

McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act Policy

Members of the public and the Tri-County Regional Vocational School District are hereby informed of the provisions of an act to ensure that homeless children and youth have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education as provided to other children and youth. Tri-County has designated a staff person to serve as the Homeless Education Liaison, whose role it is to assist homeless children to enroll in school and to receive the educational services for which they are eligible, and to ensure that homeless youth participate fully in the opportunities at Tri-County without segregation or stigmatization. That staff member is the Director of Guidance.

Definition

The homeless population consists of preschoolers, children and youth who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, including those who are:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or campgrounds due to lack of alternatives
- Living in publicly or privately operated emergency or transitional shelters
- Living in places not designed for the sleeping accommodation of human beings
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing
- Living in temporary, transitional or emergency care, awaiting foster placement
- Unaccompanied youth under age 18, not in physical custody of parent/guardian

Enrollment

The parent of a homeless child, or an unaccompanied youth acting on his own behalf, has the right to choose continued enrollment in the school of origin or to enroll in the school where the child is sheltered.

- Students choosing their school of origin have a right to remain there until the end of the school year in which they get permanent housing
- Students choosing to enroll where they are sheltered must be immediately enrolled with or without records ('enrollment' means attending classes)
- The homeless education liaison must obtain records from the school previously attended and must ensure access to all school activities and events

Transportation

Homeless students are guaranteed transportation to and from the school of origin or the school where the student is sheltered. The school systems involved will follow the guidelines for reasonable commuting time (one hour) and for cost apportionment outlined in state advisories. The homeless education liaison will ensure that parents or unaccompanied youth are informed of their right to transportation.

Access to Comparable Services

- Homeless students will be provided services and educational programs comparable to those received by other students and for which they meet eligibility criteria, including but not limited to: services provided under Title I or similar state or local programs; programs for students with disabilities; programs for students with limited English proficiency; vocational or technical programs; and school nutrition programs. (Documentation of homelessness constitutes immediate eligibility for free meals.)
- Homeless students will be referred for counseling and medical services available to other students.
- Parents of homeless students will be informed of opportunities to participate in their child's education.

Dispute Resolution

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the homeless student will be enrolled immediately in the selected school, pending resolution of the dispute. The school will attempt to resolve the dispute in-district, and will provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written copy of the placement decision and their right to appeal the decision. The homeless education liaison will carry out the dispute resolution process in a timely manner as specified in the state advisory.

Protocol For The Homeless Education Liaison

The responsibilities of the homeless education liaison are defined through advisories from the Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth of the Massachusetts Department of Education. This protocol will be reviewed annually for accuracy and completeness.

Identification

The homeless education liaison will:

- Conduct annual information sessions for all staff on homelessness
- Conduct annual training for administrator and members of the pupil personnel services department who may learn of student homelessness
- Communicate with agencies having care and custody of youth
- Keep a register of homeless students

Immediate Services

The homeless education liaison will:

- Facilitate the immediate provision of meal benefits to homeless students
- Ensure the provision of transportation to and from school according to guidelines provided by the Department of Education
- Provide parents and unaccompanied youth with a list of their rights and the opportunities for parent participation

Enrollment

The homeless education liaison will:

- Immediately enroll, or provide for the continued enrollment of, homeless youth, with or without records
- Contact previous school, if not Tri-County, to receive records and information about services for which the student is eligible
- Inform pupil personnel services department of homeless students and needed services:
 - Counselors – for scheduling, uniforms, supplies, etc.
 - School nurse – for referral for medical services
 - SPED coordinator – for special needs services, evaluation, or Title I
 - School psychologist/adjustment counselors – for counseling needs

Barriers To Full Participation

The homeless education liaison will:

- Review school activities, schedules, programs for possible barriers to homeless
- Solve problems preventing full participation of students and/or parents
- Ensure availability of extra help as is available for other students
- Identify means of communication with parents of homeless students, and develop alternative means if necessary

Student Records / Collaboration

The homeless education liaison will:

- Facilitate the transfer of complete student records to receiving schools
- Collaborate in the interest of homeless student with liaisons in other schools

Policy Review and Public Notice

The homeless liaison or designee will:

- Attend trainings conducted by the Office for the Education of Homeless Youth
- Annually review the policy printed in the Student Handbook, as well as this protocol
- Disseminate information about homelessness through flyers, posters and newsletters
- Implement the dispute resolution process when necessary, and seek the advice and counsel of the state director for any questions in regard to the policy and protocol