropriate health care, dental services, and other medical services.

VGSD will ensure the student has transportation to school related events, such as, but not limited to testing and field trips.

Placement/Dispute/Complaints: If VGSD is unable to determine the student's grade level due to missing or incomplete records, the school shall administer tests or utilize appropriate means to determine the student's placement.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent/guardian/student will be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision on the dispute, including the right to appeal. The parent/guardian/student will be referred to the 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 student, the Homeless Liaison shall ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

If disputes or complaints on noncompliance arise regarding the education of homeless students, the following steps may be taken:

- The person filing the complaint shall first contact the school's Homeless Liaison to present their concerns to the people closest to the situation and most likely to be able to resolve it quickly.

- 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.

- Individual cases may be referred to 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/district letter or on the Dispute Letter Form if given directly to a Liaison of the Homeless Initiative.

Children who are experiencing homelessness may qualify for assistance, with school supplies/materials, and/or tutoring so that they can remain in their school throughout the duration of their homeless episode.

If you believe your child(ren) may qualify for this service, please contact the- Homeless Liaison at 814-432-3861

If your living situation changes during the school year, and you and your children become homeless, please be sure to contact the school. We will work with you so that your child(ren)'s education is disrupted as little as possible.