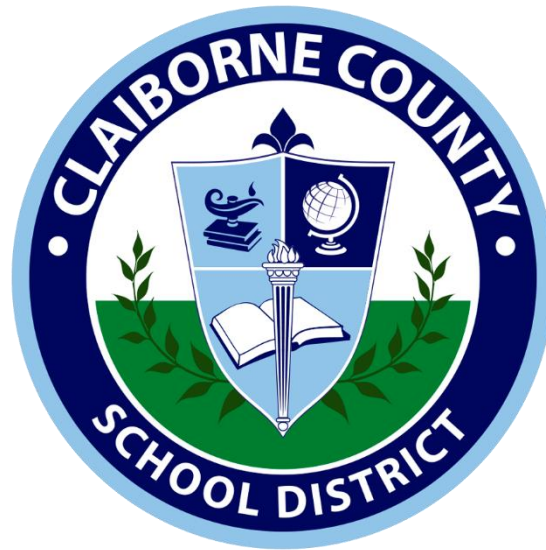


HOMELESS STUDENTS & UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH

McKinney-Vento Policy & CCSD Procedures Guide



Office of Federal Programs

CLAYBORNE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

CLAIBORNE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR SERVING HOMELESS STUDENTS- AND UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH UNDER THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT

The Claiborne County School District (CCSD) has adopted the following policy and procedures for identifying, enrolling, and providing services for homeless students and unaccompanied youth (students in transition) in the Claiborne County School District (CCSD). This policy will be reviewed, revised, where applicable, and approved annually as required through Federal Programs.

The Claiborne County School District, in compliance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act), shall ensure that all homeless children and youth, including preschool-aged children, are provided with equal access to free appropriate education programs. Homeless students will have access to the education and other services that they need in order to have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State of Mississippi academic achievement standards to which all students are held.

Homeless children and youth will not be segregated from the mainstream school environment on the basis of their homelessness. The District will ensure that homeless children and youth are protected from discrimination and harassment on the basis of their homelessness. The District will make reasonable efforts to identify homeless children and unaccompanied youth of school age within the district and eliminate barriers in District policies or practices that would prevent them from receiving an education.

Definitions

The McKinney-Vento Act defines “homeless children and youth: as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence. The term includes:

1. Children and youth who are:
 - a. sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as *doubled-up*);
 - b. living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
 - c. living in emergency or transitional shelters;
 - d. abandoned in hospitals;
 - e. awaiting foster care placement;

- f. children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
 - g. children and youth who are living in a cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar setting; and
 - h. migratory children and youth who are living in circumstances described above.
2. Unaccompanied youth: a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who meets the definition above.
 3. Enroll and enrollment: attending school and participating fully in school activities.
 4. Immediate: without delay.
 5. Parent: a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.
 6. School of Origin: the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.
 7. Liaison: the staff person designated by the Claiborne County School District as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act.

Identification

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the liaison will work to identify homeless children and unaccompanied youth in the district.

School Selection

Each homeless child and unaccompanied youth has the right to remain at his or her school of origin, or to attend any school that houses students who live in the attendance area in which the child or unaccompanied youth is actually living or eligible to attend. In selecting a school, homeless children and unaccompanied youth shall remain at their school of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent's or youth's wishes. Students may remain at their school of origin the entire time they are homeless, and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing between academic years.

Feasibility shall be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent's or youth's wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

- ✓ Safety of the student;

- ✓ Continuity of instruction;
- ✓ Likely area of family's or youth's future housing;
- ✓ Time remaining in the academic year;
- ✓ Anticipated length of stay in temporary living situation;
- ✓ School placement of siblings; and
- ✓ Whether the student has special needs that would render the commute harmful.

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin and services under federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.

Enrollment

The District will immediately enroll homeless children and youth. Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school: they may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling or the homeless liaison.

Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:

- ✓ Proof of residency;
- ✓ Transcripts/school records (The enrolling school must contact the student's previous school to obtain school records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the student's age and information gathered from the student, parent and previous schools or teachers.);
- ✓ Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records (If necessary, the school must refer students to the liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunization and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from previous schools or state registries, and school- or community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed.);
- ✓ Proof of guardianship;
- ✓ Birth certificate;
- ✓ Any other document requirements;
- ✓ Unpaid school fees;
- ✓ Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes; and
- ✓ Any factor related to the student's living situation.

Title I

Homeless children and youth and unaccompanied youth are automatically eligible for Title I services, regardless of what school the student attends. The District shall reserve such funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title I students to homeless children and youth and unaccompanied youth attending non-participating schools (**Note: All of CCSD's schools are Title I schools**). Reserved funds will be used to provide educationally related support services to homeless children and youth to remove barriers that prevent regular attendance.

The District's Title I plan will be coordinated with McKinney-Vento Act services, through collaboration between the Title I director (Federal Programs Director) and the homeless liaison.

Transportation

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent's request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a homeless child or youth or an unaccompanied youth. Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes. The local liaison will request transportation to and from the school of origin for children and unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will only be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.

Schools and local liaison will use the district transportation form to process transportation requests. Transportation requests shall be arranged without delay. If the student in transition is living and attending school in the Claiborne County School District, the District shall arrange transportation. If the homeless student is living in this district but attending school in another, or attending school in this district but living in another, the District will develop an inter-district transportation agreement with the district in which the homeless student resides or the district that houses the homeless student's school of origin. It is this district's policy that inter-district disputes shall not result in a homeless student missing school. If such a dispute arises, this district will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention of the Mississippi Department of Education, Offices of Coordinator of Homeless Children and Youth and Student Transportation.

In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to housed students.

Services

Homeless children and youth in transition shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected, including:

- ✓ Transportation (as described above);
- ✓ Title I, Part A services (as described below);
- ✓ Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners;
- ✓ Vocational and technical education program
- ✓ Gifted and talented programs;
- ✓ School nutrition programs (free meals); and
- ✓ Before and after-school programs.

Evaluations of homeless children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability shall be given priority and coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary, to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school shall immediately implement it. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence shall be evaluated to determine if it is a result of the child's or youth's living situation. If the school administrator determines that the absence or tardy was a result of homelessness, the administrator may excuse the absence or tardy. School personnel shall refer homeless children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

School personnel must inform parents of all educational and related opportunities available to their children and provide parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education. All parent information required by any provision of this policy must be provided, to the extent practicable, in a form, manner and language understandable to each parent.

Disputes

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the homeless child, youth, or unaccompanied youth shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the rights of a homeless student to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals and Title I services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or youth to the District Homeless Liaison. The liaison shall ensure that the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The local liaison will keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth in transition repeatedly.

The parent, unaccompanied youth or school district may appeal the liaison's decision as provided in the Claiborne County School District and the Mississippi State Department of Education Complaint Process.

Free meals

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all homeless children and youth are automatically eligible for free meals.

Preschool

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Children in transition have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. To facilitate preschool enrollment and attendance, the provisions of this policy will apply to preschools administered by our school district.

The District will ensure that homeless children receive priority enrollment in preschool programs operated by the district, including exempting homeless children from waiting lists.

Homeless children with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Homeless children under age three will be referred for at-risk services under Part C of IDEA and screened to determine if referrals for additional Part C services are appropriate. The local liaison will collaborate with Head Start and Even Start programs and other pre-school programs to ensure children in transition can access those programs.

The Homeless Liaison for the Claiborne County School District is Dr. Trena Warren located at the main district office. Her contact information is 404 Market Street ~ Port Gibson, MS 39150 ~ 601-437-4352. Others designated as Point-of-Contact at schools include: Mr. Michael Anderson, Counselor at A.W. Watson Elementary @ 601-437-5070, Dr. Sarai Johnson, Counselor at Port Gibson Middle School, and Mrs. Detranell Bailey, Counselor at Port Gibson High School @ 601-437-4190.