LEHIGHTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

MCKINNEY VENTO STUDENT/PARENT RESOURCE GUIDE



2024-2025

Questions regarding this handbook may be directed to the curriculum office of the Lehighton School District at 610-377-4490.

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Lehighton School District Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Lehighton Area School District, in partnership with family and community, to provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment that gives all students the opportunity to achieve their fullest personal and potential for lifelong learning in order to become productive and responsible citizens.

McKinney-Vento Act

On July 22, 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act became public law. This was the first comprehensive federal law dealing with the problems of homelessness. Included in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, it is now called the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvement Act of 2001* (Public law 107-110. Subtitle B)

The Act ensures educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness. These rights and protections include:

- School Stability
- School Access
- Support for academic success

This is a federal law that supersedes conflicting state laws and local policies.

Who is homeless?

Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. This includes children who are:

- Sharing housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason.
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds.
- Living in emergency transitional shelters or agencies.
- Abandoned in hospitals.
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or a similar setting.
- Migratory children who are living in similar circumstances as above. The term migratory children means children who are, or whose parent(s) are migratory dairy workers, or migratory fishermen, and who have moved from one school district to another in the preceding 36 months, in order to obtain temporary or seasonal employment in agricultural or fishing work.
- Unaccompanied Youth (not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian). This includes children who have run away, been thrown out of their home, been abandoned, or separated from their parent(s) for any other reason.
- Living in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings.

Homeless Liaison

The McKinney-Vento Act states that, "Local education agencies will designate an appropriate staff person as a local education agency for homeless children and youth." This person has the following responsibilities:

- Identify homeless children.
- Inform parents of educational rights and opportunities.
- Provide them with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
- Disseminate public notice of the educational rights of homeless students. (schools, shelters, etc.)
- Mediate enrollment disputes.
- Inform parent(s)/guardian(s) of transportation options.
- Identify and ensure unaccompanied youth are immediately enrolled pending any disputes that might arise and remove barriers that prevent them from receiving credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed at prior school.
- Assist children and youth who do not have immunizations or records to obtain necessary documentation or immunizations.
- Know the best resources in your community to assist families and give referrals. (food, shelter, counseling, substance abuse)
- Distribute information on the subject of homeless students to staff.
- Arrange staff development workshops and presentations for school personnel.
- Provide standard forms and information about enrollment procedures and key school programs to each shelter in your district.
- Ensure homeless children in need of special education are identified.
- Identify preschool-aged homeless children and ensure access to Head Start and Early Intervention.
- Participate in professional development and technical assistance.

The Superintendent has designated the following individual as the Lehighton Area School District Homeless Liaison:

Mary Figura
Assistant to the Superintendent
mfigura@lehighton.org
610-377-6180

Enrollment

The Lehighton Area School District has adopted the following policies in regards to homeless student enrollment ("Enroll" and "enrollment" are defined to include attending classes and participating fully in school activities):

- The Lehighton Area School District will immediately enroll a homeless child despite lack of records .

- The Lehighton Area School District will immediately contact the student's previous school for records. (academic records, immunizations, IEP's, etc.)
- If the child lacks immunizations or immunization records, the Lehighton Area School District will refer them to the homeless liaison who shall help obtain what is necessary.
- Homeless families do not have to prove residency regarding school enrollment.
- Enrollment will not be delayed because of fees owed for textbooks or any other debt the student owes.
- Absences caused by homelessness will not be counted against students.

Timely & Accurate Identification

The Lehighton Area School District 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.

School Placement Decision Process & Attendance at School of Origin

To the extent feasible, the Lehighton Area School District will keep homeless children in their school unless it is against the wishes of the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth.

The Lehighton Area School District also considers the following factors to determine what would be in the best interest of the homeless student:

- Distance to the Lehighton Area School District
- Age of child
- Area the family and/or child might relocate to
- Special needs
- Time of school year
- Other siblings
- Domestic violence (danger at school?)
- Consult with staff at original school (best interest)
- Pregnant teen and child care
- Parent/Guardian/Child choice

School attendance teams meet weekly to discuss frequently absent students and their cause for absenteeism. Absences of homeless students are reviewed and discussed during these meetings to ensure that any absenteeism is addressed for support services.

Transportation

The Lehighton Area School District has adopted policies and practices to ensure that transportation is provided for our homeless students to help students remain in their school of origin. If a homeless student moves to an area served by another LEA, the Lehighton Area School District and LEA in which the

student is living will agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and cost of transportation. Distance, time of year, option available, effects of transfer, and any other transportation issues will be addressed.

Academic Standards and Supports

The Lehighton Area School District has staff members who work with local community agencies to coordinate services in the community. This staff includes school counselors, social workers, as well as those involved in the Student Assistance Program. Additionally, the Lehighton Area School District has certified nurses on staff that work to ensure necessary referrals take place to appropriate health care, dental services, and other medical services.

Other supports include:

- After School Tutoring
- Title I Math and Reading Services
- Summer and Winter School
- Shine Program
- LAVA Program

The Lehighton Area School District supports graduation for students experiencing educational instability for students experiencing homelessness per Act 1 of 2022.

Title I Funds

All children in homeless situations are automatically eligible for Title IA services and a portion of these funds is set aside to provide services and support to our homeless students to facilitate their success in school and to meet academic achievement standards.

Title IA funds may be used for:

- Items of clothing for students
- Transportation
- Clothing for Physical Education Classes
- School supplies
- Birth certificates (enrollment)
- Immunizations
- Medical and dental services
- Eyeglasses and hearing aids
- Counseling services (anxiety)
- Outreach services to students living in shelters, motels or other temporary residences
- Extended learning time before or after school (lack of quiet time)
- Tutoring services
- Parental involvement
- Fees for SAT/ACT testing

Disputes & Rights to Appeal Educational Placement Decisions

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, it is policy of the Lehighton Area School District that the student be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The District will provide the parent/guardian or student with a written explanation of the District's decision on the dispute, including the right to appeal. The Homeless Liaison will carry out the state's grievance procedure as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. In the case of any unaccompanied student, the Homeless Liaison will ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute. More information regarding the dispute resolution process can be found here.

The Regional Coordinator may assist in the mediation of disputes directly and may also invite those involved to have the dispute mediated at any time in the process. The local regional coordinator is:

Jeff Zimmerman
Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18
(570) 718-4613
jzimmerman@liu18.org

Unaccompanied Youth

The McKinney-Vento Act includes the following provisions specific to unaccompanied youth:

- The right to immediate enrollment without proof of guardianship.
- Assistance from the District's homeless liaison to select a school of attendance.
- Receive transportation to and from the school of origin, if requested.
- Ensure the prompt and fair resolution of any disputes in accordance with the Act

With the Lehighton Area School District, unaccompanied youth may also may sign paperwork for enrollment and school absences.

Student Meals While in School

The Lehighton Area School District participates in the national school lunch program and the community eligibility program to ensure that all students receive free meals for breakfast, lunch and after school.

Assistance

Please see appendix A for a comprehensive list of local facilities who can assist families with housing needs, financial assistance, medical and counseling resources, employment assistance, child care, and food assistance.

Family Engagement Opportunities

Family engagement opportunities are available to all school district families. Please refer to our website at www.lehighton.org for current information. Most information is also available via alert call.

If a homeless family is unable to access this information due to lack of phone or internet access, please notify the homeless liaison for assistance.

Community Partnerships

The Lehighton Area School District has established relationships with community partners to provide housing, food, or employment assistance, as well as health and behavioral health assistance. Homeless families are asked to contact the District Homeless Liaison to request assistance with their specific needs.

Early Childhood Referrals

Early childhood development programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, Early Intervention, and Pre-K Counts can mitigate the effects of homelessness. Accordingly, the homeless liaison will work to identify younger siblings of school age students identified as homeless, refer these children to early childhood development programs, and report these children as homeless.

Appendix A