

Guidance for School Districts on Identifying, Serving and Supporting Homeless Preschool Children and Families

This guidance document does not override the McKinney Vento federal law. It is to serve as an additional resource to help support existing methods the district has in place for identifying, serving and supporting homeless preschool children and their families.

Federal Law

(McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 – Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act – Section 725)

The term “homeless children and youth:

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and
- B. includes-
 - i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
 - ii. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
 - iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - iv. migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

Identifying Homeless Preschool Children

- To increase public awareness of the preschool program and increase enrollment of homeless children, social service agencies, contracted childcare providers and other educational agencies within the local community should be familiar with the school district’s registration process. Copies of written information on the registration process and required documentation should be disseminated to consumers (e.g., board of social services/welfare, emergency shelters, transitional shelters, domestic violence shelters, hospitals, food pantries, soup kitchens, local motels, clinics, family medical and pediatrician offices, subsidized housing offices, Head Start, early intervention,

unemployment office(s), adult education & training centers, community colleges, libraries, local and state government entities etc.).

- All public information about the preschool program, including how to register (whether written or aired on TV or the radio), should be in the predominant language(s) of the community. Flyers, brochures, and other written documents should be distributed to the community agencies listed above.
- Personnel conducting school registration interviews should be trained in conducting interviews and corresponding protocols. The climate of all interviews should be nonthreatening, nonjudgmental and take place in a comfortable environment. It is important for displaced families or families experiencing homelessness to be able to be open in disclosing their living situations without concern or fear of being stigmatized, discriminated against or reported to other authorities.
- Translation services should be available for families whose first language is not English.

Serving and Supporting Homeless Preschool Children and Families

- Transportation should not be a barrier to displaced families or families experiencing homelessness. Refer to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act for full information).
- Refer children and families to appropriate social service entities when the school district is unable to provide the services needed (e.g., health, counseling, housing, food, and clothing).
- School district family services personnel (e.g., community parent involvement specialist, social worker, family worker) should have ongoing collaborative relationships with the school district homeless education liaison (The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act mandates a homeless education liaison in every school district.), classroom teachers, teacher assistants, school counselors, nurses, secretaries, bus drivers, and administrators to help broaden the reach to homeless families. Examples of collaboration include regular briefings among staff, discussions and updates on enrollment and school attendance at staff meetings, and regularly scheduled meetings for the homeless liaison and family services personnel.
- Provide diversity and sensitivity training and materials to all staff. Examples include having information on homelessness readily available to staff by locating materials in the main office, staff lounge, or resource room, provide annual training on the specialized and unique needs of children experiencing homelessness.
- Community social service agencies should be invited to serve on the school district's early childhood advisory council and other school committees addressing early childhood education.

- Data obtained from registration forms and interviews should be aggregated and used to help inform plan and implement services to best serve and meet the educational needs of preschool children experiencing homelessness.
- Establish guidelines in consultation with district child study team in determining the educational and placement needs of preschool students with disabilities.
- Provide a resource book with the name, address, and services offered by public and private social service agencies at the local, county and state levels to families at the beginning of each school year. Additional copies should also be readily available at each school site.

ONLINE RESOURCES

National Center for Homeless Education <http://www.serve.org/nche>

National Association for the Education of Children and Youth <http://www.naehcy.org>

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty <http://www.nlchp.org>

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