

Treutlen County Schools McKinney-Vento Homeless and Foster Care Procedures

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Dr. Susan Stone – Superintendent
Mr. Donald Reeves- Director of Federal Programs
Mrs. Crystal Coney- District Social Worker/ Homeless Liaison
TCSS | 4313 W. MAIN ST. SOPERTON, GA 30457

Treutlen County School System – Homeless, N&D & Foster Procedures

Title IX HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was reauthorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA) to ensure the educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness. ESEA made significant changes in the way TCSS (TCSSs) address the needs of homeless students. Among these changes are requirements for:

- The Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) and TCSSs to review and revise laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as a barrier to the enrollment, attendance, and success in school of homeless children and youth.
- TCSSs to use the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act definition of homeless when identifying and determining which students are eligible for services.
- TCSSs to designate a local liaison to coordinate services to ensure that homeless children and youth enroll in school and have the opportunity to succeed academically.
- TCSSs to coordinate the local plan required under Title I with the needs of homeless children and youth, including making a mandatory set-aside of funds under Title I, Part A to serve homeless children.
- The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act guarantees to homeless children the following:
 - The right to immediate enrollment in school.
 - The right to attend school in school of origin or in the attendance area where family currently resides.
 - The right to receive transportation to school of origin if requested by parents and is in the best interest of the child.
 - The right to comparable services as other schoolmates including transportation and supplemental services.
 - The right to attend school along with children not experiencing homelessness.
 - The posting of homeless students' rights in all schools and other places around the community that low-income families and high-risk families may visit.

HOMELESS LIAISON RESPONSIBILITIES

The Treutlen County homeless liaison is the heart of the TCSS homeless program. It is important that the homeless liaison have some knowledge and experience in dealing with Federal programs, social worker responsibilities, and counseling responsibilities. It is important that the TCSS homeless liaison has knowledge of the district, understands the community, has great communication skills, and has a commitment to the homeless program.

Treutlen County's homeless liaison meets, at minimum, yearly meets with school personnel to discuss the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act.

HOMELESS PLAN COMPONENTS

Treutlen County's Homeless plan has the following components addressed,

- The process for the identification and enrollment of homeless children and youth.
- The services to be provided to homeless children and youth.
- Collaborates with Federal Programs Director to reserve Title I, Part A funds to provide comparable services for homeless children and youth.
- Develops, reviews, and revise TCSS policies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of children and youth in homeless situations.
- The process for ensuring that transportation is provided to homeless children and youth.
- Ensures that accurate data is collected on enrolled homeless children and youth.
- Homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies.
- Homeless students enroll in, and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school.
- Homeless children and youth and their families, including unaccompanied youth receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, preschool programs administered by the TCSS, referrals to health, mental health, dental, and other appropriate services.
- Parents or guardians of homeless children and youth, and unaccompanied youth 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.
- Parents or guardians of a homeless child or youth, and unaccompanied youth are fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to and from the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing transportation services to their selected school.
- Enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
- Public notice of the educational rights of homeless students is disseminated in all schools and other places around the community.

PUBLIC NOTICE REQUIREMENTS

Posters, brochures, and other awareness materials explaining educational rights, programs, and other related services for those families experiencing homelessness are required to be posted in the registration area of all schools and other locations that low- income and high risk families receive services.

The homeless liaison supervises and works very closely with the school guidance counselors, social workers, and transportation director to assure students receive the

services they need. She provides new or additional posters and assures these are placed where parents can readily see them.

Treutlen County Homeless Procedures

LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY (TCSS) POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO IMPLEMENT THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT

Identification

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, Treutlen County's homeless liaison, will identify children and youth experiencing homelessness in the TCSS, both in and out of school.

- Treutlen County's homeless liaison, will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth who are experiencing homelessness, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the liaison.
- Treutlen County's homeless liaison, will also instruct school registrars and secretaries to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student, and to forward information indicating homelessness to the liaison.
- Community partners in identification may include: family and youth shelters, motels, campgrounds, drop-in centers, the Divisions of Family and Children Services and other social service agencies, faith-based organizations, truancy and attendance officers, local homeless coalitions, and legal services.
- Treutlen County's homeless liaison, will keep data on the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness in the district, where they are living, their academic achievement (including performance on statewide and district wide assessments), and the reasons for any enrollment delays and/or interruptions in their education or school transfers.

School Selection

Each child or youth experiencing homelessness has the right to:

1. Remain at his or her school of origin, or
2. Attend any school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.
3. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both the student and the TCSS. Students who change schools have been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. High mobility rates have also been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting our schools to benefit from the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity.
4. Children and youth experiencing homelessness shall remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent's or youth's wishes or not in the best interest of the child. Students may remain at their schools of origin the entire time they are experiencing

homelessness, 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.
- 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 (see below) and services under Federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.

Enrollment

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students experiencing homelessness may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth experiencing homelessness. 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- based 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.
- Any factor related to the student's living situation.

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 TCSS homeless liaison.

Procedures for Education of Homeless Children and Youth

In the monitoring process for homeless students enrolling in Treutlen County School System, every consideration will be given to students transferring into the Treutlen County Schools to honor full or partial credits obtained in other TCSS's. Support services will be provided to assist students in successfully completing coursework impacted by the students' homeless living situation. The homeless liaison will assist the school in determining what support services are needed and appropriate.

Treutlen County will implement the following procedures for awarding full or partial coursework credit for students enrolling in grades 9-12 to ensure that all students who are identified as homeless are treated much like any other student who enrolls at Treutlen County High School.

- We request records and make every attempt to piece together an academic history for the student.
- Students are placed in their appropriate grade level based on TCHS graduation requirements.
- Only credits posted on an official high school transcript can be awarded on a Treutlen County High School transcript.
- Students who are credit deficient, for whatever reason, are given opportunities to earn additional credit through the credit recovery program or summer school.
- In cases where students are identified as homeless, the homeless liaison is notified, and the homeless liaison offers appropriate services that are afforded through the McKinney-Vento Act.

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 child or youth experiencing homelessness.

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 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 the homeless liaison shall use the district transportation form to process transportation requests. Requests shall be processed and transportation arranged without delay. If the student experiencing homelessness is living and attending school in Treutlen County, the homeless liaison shall arrange transportation. If the student experiencing homelessness is living in Treutlen County but attending school or attending school in Treutlen

County but living in another, the TCSs will follow the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act statute to determine who must arrange transportation. It is Treutlen County's policy that inter-district disputes shall not result in a student experiencing homelessness missing school. If such a dispute arises, Treutlen County will arrange transportation and immediately implement the procedures for the dispute resolution.

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

Services

- Transportation
- Title I, Part A
- Title I, Part C
- Title III, Part A
- Special education
- Programs for English learners.
- Vocational and technical education programs.
- Gifted and talented programs.
- School nutrition programs.
- Before-school and after-school programs.

Treutlen County recognizes that children and youth experiencing homelessness suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth experiencing homelessness 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. When necessary, Treutlen County shall expeditiously designate a surrogate parent for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability. 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 Treutlen County policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation shall be excused. Treutlen County will follow state procedures to ensure that youth experiencing homelessness and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate education and support services. School personnel shall refer children and youth experiencing homelessness to appropriate health care services,

including dental and mental health services. The homeless liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

School personnel must also 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.

Free meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are ready to learn, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has determined that all children and youth experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible for free meals on the first day of enrollment. The USDA guidance is available at http://www.naehcy.org/dl/usda_04_04_02.pdf Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning.

Disputes

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy –

- The child or youth experiencing homelessness shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute.
- 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 the decision
- The child, youth, parent, or guardian shall refer to the local educational agency liaison designated under paragraph (1) (J) (ii), who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as described in paragraph (1) © as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute; and
- In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the homeless liaison shall ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute. The school selected in accordance with this paragraph shall immediately enroll the homeless child or youth, even if the child or youth is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of residency or other documentation. Separated from public schools are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services, including by identifying and removing barriers that prevent youths described in this clause from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with state, local and school policies.
- The student shall also have the rights of a student experiencing homelessness to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I services while the dispute is pending.

Training

In monitoring the policies and procedures to implement the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Treutlen County's homeless liaison will train school counselors, enrollment personnel, including but not limited to administrators, registrars, teachers, social workers, counselors, bus drivers, custodians, community service providers, and social service personnel at the beginning of each school year on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth who are experiencing homelessness, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the liaison. The trainings and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with McKinney-Vento law, and increase sensitivity to the unique needs of homeless children and youth.

Documentation of training agendas, copies of training materials, and sign in sheets of each training will be collected by the homeless liaison. Initial Training is completed through Compliance Director web based modules.

Title I, Part A

Children and youth experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible for Title I, Part A services, regardless of the school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness puts students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support.

Coordination

Homeless students and their families often need housing assistance, social services, and health care. Linking families with community resources can have a positive impact on the education of children.

Title I, Part A, requires targeted assistance programs to coordinate with Federal, state, and local service programs, including programs for housing, nutrition, violence prevention, Head Start, adult education, vocational and technical education, and job training. [20 UCS 63159(c)(1)(H)]

Preschool

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Children experiencing homelessness have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. To facilitate preschool enrollment and attendance, the provisions of this policy will apply to preschools. Treutlen County should ensure that children experiencing homelessness receive priority enrollment in preschool programs operated by Treutlen County, including exempting children experiencing homelessness from waiting lists. Children experiencing homelessness with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Children experiencing homelessness under age three will be referred for at-risk services

under Title VI, Part C of IDEA and screened to determine if referrals for additional Title VI, Part C of IDEA services are appropriate. The TCSS homeless liaison will collaborate with Head Start and other preschool programs to ensure that children experiencing homelessness have access to those programs.

References

- The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§11431 – 11436
- Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§6311 – 6315
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§1400 et seq
- April 6, 2002 Policy of the Child Nutrition District of the U.S. Department of Agriculture
- June 5, 1992 Policy of the Administration for Children and Families Department of Health and Human Services

SERVICES FOR FOSTER CARE CHILDREN

The Treutlen County School System (TCSS) ensures educational stability and continuity for students in foster care, in compliance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, Section 1111(g)(1)(E)) and state guidance from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS).

Educational Stability Requirements

In coordination with DFCS and other child welfare partners, TCSS will ensure that:

School of Origin Placement

- Students in foster care will remain in their school of origin unless a best-interest determination concludes that attendance at another school is more appropriate.
- The best-interest determination will be made collaboratively between TCSS and DFCS, considering factors such as educational continuity, safety, and the student's social and emotional needs.

Immediate Enrollment

- When a change in school placement is determined to be in the student's best interest, TCSS will immediately enroll the student in the new school, even if required records (such as immunizations or transcripts) are unavailable at the time of enrollment.
- The receiving school will promptly request records from the prior school.

Transportation

- TCSS, in collaboration with DFCS, will ensure that transportation is arranged for students who remain in their school of origin when in their best interest.
- Transportation costs and responsibilities will be shared in accordance with GaDOE and DFCS guidance.

Confidentiality and FERPA Compliance

- The educational status and placement of students in foster care are confidential. TCSS will comply fully with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and GaDOE privacy protocols when handling information about children in care.

Identification and Notification

- DFCS provides the GaDOE with periodic lists of children in foster care, which are then shared with local districts.
- TCSS may also receive notifications directly from foster parents, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), DFCS case managers, or Educational Support Monitors (ESM) within the DFCS Educational Programming, Assessment, and Consultation (EPAC) unit.
- Upon notification, the TCSS Foster Care Point of Contact (POC) will verify the student's status and initiate required educational stability procedures.

Roles and Responsibilities

- The District Foster Care Point of Contact serves as the liaison between TCSS, DFCS, and the GaDOE Foster Care Education Program.
- The POC ensures staff are trained annually on foster care procedures, record confidentiality, and collaboration protocols with DFCS.
- Principals and counselors will assist in implementing supports for academic success and ensuring that foster care students have equal access to all educational programs and services.

Monitoring and Compliance

- TCSS will participate in GaDOE monitoring to ensure implementation fidelity with all foster care provisions.
- Documentation of best-interest determinations, transportation agreements, and training attendance will be maintained for monitoring purposes.

Foster Care Transportation Procedures

The Treutlen County School System (TCSS) ensures that children in foster care have access to transportation to remain in their school of origin when it is determined to be in their best interest. These procedures are developed in accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA §1112(c)(5)(B)) and guidance from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS).

Transportation Coordination

- When a child in foster care is determined to remain in their school of origin, the DFCS Director or Case Manager will notify the TCSS Foster Care Point of Contact (POC)
- The POC will immediately coordinate with the Superintendent, Director of Transportation, and Federal Programs Director to arrange transportation services.
- The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), Educational Support Monitor (ESM) from the DFCS Educational Programming, Assessment, and Consultation (EPAC) unit, and any Juvenile Court representatives will be included in coordination discussions when relevant.

Funding and Cost Sharing

- Transportation costs will be shared equally between DFCS and TCSS unless another agreement is reached.

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- If additional costs arise, TCSS may use Title I or general operating funds to ensure uninterrupted services while cost agreements are finalized.
- All financial arrangements will be documented through written communication between DFCS and TCSS.

Immediate Provision of Transportation

- DFCS will notify TCSS within 48 hours of a child's placement in foster care when transportation to the school of origin may be required.
- TCSS will ensure that transportation is provided immediately, even if funding agreements are pending.
- DFCS has agreed to reimburse TCSS for additional costs as necessary to maintain educational stability.

No delay in transportation services shall occur due to cost-sharing discussions.

Dispute Resolution

- If a dispute arises regarding transportation responsibility or cost, the TCSS Foster Care POC and Superintendent will initiate the local dispute resolution process.
- Students will continue to receive transportation to their school of origin during the dispute process.

Foster Care Point of Contact

- The Treutlen County School Social Worker/Attendance Clerk serves as the Foster Care Point of Contact.
- The POC is responsible for coordinating transportation logistics, facilitating best-interest determinations, managing cost-sharing communications, resolving transportation disputes, and maintaining documentation.
- The POC serves as liaison among DFCS, EPAC, school administrators, and transportation staff, and provides annual training for district and school personnel on foster care requirements.

Cost-Sharing Agreement

- Because TCSS operates a single K–12 campus, students placed within the district's attendance area typically incur no additional transportation costs.
- If special circumstances require travel outside the normal attendance zone, TCSS and DFCS will determine the most practical, cost-effective method of transportation and share costs equitably when necessary.

Transportation Services

- TCSS currently provides transportation that meets all federal and state requirements for children in foster care to remain in their schools of origin.
- In the event of unique circumstances requiring additional resources, TCSS will utilize existing routes, contracted drivers, or DFCS partnerships to ensure full compliance with ESSA and GaDOE guidance.

MONITORING OF NEGLECTED & DELINQUENT FACILITY

There are currently no Neglected & Delinquent facilities located in Treutlen County.