McKinney-Vento Homeless Policy
Mifflinburg Area School District

A. General Policy Statement:

The Mifflinburg Area

School District shall ensure that homeless children and youths shall have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths.

B. Definitions:

"School of Origin" shall mean the school that a child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled, including preschool. School of origin shall also include any designated receiving school for the next grade level for all feeder schools when a student completes the final grade level served by the school of origin.

"Homeless children and youths" shall mean any individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and includes:

1. 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 hotels, motels, 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;
2. 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 of human beings;
3. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
4. Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above (B-3).

"Unaccompanied Youth" shall mean a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. Unaccompanied youth are eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act regardless of the circumstances that led to their separation from family; this includes youth who ran away from home, and youth who were forced from the home by their families. The dynamics of family conflict or dysfunction often are very personal and sensitive, and may not be shared readily with school staff; as such, what students or parents disclose may be an inaccurate or incomplete representation of what has occurred within the family.

C. School Stability:

1. School Selection: Each school shall presume that keeping a homeless child or youth enrolled in that child's or youth's school of origin is in the child or youth's best interest, except when doing so is contrary to the request of the child's or youth's parent or guardian or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth.
   To overcome the presumption that a child or youth should remain in his/her school of origin, the school staff shall consider student-centered factors including; the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless children and youth, giving priority to the request of the child's or youth's parent or guardian or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth.
   (See Appendix A for Best Interest Determination Worksheet)

2. Enrollment: Once the school is selected in accordance with the child's or youth's best interest, that child or youth shall be immediately enrolled even if the child or youth is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment including, but not limited to, previous academic records, immunization or other health records, proof of residency, or has missed any application or enrollment deadlines during any periods of homelessness.

3. Transportation: If the child or youth continues to attend his or her school of origin, transportation shall be provided promptly even if there is a dispute pending regarding which school is in the child's or youth's best interest to attend. Transportation will continue to be provided to and from the school of origin for the remainder of any academic year during which the child or youth becomes permanently housed.

D. PROCEDURES FOR ENROLLMENT OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

1. When contact is received by the District's Homeless Liaison from school administration, District registration office, shelter, etc., the following procedures will be followed:
   a. The District Liaison will facilitate the student's immediate enrollment in school;
   b. Contact the School Administration/Child Accounting to list student as homeless;
   c. Contact parent/shelter to discuss services;
   d. Arrange for transportation;
   e. Ensure teachers and staff receive necessary information to assess education needs;
   f. Arrange for Title I, and all educational services (special ed., vo-tech, etc.);
   g. Ensure student receives free breakfast/lunch;
   h. Begin documentation of student information.

i. Refer student to appropriate school/district programs for support (SAP, IST, Tutoring, Child Study, etc.), if necessary
j. Ensure all parties receiving information are aware of safety and confidentiality issues and that homeless information is covered under FERPA.

2. When necessary, contact Regional Homeless Coordinator to determine if other services are required, i.e., medical, vouchers for clothing, food/supplies, housing, etc.
3. Complete administrative responsibilities:
    a. Include student information on District Homeless list;
    b. Submit student listing with District Liaison's signature to Food Service Liaison and Federal Program Coordinator;
    c. Ensure all needs and services are documented;
    d. If appropriate, review course of study, graduation/promotion requirements, determine if credit recovery is necessary due to homelessness;
    e. Coordinate with community service providers as needed.

E. <u>Records</u>

Any record ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, and evaluations for special services or programs, regarding each homeless child or youth shall be maintained:

1. Such that all records are available, in a timely fashion, when a child or youth enrolls in a new school or school district;
2. Any information about a homeless child's or youth's living situation shall be treated as a confidential student education record, and shall not be deemed to be directory information; and
3. In a manner consistent with the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act.

F. <u>Designation of McKinney Vento Local Educational Liaison:</u>

Mifflinburg Area School District shall identify an appropriate staff person to be the Local Educational Liaison (LEL) for all homeless children and youth attending ***Mifflinburg Area School District.*** The LEL responsibilities shall include, but are not limited to:

1. Ensure homeless children and youth are identified through outreach and coordination activities including coordination with school district personnel responsible for education and services to homeless children and youth, community agencies and Regional Coordinator for Pennsylvania Education for Children and youth Experiencing Homelessness;
2. Receive appropriate time and training in order to carry out the duties required by law, School Board Policy and this Administrative Policy;
3. Ensure homeless families and homeless children and youth are referred to health care, dental, mental health, substance abuse, housing and any other appropriate services;
4. Ensure that homeless children and youths:
    a. Are enrolled in school which includes attending classes and participating fully in school activities.
    b. Have full and equal opportunity to meet the same challenging state academic standards as other children and youth;
    c. Receive individualized counseling from counselors to prepare and improve their readiness for higher education and vocational training including school selection, application, financial aid, and on campus supports.
    d. And that Unaccompanied youths are informed of the status as independent students and may receive verification of such status for purpose of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
5. Ensure that school personnel providing services to children and youth experiencing homelessness receive required professional development and support.
6. Coordinate and collaborate with Regional and State Coordinators for Homeless Education.

G. Dispute Resolution

1. The dispute procedure must be available for disputes over eligibility, as well as school selection or enrollment.
2. In the event of a dispute regarding where a child or youth should enroll, the child or youth shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought pending the final resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals. The district shall immediately provide the child's parent or guardian or, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth a written explanation of the decision made regarding the school selection including the right to appeal such decision. This shall be provided in a manner and form understandable to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth and also include the Local Educational Liaison contact information.
3. The Local Educational Liaison shall aid the child, youth or family through further action in the process. (see Mifflinburg Area School District Dispute Resolution Process) Appendix B

H. Training and Professional Development

1. The homeless liaison or designee will conduct training for the following school staff on an annual basis:
   a. Superintendent and/or designee
   b. Principals
   c. Assistant Principals
   d. Federal Program Administrators
   e. School Secretaries
   f. Counselors
   g. School Psychologists
   h. School Nurses
   i. Teachers and other Professional Employees
   j. Support staff

2. The training and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with the policy and procedures and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition

I. Title I

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness puts such students at risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The Title I Coordinator will reserve such funds that are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title I students to children and youth in transition attending non-participating schools. The amount reserved shall be determined by a formula based upon per pupil Title I expenditure and developed jointly by the Title I Coordinator and the homeless liaison. Reserved funds will be used to provide education-related support services to children and youth in transition, both in school and outside of school, and to remove barriers that prevent regular school attendance. The Miflinburg Area School District's Title I Plan will be coordinated with our McKinney-Vento services. Children and youth in transition will be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems, as required by state and federal law and regulations.

J. Free Meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, The U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day that the child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school will submit the student's name to the Director of Food Services for immediate processing.

K. Outside Agencies and Services

District Liaison and other appropriate personnel should maintain a list of available local resource providers and should be prepared to refer the student and family for services as necessary.

L. Transportation

1. Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his/her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, transportation shall be provided to the school of origin for a child or youth in transition.
2. Transportation will be provided for the entire time that the youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes.
3. The homeless liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin if there is potential harm to the student.
4. Factors that may be considered are:

a. time of day of transportation,
b. distance to and from school,
c. age of the child or unaccompanied youth,
d. medical or other disabilities.

5. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance. Transportation requests from schools should be made to the homeless liaison in a timely manner in order to avoid or minimize delay
6. In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin, children and youth in transition shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to all other students.
7. Once a child/family has been identified as being in a "homeless" situation (usually via school faculty/staff, supporting agency notification, etc.), the following steps are taken to secure transportation.
    a. Contact is made with supporting agency if applicable
    b. Information on temporary housing location is confirmed
    c. Parent/Guardian contact information is obtained
    d. Contact information for shelter, hotel, etc is obtained
    e. Notification w/above information is sent to transportation company
    f. Company then sets a route in place as soon as possible. This sometimes take several days depending on where the location is and whether there are any existing routes that new location will fit into.
    g. Parent/Guardian is notified when transportation will begin and pickup and drop off times are given.
    h. Contact with the student's school with transportation plan.

Appendix A

MIFFLINBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

McKinney-Vento Worksheet for Best Interest Determination for School Placement

Date: _____

Please provide the information for the previous schools the child attended, listing the most recent school first.

1. Are the school of origin and the school of residency in the same or different public school districts?
2. What is the child's desire concerning the school of his/her best interest?
3. What is the opinion of the parent or caregiver concerning the child's school of best interest?
4. What is the distance and time spent on travel from the current residence to the school of origin?
5. If transportation is not currently available back to the school of origin, how can it be arranged?
6. What time of year is it (near the end of the school year, the summer)?
7. How long did the child attend the school of origin? Were meaningful social and educational relationships established?
8. Are there specified people in the school of origin who have been providing support or assistance to the family or child experiencing homelessness?

9. Are there special programs such as gifted, bilingual, or remedial education in which the child has been participating at the school of origin? -If yes, please name.-Are they available at the school of residency?

10. Based on the knowledge of the family situation, how long is it likely that the family will remain at the current residence?

11. What is the likelihood that the family experiencing homelessness will once again establish residency in the attendance area of the school of origin?

Recommendation:

Individuals consulted on this determination of feasibility for school placement in the student's best interest:

Signatures of the individual(s) making the recommendation:

Appendix B

Dispute Resolution Process

Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program

Pursuant to the McKinney-Vento Act, every state must develop procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding the educational placement of homeless children and youths. The state must ensure that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) comply with requirements set forth in the McKinney-Vento Act including ensuring immediate enrollment, providing written notice to families concerning school selection, enrollment decisions and providing enrollment and pendency in the school of choice while a dispute is being resolved.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has developed the following procedures to govern the resolution of disputes regarding enrollment, school selection, homeless status and complaints of non-compliance with legal requirements pertaining to the education for homeless children and youths:

Level 1 – A dispute may be raised with a LEA.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the child or youth involved must immediately be admitted to the school in which they are seeking enrollment, pending resolution of the dispute. PDE recommends that the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth who initiates the dispute contact the LEA liaison for individuals experiencing homelessness as soon as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. If the person initiating the dispute does not contact the LEA liaison directly, the LEA shall be responsible for contacting the LEA liaison regarding the dispute as soon as possible and referring the family or youth involved to the liaison.

The LEA liaison shall ensure that the child or youth is immediately enrolled, explain the dispute resolution process to families and help them to use it. The LEA shall issue a written disposition of the dispute within 20 business days after the LEA liaison is notified of the dispute. The disposition shall be provided to the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth and shall explain the basis for the decision and advise the parent, guardian or youth of the right to appeal.

NOTE: The LEA should use and maintain copies of PDE's "Notice of Procedural Safeguards" form (see attached) which ensures that all LEAs (a) inform families of the basis of their decision regarding enrollment or school selection; (b) notifies families of their right to remain in their school of choice pending resolution of the dispute and (c) explains the procedures for challenging the decision of the LEA.

Level 2 – A complaint may be filed with a McKinney-Vento coordinator.

If the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth is dissatisfied with the LEA's disposition of a dispute or would like to raise any issue of McKinney-Vento Act noncompliance, they may file a complaint or appeal with a McKinney-Vento site or regional coordinator or with the state coordinator. (See attached list which contains contact information for all of the McKinney-Vento coordinators in Pennsylvania). In lieu of filing an appeal with a McKinney-Vento coordinator, a parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth may elect to appeal the LEA decision directly to a court of competent jurisdiction. Participation in the appeal procedure is not required prior to taking legal action.

- Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youths should be informed that they can provide written or oral documentation to support their position; and
- Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youths should be given the opportunity to challenge the school system's assertions.

A regional or site coordinator with whom a complaint or appeal is filed must notify the state coordinator immediately. Upon being notified, the state coordinator will review the complaint or appeal and assign it to a site or regional coordinator for disposition. The coordinator to whom the appeal is assigned may contact, interview and accept documentation from any individual or LEA involved, and shall issue a written disposition within 20 business days after the complaint or appeal has been assigned. The disposition shall be provided to the LEA and the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth involved. The child or youth shall continue to be enrolled in the school in which he or she is seeking enrollment until the complaint or appeal is resolved or until a disposition from a McKinney-Vento coordinator is received.

If a decision cannot be reached or agreed upon as the regional coordinator level, the dispute will be forwarded to the state coordinator for resolution. The state coordinator will view all information and interview all concerned parties involved. The Office of Chief Counsel will be included in the resolution process as needed. If mediation services are needed, the state coordinator will assist in the mediation and may also invite those involved to have the dispute mediated at any time in the process through the Dispute Resolution Program operated by the Commonwealth Office of General Counsel (OGC). The OGC Dispute Resolution Program is a voluntary informal process through which a trained mediator assists in reaching a mutually acceptable resolution.

Participating in mediation is not a waiver of the right to file a lawsuit nor is participation in mediation required prior to taking legal action.

NOTE: The parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth may file a complaint with the McKinney-Vento site, regional or state coordinator on the attached complaint form. However, the use of the attached form is not mandatory. Any dispute raised by a homeless family or youth concerning school enrollment or any other right under the McKinney-Vento Act whether received via telephone, letter or any mode of communication shall be treated as a complaint.

Mifflinburg Area School District

McKinney-Vento LEVEL 2 Enrollment Dispute Resolution Form

Person Completing Form: _____ Date: _____

Enrollment Request Initiated By: _____

Location: _____

Phone Number(s): _____
School(s): _____

Requested School: _____

Name/Age/Grade of student(s): _____

Child/Youth living with: Circle one below

Both parents Mother Father Legal guardian Unaccompanied Youth Other _____

Child Lives in: Circle one below or fill in other

Shelter Doubled-up Motel Car Campground Other _____

Initial Details:
_____
_____
_____

Follow up:_____
_____
_____

Mifflinburg Area School District

McKinney-Vento Written Notification of Enrollment Decision

To be completed by the receiving school when an enrollment request is denied.

Date: _____

Person Completing Form: _____

Title: _____

School: _____

In compliance with Sections 722(g)(3)(E) and 722(g)(3)(B)(ii) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act of 2001, the following written notification is provided to:

Parent or Guardian: _____

Student(s): _____

After reviewing your request to enroll the student(s) listed above, the enrollment request is denied. This determination was based upon:

_____
_____
_____

You have the right to appeal this decision in writing or by contacting the school district's local homeless education liaison:

Liaison's Name: _____ Title: _____

Phone Number: _____

In addition:

The student listed above has the right to enroll immediately in the school of choice pending resolution of the dispute.

Appendix C

Tips for Staff Members Dealing with Students and Families Experiencing Homelessness

Administrator Tips

You Can Support the Access and Success of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in School

1. Be familiar with common characteristics of children who are homeless. Common signals are attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class.
2. Welcome the student and the family, and let them know that the school is a safe and secure place.
3. Make sure the child enrolls in the free and reduced-price meal programs.
4. Ensure that the student has every opportunity that a non-homeless student has for after-school activities and in-school programs.
5. Let parents know of their child's educational rights.
6. Know your attendance zone, visit shelters to make contact with the shelter director, and reinforce that students will find the school safe and supportive.
7. Hold school meetings, such as the PTA meeting, in neighborhood centers to increase accessibility to school events.
8. Provide city bus tokens to get parents to school for conferences, school events, or PTA meetings.
9. Encourage parents to volunteer. Discuss their interests and offer suggestions that allow them to use their expertise. Many parents will help if invited to do so.
10. Support the school staff as they work with the student.
11. Contact the school district homeless liaison for additional support.
12. Show that you care about the student!

Administrative Assistant Tips

Things Administrative Assistants Can Do for Students Experiencing Homelessness

1. Learn to identify the following tell-tale signs of homelessness:

    a. Chronic hunger or tiredness

    b. Erratic attendance at schools

    c. Attendance at multiple schools

    d. Poor grooming or clothing that draws attention

    e. Lack of records, such as report cards, birth certificate, immunization record, pre-school records

    f. Parent who seems confused when asked about the last school attended

    g. Low-income motel address on enrollment form

    h. Statements from families when enrolling, such as:

        "We've been having a hard time lately."
        "It's a new address. I can't remember."
        "We've moved a lot and are staying with friends until we find a place."

2. Assure families that children can enroll if you think that they are experiencing homelessness. (This is mandated by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act, P.L. 107-110)

3. Enroll the child immediately (even without records).

4. Ask for the name and city of the last school attended; then call that school and ask to have the records sent.

5. Take the family to a private place to fill out enrollment forms.

6. Offer to assist with filling out the enrollment forms. Hesitation may indicate an inability to read.

7. Privately and confidentially alert the child's teacher and guidance counselor of the student's living situation.

Before a student leaves, prepare a parent pack

Be sensitive, patient, calm, and reassuring. YOU can make a difference!

Guidance Counselor Tips

You Can Support the Access and Success of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in School!

1. Be familiar with common characteristics of children who are homeless. Common signals are attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class.
2. Introduce yourself as someone who works as an advocate for the child's success in school.
3. Arrange a follow-up meeting with parents a couple of weeks after enrollment.
4. Ask if the child participated in any after-school activities or had special classes at a previous school, then work to connect the child with similar resources if they are available.
5. Make sure the child enrolls in the free and reduced-price meal programs.
6. Let parents know of their child's educational rights.
7. Offer support for the physiological needs of the student (food, clothing) as well as the social/ emotional needs (safety, security, and belonging).
8. Train peer buddies to orient students to the school.
9. Contact the school district homeless liaison for additional support.
10. Show that you care about the student!

School Nurse Tips

You Can Support the Access and Success of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in School

1. Be familiar with common characteristics of children who are homeless.
2. Common signals are attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class.
3. Verify immunization records and, if needed, refer the student to the local health department.
4. Observe and alert the principal to any serious medical concerns.
5. Ask about glasses; the child may need them but not have any.
6. Make sure the child enrolls in the free and reduced-price meal programs.
7. Assist parents with the completion of medical records.
8. Remember that sending a sick child “home” may not be a safe or stable place for a child who is experiencing homelessness. Help families determine options for their children, if ill.
9. Contact the school district homeless liaison so that additional services can be coordinated.
10. Follow-up with children sent to obtain immunizations or physicals.
11. Contact the parent or shelter if a child is absent for three or more days.
12. Develop reliable, accessible resources for medical, dental, and eye care.
13. Show that you care about the student!

Teacher Tips

Support Classroom Access and Success of Students Experiencing Homelessness

1. Be familiar with common characteristics of children who are homeless, such as attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class.
2. Assist other students in being sensitive to stereotypes of homeless people.
3. Adjust assignments so children not living in permanent settings can complete them. (Such children may not have a place to perform a science experiment or the resources to cut out an article for current events.)
4. Make sure the child enrolls in the free and reduced-price meal programs.
5. Ensure that the student has every opportunity that a non-homeless student has for after-school activities and in-school programs.
6. Communicate with parents about school performance.
7. Connect the child with tutoring and remediation services, if needed.
8. If you have a snack break, keep a store of snacks for students who don't bring one.
9. Do not take away possessions. Students may need their "stuff" nearby for security.
10. Hold the child accountable for what he or she can control (e.g., behavior or attitude) not what is not in the child's control (e.g., inability to watch a news program or purchase a poster board for a project).
11. Prepare a list of your class routines and procedures.
12. Prepare a new student file with information for parents and guardians.
13. Maintain a supply of materials for students to use at school.
14. Prepare a "getting-to-know-you" activity available for the class to do when a new student arrives.
15. Assign a class buddy to assist with routines.

Appendix D

Duties of the LEA McKinney-Vento Liaison

What are the responsibilities of the local liaison for homeless children and youths?

The local liaison serves as one of the primary contacts between homeless families and school staff, district personnel, shelter workers, and other service providers. Every LEA is required to designate a local liaison. (Section 722(g)(1)(J)(ii)). The liaison coordinates services to ensure that homeless children and youths enroll in school and have the opportunity to succeed academically.

Local liaisons must ensure that:

• Homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
• Homeless children and youths are enrolled in, and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in, the school or schools of the LEA;
• Homeless families and homeless children and youths have access to and receive educational services for which such families, children, and youths are eligible, including services through Head Start programs (including Early Head Start programs), early intervention services under Part C of the IDEA, and other preschool programs administered by the LEA;
• Homeless families and homeless children and youths receive referrals to health, dental, mental health, and substance abuse services, housing services, and other appropriate services;
• Parents or guardians of homeless children and youths are informed of educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
• Public notice of the educational rights of homeless students is disseminated in locations frequented by parents and guardians of such children and youths, and unaccompanied youths, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to the parents and guardians and unaccompanied youths;
• Enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act;
• Parents and guardians and unaccompanied youths are fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to and from the school of origin and are assisted in accessing transportation services;
• School personnel receive professional development and other support; and
• Unaccompanied youths are enrolled in school, have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as the State establishes for other children and youths, are informed of their status as independent students under section 480 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) (20 U.S.C. 1087vv), and their right to receive verification of this status from the local liaison.

Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act 722(g)(1)(J)(ii)
as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act and effective October 1, 2016

Appendix E

Determining McKinney Vento Eligibility of Students for Rights and Services Provided Under the Act

Did you know that:

- Homeless children and youths must have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths?
- Any requirements in laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as a barrier to the identification, enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and youths must be eliminated?

Do you know:

- What potential barriers to identification, enrollment, attendance, and success in school may exist in local policies and procedures?
- How those barriers may be alleviated?
- What local educational agencies (LEAs or school districts) are required to do to uphold rights and ensure services for homeless children and youth?

Every LEA must know this information in order to carry out the mandates in Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Homeless children and youths face many educational barriers due to the disruption and trauma of not having a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. Most face educational disruption due to changing schools as they move from one temporary location to another. Homeless children and youths also have higher incidences of illness, depression, and exposure to violence than their stably housed peers. Specific educational challenges faced by homeless students include

- not being identified for services;
- difficulty enrolling without records or, in the case of an unaccompanied homeless youth, without a parent or guardian present;
- difficulty regularly attending school;
- lack of stable transportation;
- frequent school changes;
- falling behind in school;
- not accruing credits on time;
- lack of basic needs including food, clothing, and adequate housing;
- stress, depression, trauma; and
- embarrassment and stigma related to their housing conditions.

Many homeless youths are also *unaccompanied*, meaning they are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. Being both homeless and unaccompanied leaves youths fending for themselves in a world where they are vulnerable to a myriad of potentially life-threatening dangers.

For all these reasons, school can often be the one place of stability, safety, and support in the tumultuous lives of these students.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act definition of homelessness includes children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

- This definition specifically includes children and youth who are: sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; living in shelters, transitional housing, or cars; and staying in motels or campgrounds due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations.
- The phrase “awaiting foster care placement” was deleted from the McKinney-Vento Act. New protections for all children in foster care were included under Title I Part A.

However, because the circumstances of homelessness vary with each family’s or unaccompanied youth’s situation, determining the eligibility for rights and services under McKinney Vento must occur on a case by case basis.

The School District Homeless Liaison, Administration, and/or enrollment staff must gather and analyze information from the family and student and make an appropriate determination of eligibility.

Please note, during the process of eligibility determination the student should be enrolled as this is critical to the student’s educational continuity.

This includes new enrollments to district or students that have indicated a change in living status or identified by faculty or staff.

Two types of identification--- new enrollments, students experiencing homelessness after enrollment.

The Process of Determining Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Services

Step 1- Gather information.

A. Using LEA standard or modified enrollment form.
B. If form or interview indicates possibility of homelessness, ask additional questions as needed to get a better sense of the situation.
C. Avoid using terms and questions that could be a source of embarrassment or reluctance to be open about situation.
D. Explain the reason for additional questions about living arrangement are to determine eligibility for additional service and supports. Reasons for reluctance to answer questions may stem from desire for privacy, domestic violence issues, fear of losing housing and/or child custody.
E. Do not contact persons or agencies outside the school system to obtain information about the family's living situation. This is likely a violation of privacy, dignity as well as FERPA. For example, do not contact landlords, public housing agencies or law enforcement to verify living situations.
F. Respect the family's privacy by talking to them in a private space where other students, staff, and visitors cannot overhear the conversation.

4 Key questions:

A. Was there an event?
B. Is the current living situation due to a lack of housing?
C. Is the situation temporary or permanent?
D. Is the parent/unaccompanied youth in control of the situation?

Step 2. Analyze the facts.

Just the facts from the data gathered. Do not make assumptions from past similar situations. It is imperative to recall that every situation is different.

To be eligible, the student must meet the McKinney- Vento Act's definition of homeless.

McKinney-Vento basic definition describes "homeless children and youths" as individuals who lack a **fixed**, **regular** and **adequate** nighttime residence." Lacking any one of these conditions would make a student eligible.

A. Does the child of youth's living situation fit into one of the specific examples of homelessness listed in the law?

1. Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or similar reasons.

Sharing the housing of other persons…… implies the student is staying in another person's home.

*Does the student have any legal right to be in that home?
*Can the student be asked to leave with no legal recourse?
*Is the living situation intended to be temporary or long term?
*Did student arrive in this situation as urgent measure to avoid being on the street or another undesired situation?

Due to loss of housing…. Implies that the student has no personal housing available. Did the student or family lose their previous housing due to:

*An eviction or an inability to pay rent or bills?

*Destruction of or damage to the previous home?

*Abuse or neglect (runaway, thrown out)

*Unhealthy conditions, such as inadequate physical environment, infestations, drug and alcohol abuse in home, or domestic violence?

*The absence of a parent or guardian due to abandonment, incarceration or another reason?

Economic Hardship …. Includes cases where limited financial resources have forced families or youth to leave residences and share housing due

to an inability to pay rent and other bills. The way that the shared housing came about and the intention of the residents are significant.

*If economic hardship such as accident or illness, loss of employment, loss of public benefits, or condition of poverty forces a family or youth to share the housing of others temporarily, the children and youth **ARE** eligible for McKinney-Vento services.
*A long-term co-operative living arrangement among families or friends homeless situation, even if the parties are living together to save money are in most instances NOT a homeless situation.

2. Living in a motel, hotel, trailer park or campground due to the lack of alternative accommodations.

   *To determine eligibility, examine the issue of, "due *to the lack of alternative accommodations".*

   Motels, hotels and campground are most often homeless situations, due to the fact that they are rarely fixed, regular and adequate. However, if the choice to reside here is preference and there are alternative accommodations, this is likely not a homeless situation.
   On the other hand, trailer parks are often fixed, regular and adequate residences.

3. Living in an emergency or transitional shelter.
   This includes shelters of all kinds, including youth shelters, domestic violence shelters, family shelters, transitional living programs and supportive housing programs.

4. Children abandoned in a hospital.
5. Living in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for people.
6. Living in a vehicle, park, public space, abandoned building, "substandard" housing, transportation station or similar setting.
7. Migratory who qualify because of reasons described above.

*Most of these examples are self-explanatory.

In evaluating whether housing is "sub-standard" consider factors such as:

*Health and safety concerns

*Number of occupants relative to size of structure.

*Age and situation of occupants

* State and local codes and regulations.

B. If the child's, family's, or youth's situation does not fit the examples provided in the definition, is the child or youth living in another type of situation that is not fixed, regular and adequate?

Definitions to consider when determining **fixed, regular and adequate.**

Fixed- Securely placed or fastened. "Not subject to change."

A fixed residence is one that is stationary, permanent and not subject to change- a tent is not fixed.

Fixed also can imply the resident has an intention of returning to residence and has no intention of moving.

Regular- A regular residence is used on a nightly basis

Considered to be normal, common or customary

Adequate- An adequate residence is one that is sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments.

Step 3: Get additional input.

If you are still not sure if a student is eligible for McKinney-Vento services, consider the following resources:

1. Contact your school district's local homeless education liaison.
2. Contact your Regional homeless education coordinator.

Be prepared with as much information and data as possible.

Sample questions to ask parents and students for information gathering.

The following questions are designed to assist in gathering information from the student and family to determine the extent to which their living arrangement is fixed regular and adequate.

Fixed--- A residence (situation) that is stationary, permanent and not subject to change.

1. Is this a permanent arrangement or just temporary?
2. Are you looking for another place to live?
3. Do you plan to move out soon?
4. Why are you staying in your current place?
5. Where were you living prior to this place? Why did you leave?
6. Where would you go if you couldn't stay where you are?
7. Are you living with friends or relatives to share a home and expenses for the long term? Or is this a temporary situation?
8. Could the people you are staying with put you out at any time?
9. Are you sharing the residence equally or are you more of a guest?

Regular--- A regular residence is one that is used on a regular, (nightly) basis.?

1. Do you stay in the same place every night?
2. Do you have a key to the place you are staying?
3. Do you move around a lot?
4. How long have you been at this place? How long do you plan to stay?
5. Are all of your belongings at this place?
6. How long did you live at your last place?

Adequate---- An adequate residence is one that is sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments.

1. How many people are living in the home? How many bedrooms/bathrooms does it have?
2. Are parents/children sharing a room? How many sharing a room?
3. Are parents/children sleeping in a bedroom or in public area such as dining room?
4. Does the house have utilities? Heat, electricity, running water?
5. What is condition of residence? Does is keep out wind, rain, etc? Is it safe? Is it warm and dry?
6. Can you come and go as you please?

If the child or youth is eligible, provide appropriate services.

Determining eligibility is only the beginning of implementing the McKinney-Vento Act. Children, youth and families who are eligible for services may have different needs. They may have physical needs for clothing, uniforms, school supplies, free meals, and health care. They may have mental health needs. They may have academic support needs. They may need transportation. Or they may need nothing more than the ability to enroll in school immediately and assistance with the process.

In determining the appropriate services for a particular child, youth or family, consider what barriers to education can be removed by applying the McKinney Vento Act and what is in the best interest or each child or youth. Also consider all the programs in the school district that can support children experiencing homelessness, including Title I, Head Start, Pre-K Counts, Special Education and related services, Section 504 services, SAP programs, dropout prevention programs, and tutoring or mentoring programs.

Also be aware of and open to referring families to assistance available from outside agencies and providers.

Do's and Don'ts for Confirming Eligibility

Determining the eligibility of students as homeless can be a complicated process at times. By having a policy or a set of procedures in place, you can simplify the process and facilitate the timely enrollment of homeless students. Having policies and procedures in place ensures that your district is in compliance with the federal law and can also help your district avoid invasive or threatening techniques that are inappropriate or damage the relationship of the school with families and the community.

The following list includes strategies to help liaisons confirm the eligibility of students as homeless.

- Do implement the use of a district-wide residency questionnaire.
- Do have parents, youth, or caregivers sign enrollment forms indicating that McKinney-Vento services are offered based on information they have provided about their living situations.
- Do use only school staff trained on the McKinney-Vento Act and homelessness to do home visits.
- Do use visits only when necessary. Do explain to the family, youth, and the homeowner why the visit is occurring. Assure them that all information will remain confidential, and conduct only the minimum investigation necessary to verify the living situation.
- Do collaborate with neighboring school district liaisons.
- Do contact previous schools to determine if the student was identified as homeless while attending that school.
- Do use caller ID to verify when parents or youth call from a hotel, motel, or shelter.
- Do talk with parents and youth about their situations, focusing on basic questions and using care and sensitivity.
- Do work with parents, youth, and caregivers to determine if they are able to provide any documents that could confirm their living situations.

Keeping interactions with families and youth positive and supportive instead of invasive and threatening is essential to keeping homeless students connected to school.

- Don't contact landlords or housing agencies to conduct investigations about a student or family as it violates the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and is unlikely to provide useful information.
- Don't conduct surveillance of students or families, such as following them, observing them from outside their residences, or talking to neighbors about their living situations.
- Don't use police officers for home visits.

- Don’t require documents like eviction notices, utility bills, occupancy permits, or notarized letters from host families.
- Don’t force caregivers to obtain legal custody or guardianship. The McKinney-Vento Act requires the immediate enrollment of unaccompanied youth; legal custody or guardianship cannot be prerequisites and are not appropriate in many instances.
- Don’t force people into shelters or onto the streets as a prerequisite for McKinney-Vento services.

Appendix F

Homeless Education FAQ's

Question: What is the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act?

Answer: The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act is Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This legislation ensures that children and youth experiencing homelessness have full and equal access to an appropriate public education and that they experience success in school.

Key components include:

Enrollment

- Schools must immediately enroll children and youth in homeless situations, even when:
  School or immunization records are unavailable at time of enrollment.
  Proof of residency is not available.
- Students may stay in their school of origin.
- Public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youth must be posted in every public school and in appropriate places throughout the community.
- Unaccompanied youth must be provided educational access through the support of the local homeless education liaison. (See definition under "Who is considered homeless.")

Attendance and Success

Students with appropriate support are more likely to attend school on a regular basis. Attendance is critical if school success is to be realized. School districts must provide appropriate case management to ensure students have access to all educational services to which they are eligible.

- Students experiencing homelessness must receive services comparable to those of housed students.
- Transportation to the school of origin must be provided, when appropriate.
- Social service agencies and school districts must work together to serve students.
- Families and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness must be fully informed of available enrollment options and educational opportunities.
- Schools must provide written explanations of placement decisions and the enrollment dispute process.

- Separate schools or programs for children and youth experiencing homelessness are prohibited, with the exception of several programs specifically named in the McKinney-Vento Act.

Question: Who is Considered Homeless?

Answer: The McKinney-Vento Act (Section 725) defines a “homeless children and youth” (school age and younger) as:

- Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who are:
- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, cars, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, camping grounds or similar settings due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations.
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters
- Abandoned in hospitals.
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.
- Unaccompanied youth, including any youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, such as runaways, youth denied housing by their families (sometimes referred to throwaway children and youth), and school-age unwed mothers, living in homes for unwed mothers, who have no other housing available.

Question: How can schools verify that students are homeless?

Answer: There is no universal system of verification. Shelter providers may verify homeless status. Children and youth must be enrolled immediately when the school is informed that the family or youth is experiencing homelessness. If questions regarding homeless status based upon the definition of the McKinney-Vento Act exist, schools should contact their local home-less education liaison.

Question: Are all children and youth who live with friends or relatives considered homeless?

Answer: No. Lack of affordable housing and permanence of the living arrangement, not cultural preference or the desire to save money, are criteria to assist in determining who should be considered homeless.

Question: Are children and youth who qualify for migrant services considered homeless?

Answer: The children of migrant workers should only be considered homeless if they meet the definition of homelessness cited earlier. A migratory life-style is not sufficient to be considered homeless.

Question: Are children or youth incarcerated or in correction facilities considered homeless?

Answer: No. The McKinney-Vento Act specifically excludes any person who is imprisoned or otherwise detained by Act of Congress or state law from the definition of homelessness. Even children or youth who were homeless prior to incarceration, are not considered homeless while incarcerated.

Question: How quickly must children and youth experiencing homelessness be enrolled in school?

Answer: Schools must immediately enroll a child or youth experiencing homelessness, even if the child or youth is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment.

Question: Must a school enroll children or youth without proof of immunizations or physicals?

Answer: Yes. The school must enroll students who do not have health records if they meet the definition of homeless. The school should refer the family or youth to the local homeless education liaison to obtain the necessary documentation. The sending school may provide a copy of the health record to the parent when the student leaves and fax a copy to the new school to facilitate this process.

Question: Must schools enroll students in homeless situations who do not have previous school records?

Answer: Yes. Students experiencing homelessness must be enrolled in school while waiting for the previous school records to be received. Parents can request copies of critical documents such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), gifted testing records, and report cards from the sending school

Question: If a student in a homeless situation moves without returning books or paying fees, can a school district withhold student records?

Answer: No. A school district cannot withhold records when books or charges have not been paid.

Question: Can a school require proof of residency (rent receipt, lease agreement, utility receipt) that prevents or delays enrollment?

Answer: No. Homeless students, by definition, lack a fixed residence and cannot be required to provide traditional proof of residency if doing so is not possible or would delay enrollment. An affidavit explaining the lack of residency proof can be completed as an alternative.

Question: When children or youth experiencing homelessness are not living with parents or legal guardians, is the school required to enroll the child?

Answer: Yes. Guardianship cannot be a barrier to enrollment. Some students, due to family situations, may not be able to live with their family; others are not permitted by their parents or guardians to live at home. The local liaison should be contacted to assist unaccompanied youth who wish to enroll in school.

Question: If families in homeless situations move within a school district, can students stay at the same school, even if they move out of the school's attendance zone?

Answer: Yes, the McKinney-Vento Act states, that when feasible, students have a right to stay in the school of origin. The school of origin is the school that the child attended when permanently housed or the last school in which the student was enrolled.

Question: Can school districts educate children and youth experiencing homelessness in separate schools (e.g., classes located on shelter sites)?

Answer: Homelessness is not a reason to separate students from their housed peers. Students in homeless situations must not be isolated from the mainstream school environment except in a few limited circumstances defined in the McKinney-Vento legislation.

Question: What services must school districts provide to children and youth in homeless situations?

Answer: The McKinney-Vento Act requires school districts to provide services to students experiencing homelessness that are comparable to services provided to other students in the school district. Homeless children and youth must have access to any educational services for which they qualify, including special education, gifted education, free and reduced-lunch programs, before- and after-school activities, and Title I services. The students are not to be segregated or stigmatized.

Question: Can Title I funds be used to address the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness?

Answer: Yes. According to the No Child Left Behind Act, children and youth experiencing homelessness automatically qualify for Title I support, whether students attend school-wide, targeted assistance, or non-Title I schools. Title I must coordinate services in order to promote the academic achievement of homeless students.

Question: May children and youth experiencing homelessness attending non-Title I schools be served under Title I?

Answer: Yes. Title I, Part A funds must be reserved to provide comparable services to eligible home-less children who might attend schools not receiving Title I funding. This may include providing educationally related support services to children in shelters.

Question: Are children experiencing homelessness eligible to enroll in pre-kindergarten classes?

Answer: Yes. Students who are homeless should have the same access to programs as students who are housed. Head Start and Even Start may reserve slots for students experiencing homelessness to avoid waiting list delays that occur when children arrive after the school year has begun.

Question: How should special education programs serve students experiencing homelessness?

Answer: Not all students experiencing homelessness are students with disabilities. However, under the Child Find component in IDEA, districts must identify un-served children with disabilities who are homeless.

Question: Can a school expedite the child study and eligibility process for students in homeless situations?

Answer: Yes. The eligibility process that educators use to determine if a disability exists may require significant time. Families experiencing homelessness often move before the eligibility process is complete. If parents inform the receiving school that an eligibility process was in progress, the school may decide to speed up the process

Question: What academic concerns commonly impact students in homeless situations?

Answer: Due to changing schools and the stress of being homeless, students may fall behind academically, causing learning lags and gaps that can be more than four months. Students may not have quiet places to study or access to school supplies, books, or computers. Students need to know of study halls or after-school tutoring availability. If a child was receiving special education services or was participating in gifted and talented programs, the continuity of instruction needs to be maintained.

Question: What are some common health-related issues affecting students experiencing homelessness?

Answer: Students who are homeless are often at an increased risk to becoming ill due to their living conditions. If the students become sick, they often have no quiet place to rest. These students are more likely than their peers to get the flu, have stomach ailments, have respiratory problems, and visit the emergency room. School nurses can help by offering referrals for screenings, maintaining a clothes closet, assisting parents in filling out forms,

and ensuring that students are aware of the school's procedure for participating in the free and reduced-lunch program.

Question: What are some of the other issues that commonly affect students experiencing homelessness?

Answer: Students in homeless situations often are concerned about their safety because they may not have a secure place to go to school. In these instances, students should be told about community programs and activities. In addition, homeless students must also deal with the stigma associated with being homeless. They may have difficulty establishing friendships. Guidance counselors or school social workers may assist students dealing with emotions associated with being homeless. Schools can create welcome packs for all new students and assign peer buddies to tour the school.

Appendix G

WEBSITES FOR USE WITH STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Region 7 PAECYEH http:wwwliu18.org/index.php/ecyeh

Pennsylvania ECYEH https://homeless.center-school.org/

PDE Homeless Page
https://www.education.pa.gov/K12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx

National Center for Homeless Education https://nche.ed.gov

Helpline For assistance with an issue related to the education of a child or youth experiencing homelessness, contact the NCHE homeless education helpline toll-free at (800) 308-2145 or homeless@serve.org.
Assistance is available in English and Spanish. Ayuda está disponible en inglés y español.

Homeless Liaison Toolkit https://nche.ed.gov/homeless-liaison-toolkit/

Outstanding Resources https://nche.ed.gov/resources/

McKinney-Vento Fact Sheet for Educators

https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/160315ehcyfactsheet072716.pdf

Schoolhouse Connections https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) https://naehcy.org/