



McKinney-Vento District Plan

2025

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SECTION 1: OVERVIEW/GENERAL INFORMATION:

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act:

The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program is authorized under Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.) (McKinney-Vento Act). The McKinney-Vento Act was originally authorized in 1987 and most recently reauthorized in December 10th, 2016 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The McKinney-Vento Act is designed to address the challenges that homeless children and youths have faced in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, State educational agencies (SEAs) must ensure that each homeless child and youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as other children and youths. Homeless children and youths must have access to the educational and related services that they need to enable them to meet the same challenging State academic standards to which all students are held. In addition, homeless students may not be separated from the mainstream school environment. SEAs and local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to review and undertake steps to revise laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as barriers to the identification, enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and youths.

Definition of Homeless (McKinney-Vento Act Sec. 725(2); 42 U.S.C 11435(2)):

Children who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence:

- "Double up" - Sharing the housing of others due to the loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons.
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds, due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations.
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters.
- Living in a public or private place not designed for humans to live.
- Migratory children living in above circumstances
- Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- Unaccompanied Youth - Children or youth who meets the definition of homeless and not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian

Residency and Educational Rights:

Students who are in temporary, inadequate and homeless living situations have the following rights in **Merrillville Community School Corporation**:

- Immediate enrollment in the school they last attended or the school in whose attendance area they are currently staying even if they do not have all of the documents normally required at the time of enrollment;
- Access to free meals and textbooks, Title I and other educational programs and other comparable services including transportation;
- Attendance in the same classes and activities that students in other living situations also participate in without fear of being separated or treated differently due to their housing situations.

Procedures for the Dissemination of Educational Rights:

All schools within the **Merrillville Community School Corporation** shall ensure that public notice of the educational rights of students and families in homeless situations is disseminated where children and youth receive services under the McKinney-Vento Act. Posters will be posted in all school buildings, local shelters, local hotels, the local post office building, Merrillville City Hall, local library, and local food banks.

SECTION 2: IDENTIFICATION AND ELIGIBILITY

Title 1 Services and Funding:

In **Merrillville Community School Corporation**, all children and youth who qualify for McKinney-Vento services are automatically eligible for Title I, Part A services, whether or not they attend a Title I, Part A school or meet the academic standards required of other students for eligibility (Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Sec. 1115(b)(2)(E); 20 U.S.C. 6315(b)(2)(E)). This automatic eligibility acknowledges that the experience of homelessness puts children and youth at significant risk of academic failure, regardless of their previous academic standing. Additionally, all Merrillville School children and youth who qualify for McKinney-Vento services who are doing well academically are entitled to receive additional non-instructional education related support services needed to succeed in school.

School Selection:

Merrillville Community School Corporation will keep students in homeless situations in their school of origin defined as the school attended when permanently housed or the school in which they were last enrolled, unless it is against the parent or guardian's wishes or unless it is determined to be in the student's best educational interest. Students and youth who qualify for McKinney-Vento Services are eligible to remain in their school of origin for the entire duration in which they are homeless and until the end of any academic year in which they move into permanent housing. Students and youth who qualify for McKinney-Vento Services may also choose to enroll in any public school that students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend.

Procedures to Identify and Verify Eligibility of McKinney-Vento Students:

Every current, returning, and new student in the **Merrillville Community School Corporation** must complete online enrollment via the district's School Management System known as Skyward. Questions regarding a student's homeless status or situation are a part of the on-line enrollment packet, as well as the information update process for students and families living in the district. Follow-up contact to verify the information provided on the **Merrillville Community School Corporation** enrollment packet and information update process, addressing homeless will be conducted within 5 days of the completion of online enrollment and information updates by either the district McKinney-Vento liaison or at the building level.

SECTION 3: SERVICES AND STANDARDS

Transportation:

Each **Merrillville Community School Corporation** child or youth facing a McKinney-Vento situation shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the

school selected including transportation services.

Merrillville Community School Corporation will provide students and youth who qualify for McKinney-Vento Services with transportation to and from their school of origin, at a parent or guardian's request. For unaccompanied youth, **Merrillville Community School Corporation** will provide transportation to and from the school of origin at the request of the District McKinney-Vento Liaison. If the student's temporary residence and the school of origin are in the same district, **Merrillville Community School Corporation** will provide and/or arrange transportation to and from school. If the student is living outside of the **Merrillville Community School Corporation, (MVSC)** will assume the responsibility and cost of providing transportation to and from school until arrangements can be made to share the responsibility with the corresponding school district.

Students and youth who qualify for McKinney-Vento Services are eligible to receive these transportation services for the entire duration in which they are homeless.

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

Food Services:

Each **Merrillville Community School Corporation school** child or youth facing a McKinney-Vento situation shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected including school nutrition programs. Students and youth who qualify for McKinney-Vento Services are eligible to receive free breakfast and lunch as offered by each school for the entire duration in which they are homeless. For the 2023-2024 school year, Merrillville School Corporation is a Community Eligibility Program (CEP) which qualifies all students to receive one free breakfast and lunch per day.

Textbooks and Technology:

Each **Merrillville Community School Corporation** child or youth facing a McKinney-Vento situation shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected including access to instructional materials, assessments, and technology. Students and youth who qualify for McKinney-Vento Services are eligible to receive free textbooks and technology fees as offered by each school for the entire duration in which they are homeless.

Academic Services & Standards:

Each **Merrillville Community School Corporation** child or youth facing a McKinney-Vento situation shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected including educational services for which the child or youth meet the eligibility criteria (Title I services, pre- school, educational programs for children with disabilities or for students with limited English proficiency), programs in vocational and technical education, and programs for gifted and talented students as available.

SECTION 4: ENROLLMENT

Enrollment Procedures:

Any child or youth who claims to be homeless will be immediately enrolled in **Merrillville Community School Corporation** even if they do not have required documents such as:

- school records
- medical records
- proof of residency
- guardianship papers or other documents.

Enrolling schools must obtain school records from the previous school, and students must be enrolled in school while records are obtained.

The McKinney-Vento District Liaison will assist unaccompanied youth in choosing and enrolling in a school after considering the youth's wishes, informing the youth of their rights to transportation and assisting the youth in accessing transportation, and informing the youth of their right to appeal school or school district decisions.

Unaccompanied youth have the right to:

- Remain in their school of origin
- Transportation to and from the school of origin
- Immediately enroll in a new school serving the area in which they are currently living even if they don't have typically required documents (e.g. proof of guardianship)
- Equal access to programs and services such as gifted and talented education, special education, vocational education, and English Language Learner services.

Merrillville Community School Corporation Schools shall remove any/all barriers to the enrollment and retention of children and youth in homeless situations. Students in homeless situations shall be free from segregation, isolation, and stigmatization.

****The term "enroll" is defined as attending classes and participating fully in school activities.****

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

Appeal and Dispute Processes:

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school, the child or youth shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The child, youth parent, or guardian shall be referred to the McKinney-Vento District Level Team, who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible in according to the enrollment disputes section of the McKinney-Vento Act as follows.

- Work with the McKinney-Vento District Level Liaison to ensure that enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the enrollment disputes section of the McKinney-Vento Act as follows:
 - I. the parent or guardian of the child or youth shall be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or youth to appeal

- II. the child, youth, parent, or guardian shall be referred to the McKinney-Vento District Level Team, who shall carry out the Dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute; and
- III. in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the McKinney-Vento District Liaison shall ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

***The McKinney-Vento District Level Team consists of McKinney-Vento District Liaison, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Assistant Superintendent of Finances and Director of Human Resources

If a dispute arises over qualification for McKinney-Vento services, the child or youth shall receive all McKinney-Vento rights and services provided by **Merrillville Community School Corporation** Schools, pending resolution of the dispute. The child, youth parent, or guardian shall be referred to the McKinney-Vento District Level Team, who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Act as follows.

- Work with the McKinney-Vento District Level Liaison to ensure that enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the enrollment disputes section of the McKinney- Vento Act as follows:
 - VI. the child or youth shall receive all McKinney-Vento rights and services, pending resolution of the dispute;
 - V. the parent or guardian of the child or youth shall be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or youth to appeal (Appendix A)
 - VI. the child, youth, parent, or guardian shall be referred to the McKinney-Vento District Level Team, who shall carry out the Dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute; and
 - VII. in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the McKinney-Vento District Liaison shall ensure that the youth receives all McKinney-Vento rights and services pending resolution of the dispute.

SECTION 5: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

McKinney-Vento Professional Development Opportunities:

Professional development for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act will be provided to all staff members of **Merrillville Community School Corporation** Schools via the following ways:

- Safe Schools Portal (Skyward)
- McKinney-Vento District Level Team Meetings
- One Professional Development Meeting per school year with administration, clerical, and support staff from each building
- School Board Presentations

District Website:

The **Merrillville Community School Corporation** Website will include a page that will be used to communicate McKinney-Vento information with students, parents, staff, and community members. Information on the Merrillville Community School Corporation's Website will include:

- Contact information for the McKinney-Vento District Liaison
- Notice of Rights for McKinney-Vento Families
- Dispute Resolution Documents
- Link to McKinney-Vento Resources

SECTION 6: EDUCATIONAL STAFFING AND SUPPORT

McKinney-Vento District Liaison's Roles and Responsibilities:

The Director of Student Service, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for **Merrillville Community School Corporation** serves as the District McKinney-Vento Liaison and will:

- Ensure that procedures are established and followed across the school district and provide each child or youth who qualifies for McKinney-Vento Services with a free and appropriate education.
- Work collaboratively with transportation and food services personnel to coordinate appropriate services for any child or youth who qualifies for McKinney-Vento Services.
- Disseminate critical information concerning the rights of students in homeless situations to all schools.
- Post information regarding the availability of school programs and services for students facing homeless situations in local shelters, local hotels, the local post office building, Merrillville city hall, local library, and local food banks.
- Maintain a McKinney-Vento District Liaison Log to document the McKinney-Vento process for each child and youth who qualifies for McKinney-Vento services.
- Plan and facilitate professional development regarding the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to all staff responsible for identifying and working with students facing homeless situations.
- Work with building level staff and administration to facilitate success of the McKinney-Vento program and each student facing a homeless situation.
- Work with community agencies and volunteers to share resources and information and to evaluate impact of services.
- Monitor all district data collection and reporting requirements on each child and youth who qualifies for McKinney-Vento services.
- Attend state level professional development opportunities.

McKinney-Vento District Liaison:

- Name: Dr. Michelle Rushing
- Title: Director of Student Services, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Corporation: Merrillville Community School Corporation
- Email: mrushing@mvsc.k12.in.us
- Phone: (219)-650-5300

APPENDIX

NOTICE OF RIGHT TO APPEAL

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Be advised that you have the right to appeal the decisions made by **Merrillville Community School Corporation** regarding your student's eligibility and enrollment under Title X, Part C of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Students involved in a McKinney-Vento dispute process have the right to enroll immediately in the school of choice pending resolution of the dispute. Immediate enrollment includes full participation in all school activities.

As the district's McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Liaison designee, notification should be made to Dr. Michelle Rushing in writing within 10 business days of receipt of this letter if you want to appeal the district's decision outlined above.

Attached you will find an appeal form that you can use for this notification. If we cannot reach a resolution at the district-level, the dispute will be moved to the state level for final resolution, facilitated by the Indiana Department of Education's (IDOE) State Coordinator for the McKinney-Vento Act. State Coordinator, Flora Jones can be reached by phone at 317-232-9166 or via email at mckinneyventopoc@doe.in.gov.

Attached you will find a copy of Indiana's McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Process that provides additional details on the state's McKinney-Vento dispute and appeals process, including key timelines.

Feel free to contact me if you have questions on this decision or the McKinney-Vento dispute or appeal process.

Attachments:

McKinney-Vento Student Rights

<https://www.in.gov/doe/files/Students-Rights.pdf>

McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Procedure

<https://www.in.gov/doe/files/LEA-McKinney-Vento-Dispute-Resolution-Procedure-1.pdf>

Sincerely,

Dr. Michelle Rushing

Director of Student Services, McKinney Vento Liaison

Merrillville Community School Corporation

mrushing@mvsc.k12.in.us

219-650-5300