NCHE publications are supported through a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students. For more information, visit https://www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html.

What You Need to Know to Help Your Child in School

A Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers

Local Liaison

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State Coordinator for Homeless Education

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If your family is in a temporary or inadequate living situation due to a loss of housing, your child might be eligible for certain educational rights and services.

National Center for Homeless Education
http://nche.ed.gov
800-308-2145
homeless@serve.org

National Center for Homeless Education
Supporting the Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

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Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Services

If your family lives

- in a shelter
- in a motel or campground due to the lack of an alternative adequate accommodation
- in a car, park, abandoned building, or bus or train station
- doubled-up with other people due to loss of housing or economic hardship

your child might be able to receive help through a federal law called the McKinney-Vento Act.

McKinney-Vento Rights and Supports

Your McKinney-Vento eligible children have the right to

- receive a free, appropriate public education.
- enroll in school immediately, even if lacking documents normally required for enrollment.
- enroll in school and attend classes while the school gathers needed documents.
- enroll in the local school; or continue attending the school of origin (the school they attended when permanently housed or the school in which they were last enrolled), if that is your preference.

  *If the school district believes that the school you select is not in the best interest of your children, then the district must provide you with a written explanation of its position and inform you of your right to appeal its decision.
- receive transportation to and from the school of origin, if you request this.
- receive educational services comparable to those provided to other students, according to your children's needs.

Resources from NCHE

Toll-free Helpline: 800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org

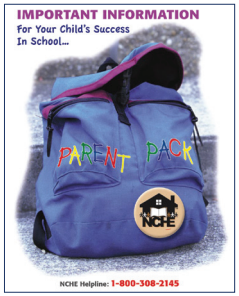
NCHE can explain your child's school rights and tell you how to contact the local liaison in your school district. The local liaison can help enroll your child in school and make sure that your child receives the help that he/she needs.

Website: http://nche.ed.gov

The NCHE website has a lot of good information, including a webpage for parents who want to help their child in school: https://nche.ed.gov/ibt/parent_res.php.

Parent Pack Pocket Folders

Parent Pack Pocket Folders are folders where you can keep important records and papers related to your child's schooling. The folder also explains the educational rights of children in homeless situations. Order these folders for free by calling 800-308-2145 or visiting https://nche.ed.gov/online_order.php.



What can I do to help my child in school?

- Make sure your child goes to school every day and arrives rested and fed.
- Provide a quiet place for your child to do homework, and set aside time every day to help your child with homework.
- Pay attention to your child's health needs and take care of any problems early.
- Ask your child what he or she is learning in school. Have him or her explain it to you. If you show interest in your child's education, he or she will know that it's important.
- Read to your child every day. For older children, set aside time each day for you and your child to read together silently. Talk about what you read.
- Praise your child for what he or she does well, like getting a good grade or playing on a school sports team.
- Listen to what your child shares with you and talk about any problems he or she is having. You also can talk about these problems with a teacher or school counselor.
- Encourage your child to participate in things like sports and music.

Good Questions Make Good Readers

Asking children about what they read will help them become good thinkers

For stories (fiction):

- What happened? What do you think will happen next? Why?
- Who is the main character? Do you like him/her? Why? Would you have done what he or she did? If not, what would you have done?
- How did this story make you feel?

For informational material (non-fiction):

- What was the article or chapter about? Ask for as many details as possible.
- What do you think was the author's main point?
- What part did you find the most interesting?
- Why do you think this information is important?

Frequently Asked Questions

When I move, should I keep my child in the same school or transfer my child to the local school?

Moving from one school to another can be upsetting for children. They have to leave the friends and teachers they know and get used to new friends, teachers, and classes. Because of this, it is usually best for your child to stay in his/her same school (the school of origin), even if you move to a different area.

Here are some questions to think about when deciding whether your child should stay in the same school or move to the new school where you're living:

- How old is your child?
- How permanent is your current living arrangement? Do you plan to move back close to the school of origin or do you think you'll stay near your current living arrangement?
- Is your child attached to his/her school of origin? An older child who feels very connected to his/her school of origin and/or is about to graduate might have a harder time changing schools.
- How anxious is your child because you have had to move? Would changing schools be overwhelming?
- Would changing schools cause your child to fall behind in school and get bad grades?
- Is this a good time of year for your child to change schools, such as at the end of a semester or school year, after testing, or after an event that is important to your child?
- How much time would your child have to spend going back and forth to the school of origin? A long ride might have a negative impact on your child's schoolwork.
- Are there safety issues to think about in choosing which school your child should attend?

What if the school and I disagree about where my child should go to school?

If you and the school disagree, the school district has to tell you in writing why it thinks your child should go to a different school than the one you want. The district also has to tell you in writing how you can appeal this decision. Your child can still enroll in, attend, and participate fully in the school you think is best for him or her while the disagreement is being settled.

Whom can I contact to help with my child's education?

- Every school district has a **local homeless education liaison**. This person can help you decide which school would be best for your child and communicate with the school. The local liaison also can help your child get school supplies, supplemental services, and free school meals; set up transportation to and from the school of origin; and help you find community supports.
- When you enroll your child in a new school, you should ask to meet his/her **teacher(s)**. You also should talk to your child's teacher(s) every so often to talk about how he or she is doing. Know at least one teacher at your child's school well enough to ask questions about your child's schoolwork and to give him or her information that will help your child learn.
- The **school counselor** can help your child deal with changes and challenges. Share with this person any information about how your child is acting at home, or things he or she is dealing with that might affect schoolwork.
- Other good people to know are the **school principal**, **attendance officer**, **bus driver**, **school social worker**, and **school nurse**.
- **All school and school district staff** can help make sure your child gets all the services he or she needs to do well in school. You are an important partner in your child's education and should work as a team with the school and school district.

What questions should I ask about services under the McKinney-Vento Act?

- Who is the local homeless education liaison? How can I contact him or her?
- What transportation is available for my child to stay in the same school (the school of origin)?
- If my child changes schools, who can help us transfer records to the new school quickly?
- How can my child receive free meals at school?
- How can my child receive free school supplies, if needed?
- Who can help if my child needs special education services? How quickly can these services be set up?
- What academic help is available for my child, such as Title I programs or after-school tutoring?
- What programs can help develop my child's talents and address his/her unique needs?
- Are there sports, music, or other activities available for my child?
- How can my child go on class field trips or participate in other school activities if I can't pay for them?
- Is there a preschool program for my younger children?