



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: August 6, 2025
To: Local Educational Agency Leads
Route To: District Registrars, District Homeless Liaisons, Principals, School Nurses, All District Staff with Enrollment Responsibilities
From: Kathy Ehling, Assistant Commissioner
Division of Educational Services

Reminder: Enrollment of Children and Youths Experiencing Homelessness

Annually, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) provides guidance to assist school districts with fulfilling federal and state requirements regarding the enrollment of students who are experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youths. The [McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#) (MKV) requires state and local educational agencies (LEAs) to remove barriers to school enrollment for homeless children and youths ([42 U.S.C. §11432\(g\)\(1\)\(I\)](#)). New Jersey school districts must undertake steps to revise practices and/or policies that may act as barriers to the identification, enrollment, attendance, or success of students experiencing homelessness.

A child or youth may be eligible for protection and support if they meet the Act's [definition of homelessness](#). The Act defines "homeless children and youths" as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." This includes children and youths who share housing with other persons due to the loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as "doubled-up").

An unaccompanied youth is a student who is not in physical custody of a parent or legal guardian. This may include students who have run away, been asked to leave, or been abandoned by their parents. While there is no age limit, unaccompanied youths are typically teenagers. To be considered an unaccompanied homeless youth under the Act, **both** of the following conditions must be met:

1. The youth's living situation meets the definition of homelessness; and
2. The youth is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

The Act also requires schools to **immediately enroll** all homeless students, including unaccompanied youths, even if they are awaiting immigration proceedings and living in the community with a relative or other responsible adult.

Children and youths experiencing homelessness often do not have the documents ordinarily required for school enrollment (i.e., proof of residency, school/immunization records, and/or birth certificates). Many students, especially those living in "doubled-up" situations (i.e., shared living arrangements, some of which may be considered homeless), may not be able to provide proof of residency. Though proof of residency affidavits may be intended to ensure that only eligible students can enroll in a district school, the use of such forms as a requirement for enrollment, or continued enrollment, constitutes an educational barrier for

students who do not reside in permanent living situations. The right to enroll immediately in school, even without documents normally required for enrollment, is one of the core protections of MKV ([42 U.S.C. §11432\(g\)\(3\)\(C\)](#)). Additionally, proof of guardianship is not necessary to immediately enroll an unaccompanied child or youth.

Proof of Residency in the School District

Under state law ([N.J.A.C. 6A:22-3.1,3.2](#)), school officials may request proof that the adult enrolling the child lives within the boundaries of the school district. School districts typically accept a variety of documents for this purpose, such as copies of phone and water bills, lease agreements, affidavits, or other documents. A school district's requirements to establish residency must be applied in the same way for all children, including unaccompanied youths. The district must immediately enroll or continue to enroll students while the district reviews the parents' and/or students' residency claims. A district cannot deny an unaccompanied child or youth enrollment because he or she cannot provide the required documents to establish residency.

If the district disputes a claim of homelessness, it must continue the student's enrollment for the duration of the dispute resolution process, as described at [N.J.A.C. 6A:17-2.7](#). The requirement for immediate enrollment also applies to unaccompanied homeless youths who lack proof of guardianship.

NJSLEDS Reporting Responsibilities

It is important to note that if a student becomes homeless at any time during the year, the NJDOE's NJ Statewide Longitudinal Educational Data System (NJSLEDS) fields must be updated. NJSLEDS' homeless status is an indication of whether a student is or has been homeless at least one day during the school year. Students who meet the MKV definition should be coded as follows:

- Y1 = Yes, students were homeless at any time during the school year and was in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian; or
- Y2 = Yes, student was homeless at any time during the school year and was NOT in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian (unaccompanied); or
- N = No, student was not homeless "Y1" or "Y2".

If you have questions or need further clarification, please visit the NJDOE's McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youths [webpage](#) or email McKinney.Vento@doe.nj.gov.

c: Members, State Board of Education
NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy
Network Garden State Coalition of
Schools
NJ LEE Group