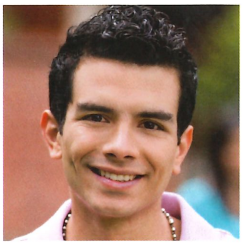
What You Should Know About Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness



A Guide to Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program

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Introduction

The Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program was authorized by Title VII, Subtitle B of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, and more recently under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) was the first comprehensive federal law dealing with the problem of homelessness in America. For the full text of the final regulations disseminated by the U.S. Department of Education, as amendments to the McKinney-Vento Act, go to www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-11-29/pdf/2016-27985.pdf.

Pennsylvania's primary goal for its ECYEH Program is to educate local education agencies (LEAs) and other entities who work with children, youth and families, on the rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness. They should also work collaboratively to eliminate barriers that may impede enrollment, attendance, or receipt of services that support academic success – including special student populations such as preschool-aged children experiencing homelessness, unaccompanied youth, and out-of-school youth experiencing homelessness.

The ECYEH Program provides support for activities or services that enable these children and youth to enroll in, attend, and succeed in school. The ESSA provisions actually provide clarification and reinforcement of the important role of school district homeless liaisons in working with and supporting students experiencing homelessness.

These new or changed requirements focus on (from Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, July 27, 2016. This document can be found at www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/160240ehcyguidance072716.pdf)

1. Identification of homeless children and youths.
2. Preschool-aged homeless children, including clarification that liaisons must ensure that these children and their families have access to and receive services, if eligible, under LEA-administered preschool programs, including Head Start, Pact C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities) and other preschool programs administered by the LEA.
3. Collaboration and coordination with other service providers, including public and private child welfare and social service agencies; law enforcement agencies; juvenile and family courts; agencies providing mental health services; domestic violence agencies; child care providers; runaway and homeless youth centers; providers of services and programs funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act; and providers of emergency, transitional, and permanent housing, including public housing agencies, shelter operators, and operators of transitional housing facilities.
4. Professional development and technical assistance at both the State and local levels.
5. Removing enrollment barriers, including barriers related to missed application or enrollment deadlines, fines, or fees; records required for enrollment, including immunization or other required health records, proof of residency, or other documentation or academic records, including documentation for credit transfer.
6. School stability, including the expansion of school of origin to include preschools and receiving schools and the provision of transportation until the end of the school year, even if a student becomes permanently housed.
7. Privacy of student records, including information about a homeless child or youth's living situation (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act/FERPA prohibits an LEA from disclosing personally identifiable information from students' education records without the consent of a parent or eligible student, unless an exception to FERPA's general consent rule applies – p. 7, A-6, of the U.S. Department of Education's Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, July 27, 2016).
8. The dispute resolution process.

The program is authorized to provide funds through the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to coordinate the enrollment and delivery of services for the educational success of children and youth experiencing homelessness. This booklet is a brief overview of some important issues surrounding child homelessness – such as who they are, how they are affected by homelessness, and their available educational choices and federal rights. The booklet should prepare you to better assist any student who is experiencing homelessness.

A Definition of Homelessness

A family or student is considered homeless under the McKinney-Vento definition if they are in any of these places or situations:

- Public or private emergency or transitional shelters.
- Public or private places not designated for, or ordinarily used as, regular sleeping accommodations such as vehicles, parks, motels, campgrounds, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, etc.
- Living with a parent in a domestic violence shelter.
- Living with relatives or friends due to lack of housing.
- Living in transitional housing programs.
- Runaway children (under 18 years of age) and children and youth who have been abandoned or forced out of their home by parents or other caretakers (unaccompanied youth). These children may be in temporary shelters awaiting assistance from social service agencies, or may live alone on the street or move from place to place among family members, friends or acquaintances.
- Children of migrant families who lack adequate housing.
- Children abandoned in hospitals.
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless based on their living situation.

Frequently, unaccompanied youth become homeless after leaving abusive or destructive home environments. In turn, their homelessness, which often involves "couch surfing" (staying temporarily with friends or relatives), or living on the streets, places them at risk of further victimization, including robbery, assault, or human trafficking. School personnel must understand that although youth may hesitate to admit it, their home may be an unhealthy or dangerous environment for them. Judgments regarding why a youth left home fall outside the purview of the public education system. Schools are required to enroll any unaccompanied youth who fits the definition of homelessness.

School District Homeless Liaison

Per the federal law, every school district must assign a person (a liaison) to ensure that students experiencing homelessness are identified, enrolled and able to succeed in school. The liaison is responsible for identification of McKinney-Vento eligible students (student population experiencing homelessness) and supporting the needs of these students. The liaison assesses McKinney-Vento eligibility and the needs of students and families experiencing homelessness; interprets laws relating to student homelessness; works as a team member to remove educational barriers; provides case management; monitors student progress; and makes referrals to facilitate appropriate services to ensure full attendance and access to an appropriate education. The liaison also acts as a resource to school staff to inform, facilitate and support appropriate services.

Major responsibilities and essential functions of the liaison:

- Coordinates and collaborates with ECYEH regional and site coordinators.
- Collaborates with appropriate staff to determine eligibility for McKinney-Vento mandated services.
- Collaborates with school staff to develop interventions for students identified as homeless and develops individualized service plans as appropriate.
- Maintains necessary records and prepares related reports while ensuring confidentiality for the purpose of documenting students experiencing homelessness.
- Ensures the complete and accurate collection and submission of LEA homeless data to PIMS and ECYEH.
- Acts as a resource to school-based administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, and health services personnel regarding homeless students, interpretation of homeless/school attendance policies and laws, and record-keeping requirements.
- Models nondiscriminatory practices in all activities;
- Obtains resources necessary to promote students' educational readiness, regular attendance and academic success.
- Attends meetings and conferences to ensure full knowledge of McKinney-Vento requirements.
- Collaborates with all levels of school and district administration and staff (e.g. building liaisons, human resources, transportation, principals, psychologists, registrars, nurses, secretaries, etc.) for the purpose of ensuring the development and implementation of students' individualized service plans.
- If necessary and appropriate, conducts orientation/training for school staff regarding school policy/procedure as it relates to students experiencing homelessness and/or facilitates related orientation/training provided by the ECYEH regional/site coordinator/s.
- Interprets laws relating to homeless students for the purpose of advising administration, staff and parents regarding the rights of homeless students.
- Provides support and information (e.g. to parents, guardians, etc.) for the purpose of communicating the availability of services and activities.
- Serves as a liaison (e.g. with schools, homeless shelters/facilities, social service agencies, court-related services, police departments, etc.) to coordinate appropriate assistance for students experiencing homelessness.
- Meets with families and students experiencing homelessness to assess and prioritize needs and make linkages with district and community resources as appropriate.

- Coordinates with a variety of outside service providers and community agencies to meet students' needs and avoid duplication of services.
- Connects students experiencing homelessness with available tutoring, afterschool and summer programming to support academic success.
- Ensures that families, and children and youths experiencing homelessness receive early childhood educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, Early Intervention, and preschool.
- Ensures that families, and children and youths experiencing homelessness are referred to health care services, dental services, and other appropriate medical services.
- Ensures that public notice of the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness is displayed in every school building, and in community locations as appropriate.
- Ensures that the parent/guardians of students experiencing homelessness, and any unaccompanied youth, are fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation services described in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Title VII, Subtitle B, Section 722, (1)(J)(iii).
- Intervenes in cases where excessive absence or truancy is related to homelessness.
- Ensures that all students in homeless situations enroll in and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in school.

Further, the following list includes specific activities which support comprehensive implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (p. 16, F-1, of the U.S. Department of Education's Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, July 27, 2016):

1. Liaisons will perform outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies to assist school personnel in identifying homeless children and youths.
2. Liaisons will ensure that homeless children and youths are enrolled in, and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in, the school or schools of the LEA.
3. Liaisons will ensure homeless families and homeless children and youths have access to and receive educational services for which such families, children, and youths are eligible, including services through Head Start programs (including Early Head Start programs), early intervention services under Part C of the IDEA, and other preschool programs administered by the LEA.
4. Liaisons will ensure that homeless families and children and youths receive referrals to health, dental, mental health, and substance abuse services, housing services, and other appropriate services.
5. Liaisons will ensure that parents or guardians of homeless children and youths 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.
6. Liaisons will ensure that public notice of the educational rights of homeless students is disseminated in locations frequented by parents and guardians of such children and youths, and unaccompanied youths, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to the parents and guardians and unaccompanied youths.
7. Liaisons will ensure that any enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.
8. Liaisons will ensure that parents, guardians and unaccompanied youths are fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to and from the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing transportation services.
9. Liaisons will provide school personnel professional development and other support.
10. Liaisons will ensure that unaccompanied youths are enrolled in school, have opportunities to meet the same challenging state academic standards as the state establishes for other children and youths, are informed of their status as independent students under section 480 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) (20 U.S.C. 1087vv), and their right to receive verification of this status from the local liaison (Section 722(g)(6)(A)).

McKinney-Vento Eligibility and Identification

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines "homeless children and youths" as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." However, because the circumstances of homelessness vary with each family's or unaccompanied youth's situation, determining the extent to which the family or youth fits the definition must be applied on a case-by-case basis. The liaison must gather and analyze information from the family or youth and make an appropriate determination of eligibility. Expeditious determination of eligibility and immediate school enrollment are critical to the child's educational continuity and future success.

Children and youth experiencing homelessness are difficult to identify for many reasons, and often go unnoticed by school personnel. Students and parents may try to hide their situation because they are embarrassed by their homelessness. In addition, the fear of having children taken away often prevents families from revealing their living circumstances to school officials. Unaccompanied youth may not report their homeless status for fear of being returned to unsafe family environments. Homeless children and youth who are not enrolled in school and are living in places other than shelters, such as doubled-up with another family or in a low-cost motel, are even more invisible to schools and their communities. If you have any questions about eligibility or identification, contact your ECYEH regional or site coordinator.

Specifically, the local liaison should (p. 17, F-4, of the U.S. Department of Education's Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, July 27, 2016):

1. Include the identification of homeless students and their unique educational needs in any district needs assessment and school improvement plans that define a school's targeted work to raise achievement for all students.
2. Use a housing questionnaire to gather information about students registering in the district (universal implementation of the questionnaire can prevent stigmatization of students and reduce defensiveness in adult caregivers by preventing students and families from feeling singled out).
3. Ensure that referral forms used to identify and support homeless students are readily available, simple, and easy to use.
4. Include the local liaison's contact information on LEA websites to facilitate referrals.
5. Provide materials for students and parents in a language easily understood by families and students (if students or their families are unable to read, additional support should be provided to explain student rights).
6. Provide professional development and training for school staff, including teachers, paraprofessionals and school support staff, at least once annually that focuses on the definition of homelessness, signs of homelessness, the impact of homelessness on students, and the steps that should be taken once a potentially homeless student is identified, including how to connect the student with appropriate housing and service providers.
7. Develop interagency partnerships (Note: some federal programs are also required to identify and serve homeless children and youths who meet the eligibility criteria for those programs and to coordinate with LEAs. These programs include Head Start; the IDEA, which includes child find requirements for infants and toddlers with disabilities from birth through age two (Part C); and housing programs funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; and programs and services funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.)

Immediate Enrollment

It is important to remember that the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires the immediate enrollment of children and youth experiencing homelessness, even in the absence of records normally required for enrollment. Be aware of your district's enrollment policies and practices to ensure no barriers exist for these students/families. Build trust and talk with parents and youth with care and sensitivity about their family situation. Avoid statements and actions that may be perceived as offensive or threatening to a family experiencing homelessness. Protect confidential information – never share any information about a student with anyone who cannot prove the legal right to receive it. Make sure those receiving these students' records are aware of safety and confidentiality issues. Enroll the student immediately and consult your liaison, your ECYEH regional/site coordinator, or the ECYEH State Coordinator if you have any questions. Denying immediate enrollment to a student experiencing homelessness violates federal law and may place a student in danger in certain circumstances.

School Choice/School of Origin

According to federal law (see http://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv.php), the local education agency serving each child or youth to be assisted under this subtitle shall, according to the child's or youth's best interest:

"(i) continue the child's or youth's education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness—

(I) in any case in which a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year; and
(II) for the remainder of the academic year, if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year; or

(ii) enroll the child or youth in any public school that nonhomeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend."

The federal law defines "School of Origin" as the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled. The choice regarding placement shall be made regardless of whether the child or youth lives with the homeless parent(s) or has been temporarily placed elsewhere. When determining residence, the reasons for equating "residence" and "domicile" (home) do not apply where children experiencing homelessness are concerned – they are presently unable to establish "homes" on a permanent basis. LEAs are encouraged to consider the school placement of siblings when making a determination regarding school placement (p. 24, I-3, of the U.S. Department of Education's Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, July 27, 2016). If you have any questions about school of origin rights, contact your ECYEH regional or site coordinator.

Transportation

To counteract the educational disruption caused by students' mobility, the McKinney-Vento Act provides these students with the right to continue attending the school of origin, or enroll in any public school that nonhomeless students who live in the same attendance area are eligible to attend, according to the student's best interest. Homeless children and youths are entitled to receive transportation that is comparable to what is available to non-homeless students (Section 722(g)(4)(A). (p. 27, J-1, of the U.S. Department of Education's Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, July 27, 2016). When determining a student's best interest, the following factors should be considered:

- Age of the child or youth
- Distance of a commute and the impact it may have on the student's education
- Personal safety issues
- Student's need for special instruction (e.g., special education and related services)
- Length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location
- Time remaining in the school year

It is important to also consider the wishes of the parent/guardian and the student. Parents and youth should be informed of their school of origin rights and the available transportation services, or other transportation options. The liaison can help set up transportation through coordination within the district and between other school districts. A special publication by PDE, Child Accounting Guidelines, can be found online at www.education.state.pa.us/homeless, or by contacting your ECYEH regional or site coordinator.

LEAs must provide transportation services to the school of origin, which includes public preschools. Section 722(g)(3)(I)(i). Accordingly, transportation to the school of origin must be provided even if a homeless preschooler who is enrolled in a public preschool in one LEA moves to another LEA that does not provide widely available or universal preschool (p. 43, N-5, of the U.S. Department of Education's Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, July 27, 2016).

Supporting Opportunities for School Success

In general, children experiencing homelessness do not perform as well in school, have lower achievement scores, and more academic failure than housed students. These children need the stability of school and rely on academic support provided to them. These students often change schools frequently. This can impact learning as students must adjust to new environments, new curricula, and new teachers and classmates, while still learning the same information other students are expected to master. The loss of a home can be traumatic, leaving children and youth with tumultuous feelings that can impact their social and intellectual well-being. Limited access to food, medical care, and basic school supplies can also impact performance in the classroom.

The liaison should explore the following strategies and programs that can support students' academic success:

- Preschoolers are at greatest risk. Homelessness increases the likelihood of chronic health problems, developmental delays, lower academic achievement, and emotional difficulties. Ensure access to Head Start and preschool programs administered by the local educational agency, or within the community. Homeless liaisons should work with school personnel, who can inquire, at the time they are enrolling homeless children and youths in school, whether the family has any pre-school children (p. 42, N-1, of the U.S. Department of Education's Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, July 27, 2016).
- Provide necessary academic support such as tutoring, afterschool programs and summer programs.

- Foster resiliency through reducing risks, limit exposure to stress and decrease stressors.
- Develop and implement awareness projects that include all students.
- Encourage healthy connections (students to school, school personnel with each other and students, mobile students with other students).
- Provide necessary referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services.

An LEA must provide services to each homeless child and youth that are comparable to services offered to other students in the LEA (Section 722(g)(4)). These services include public preschool programs, programs for children with disabilities, and English learner programs. Further, students experiencing homelessness must have access to Career and Technical Education programs, Gifted and Talented student programs, before and after-school programs, school nutrition programs, and transportation.

Guidance for Schools/Basic Education Circulars

Basic Education Circulars (BEC) are issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as statements of policy. They provide guidance and direction to local administrators regarding current laws. All of these BECs can be found online at www.education.pa.gov/homeless.

- 42 U.S.C 11431 et seq. Education for Homeless Youth
- 24 P.S. § 13-1303a School Immunization Regulations
- 24.P.S. § 5-503 Admission to Kindergarten and Beginners
- 24 P.S. 13-1301 – 13-1306 Enrollment of Students

Immunization verification can be expedited for students experiencing homelessness. Department of Health regulations establish oral confirmation between professionals as sufficient basis to enroll a student (written confirmation to follow within 30 days). The Education for Homeless Youth Basic Education Circular, 42 U.S.C. §11431 explains this regulation.

According to federal law and PDE policy (see p. 8-9 list of Basic Education Circulars), if a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school—

"(i) the child or youth shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute;

(ii) 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;

(iii) the child, youth, parent, or guardian shall be referred 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)(C) as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute…"

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has developed procedures to govern the resolution of disputes regarding enrollment, school selection, homeless status, or complaints of non-compliance with legal requirements pertaining to the education for homeless children and youth. See Basic Education Circular—Education for Homeless Youth, that may be accessed online at www.education.pa.gov/homeless.

According to federal law and PDE policy (see p. 8-9 list of Basic Education Circulars), "In determining the best interest of the child or youth under McKinney-Vento Act, the LEA shall:

(I) Continue the child's or youth's education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness when a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year; and for the remainder of the academic year even if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year; or

(II) Enroll the child or youth in any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend."

According to federal law and PDE policy (see p. 8-9 list of Basic Education Circulars), there can be no enrollment delays—

"The selected school shall immediately enroll the child or youth in school, even if the child or youth lacks records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of residency, or other documentation. Section 722(g)(3)(C) (i)(ii) requires that a school selected based on a homeless child's or youth's best interest must immediately enroll such child or youth even if he or she has missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness.

The terms "enroll" and "enrollment" are defined as attending classes and participating fully in school activities. The enrolling school must immediately contact the last school attended to obtain relevant records.

In order to ensure immediate enrollment, in accordance with Section 722(g)(6)(A)(ix), the LEA liaison is required to: train school enrollment staff about the legal requirement that homeless children and youth be immediately enrolled and provided transportation; review school regulations and policies to ensure that they comply with the McKinney-Vento Act requirements; inform families and youth, in a language they can understand, of their rights; develop clear, understandable and accessible written explanations of decisions and the right to appeal; and expeditiously follow up on any special education or language needs presented by a student.

According to federal law and PDE policy (see p. 8-9 list of Basic Education Circulars), for school admission to kindergarten and beginners, acceptable evidence of pupil age—

- A birth certificate is NOT the only acceptable proof of age.
- A birth certificate is not mandated by law as a requirement for school admission.
- Other options include baptismal certificate, transcript of record of baptism, notarized parent statement, transcript of birth certificate or transcript of birth.

According to federal law and PDE policy (see 8-9 list of Basic Education Circulars), school immunization requirements—

The educating district immediately enrolls and begins to provide instruction. The receiving school district may contact the district of origin for oral confirmation that the child has been immunized. Written confirmation should follow within 30 days. According to federal law, "(iii) If the child or youth needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the enrolling school shall immediately refer the parent or guardian of the child or youth to the local education liaison designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii), shall assist in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records, in accordance with subparagraph (D)." 42 U.S.C

According to federal law and PDE policy, for enrollment of students—

Educational agencies shall ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youth. Homeless students may reside in shelters, hotels, motels, cars, tents, or be temporarily doubled-up with a resident family because of lack of housing. In the case of homeless students, traditional concepts of "residence" and "domicile" do not apply. Homeless children and youth lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Included within the definition of homeless children and youth are those who are "unaccompanied homeless youth."

Unaccompanied homeless youth may enroll without documents and without the help of an adult. Unaccompanied homeless youth includes any child who is "not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian." Falling within this definition are students who have run away from home, been thrown out of their home, or been abandoned or separated from their parent(s) or guardian(s).

Homeless youth are entitled to immediate enrollments and their families are not required to prove residency regarding school enrollment. These students should be enrolled without delay, in the district where they are presently residing, or continue their education in the district of prior attendance.

Dispute Resolution Process

PDE must ensure that LEAs comply with requirements set forth in the McKinney-Vento Act, including ensuring immediate enrollment, providing written notice to families concerning school selection, enrollment decisions and providing enrollment and pendency in the school of choice while a dispute is being resolved. PDE has developed procedures to govern the resolution of disputes regarding enrollment, school selection, homeless status and complaints of non-compliance with legal requirements pertaining to the education for homeless children and youths (for further information, visit www.education.pa.gov/homeless for the Education for Homeless Youth Basic Education Circular, 42 U.S.C §11432(g)(2)(A)), under Basic Education Circulars on the home page).

There are two dispute levels:

Level 1 – A dispute raised with an LEA, where a parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth initiates the dispute. The LEA ensures that the child or youth is immediately enrolled, explains the dispute resolution process to families and helps them to use it. The LEA issues a written disposition of the dispute within 20 business days after the LEA liaison is notified of the

dispute. The disposition is provided to the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth to explain the basis for the decision and advise the parent, guardian or youth of the right to appeal. 42 U.S.C §11432(g)(3)(E)(i)

Level 2 – A complaint filed with a McKinney-Vento Coordinator or the State Coordinator when a parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth is dissatisfied with the LEA's disposition of a dispute or wishes to raise any issue of McKinney-Vento Act noncompliance. For a list of coordinators, visit http://homeless.center-school.org. The child or youth remains in the school in which he or she is seeking enrollment until the complaint or appeal is resolved or until a disposition from a McKinney-Vento coordinator is received (within 20 business days).

Effects of Homelessness on Educational and Social Development

Most notably, homelessness causes a disruption in a child's education. The transfer and enrollment process may occur multiple times in one school year. The impact of family mobility upon education is disruption, and is the greatest barrier to school success. Changing schools means adapting to new teachers, schedules, friends, and accompanying details. Performance may slip until the child adapts to new settings. The attention of the child's caretaker may center on food, clothing, shelter and safety to the exclusion of education. This may add to the disruption of the child's education. Like any other child experiencing disruption in their life, children experiencing homelessness need support, help with adjusting to new teaching styles, assignments and some basic things like fees for class trips, etc.

As an educator you can make a significant difference in the success of these children. They may need an advocate in school. Recognize the importance of a caring environment as the foundation for academic success. Strengthen positive connections with families and form partnerships with others to develop and implement programs that will nurture and reinforce resiliency in children. Learn how Title I and other federal prevention funds can be utilized to serve mobile children. Take every opportunity to move from isolated programs to coordinating services for children experiencing homelessness.

Protective Factors That Help Students Experiencing Homelessness

Research studies show that when schools are places where students routinely receive respect and support, the students' motivation to learn is improved. To counter the many risk factors in the lives of these children, schools need to enhance protective factors that promote positive behavior, health, well-being and personal success. A child's resilience is fostered by building enough protective factors to offset the impact of a stressful life. Protective factors are grouped into three categories: caring and supportive relationships; positive and high expectations; and opportunities for meaningful participation in school activities.

Schools can promote protective factors by helping children and their families link with programs and activities that offer opportunities to strengthen existing relationships and create new ones. School-based parenting and enrichment workshops can help parents build stronger bonds with their children and the school community. Educators should set clear standards for attendance, behavior and satisfactory performance. These expectations can serve as a positive structure to a mobile family.

When schools provide caring relationships, maintain high expectations, and provide opportunities for participation in school activities, they can serve as a "protective shield" for students. The skills learned and the recognition received in these activities are keys for growth and a sense of well-being.

Educational Barriers Related to Homelessness

The following section lists identified barriers, briefly explains each barrier and offers some solutions. These 10 educational barriers have been identified through program implementation, feedback from the network of ECYEH regional and site coordinators, and information from the field garnered through training needs assessments. These common barriers are corroborated by the National Center for Homeless Education and the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. We know that policies, procedures, and strategies are only as effective as our ability to use them consistently in cooperation with all stakeholders, from the superintendent, to the admitting secretary, to the bus driver, and with all shelters and key community agencies. All statewide activities and the work of the regional and site coordinators focus on these barriers in order to reduce or eliminate them to minimize their negative impact on children and youth experiencing homelessness.

1. Residency and Guardianship Requirements and Other School Enrollment/Attendance Practices – The ECYEH staff work with local LEAs to ensure that school/district policies and procedures do not create barriers for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The ECYEH staff share sample exemplary policy statements with schools/districts and also review the schools/districts' existing policies to offer suggestions for possible revision of their policies to align with McKinney-Vento expectations.

2. Lack of Coordination, Collaboration and Cooperation – Every effort is made on a statewide, regional and local level to ensure ongoing communication, cooperation and follow-up with all stakeholders to ensure that students experiencing homelessness attend school and are provided with necessary services while minimizing the overlap of services. Sessions are provided at the annual statewide conference to encourage and facilitate cross-system coordination to benefit these students. Regular meetings and trainings provided by the network of ECYEH regional and site coordinators help to minimize these issues on the regional and local levels.

3. Lack of Program Continuity and Delays in Educational Evaluation and Placement – Practice and research confirm that children and youth experiencing homelessness often attend multiple schools in any given academic year, which has the potential to impede their educational progress. Irregular school attendance may interrupt continuity within any child's curriculum, as well as the implementation of important assessment procedures necessary for any student receiving special or supportive educational programs. Therefore training, technical assistance, and conscious coordination efforts on a case by case basis depending on the needs of each child help to ensure that the needs of all students experiencing homelessness are met.

4. Lack of Transportation to Stay in the School of Origin When It is in the Best Interest of the Student – Technical assistance is provided by the network of ECYEH regional and site coordinators on a daily basis to respond to and solve transportation issues experienced by this population. The rights of children experiencing homelessness to attend their school of origin are of utmost concern. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators address transportation barriers as needed on an individual, district, and regional level through informal contact with schools, parents and community-based agencies and through formal meetings and trainings with stakeholder groups to ensure adherence to the intent of the law.

5. Delays in Academic and Health Records – Based on feedback from the field, access to academic and health records of students experiencing homelessness rarely poses a barrier within the state. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators facilitate requests for records in a timely manner – even when the child is from out of state or even out of country – to mitigate this barrier. In many cases faxing has facilitated timely responses to record requests, and health officials such as school nurses often verify immunization records by phone. The state coordinator facilitates a special procedure when needed for domestic violence situations to ensure anonymity for these families.

6. Lack of Awareness Among School Personnel – A primary role of the ECYEH regional and site coordinators is increasing the education and awareness of school district personnel to the McKinney-Vento mandates. Each region provides formal training opportunities for school personnel through regional meetings, training sessions for specific school districts and/or targeted groups of school personnel (e.g. superintendents, principals and school counselors), and orientation/training for school personnel who are new to the role of school district homeless liaison. Training and materials are provided on an as-needed basis and can include: sample policies and procedures; regional brochures which describe the intricacies of each regional area; the ECYEH regional map; educational posters and the PDE Child Accounting Guidelines Booklet.

7. Inadequate Parental Response – Both the ECYEH state coordinator and the network of regional and site coordinators respond on a regular basis to parents' questions and concerns to ensure that families experiencing homelessness know what actions they should take, are given the highest quality of support, and are provided with the encouragement and guidance needed to enroll their children in school while maintaining the students' educational progress. The goal is to better educate these parents and caregivers through individualized or group training to minimize the likelihood that an inadequate or inappropriate parental response can pose a barrier.

8. Social Embarrassment – Due to the stigmatization of homelessness, the ECYEH staff is cognizant that parents may be embarrassed and fearful of reactions from school officials if their homelessness were discovered and that children and youth experiencing homelessness may be reluctant to attend school if they feel they will be treated differently after exposing their homeless situation. Because the ECYEH staff facilitates an open line of communication between and among shelters, other agencies and

schools every effort is made to ensure confidentiality and to minimize the embarrassment of students experiencing homelessness. ECYEH staff is aware that in our many rural areas family homelessness is often hidden, and therefore special outreach and awareness activities help to reach this population.

9. Transiency Among Families With Preschool Children – The ECYEH regional and site coordinators are required to link eligible preschoolers experiencing homelessness with educational programs such as Head Start and other local preschool programs. The ECYEH staff work with local and state resources to identify and enroll these preschoolers and support the continuity of their early education experience.

10. Lack of Access and Knowledge of Available Services for Runaway and Chronically Homeless – The population of runaway and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in the state has been increasing in recent years. There is also a corresponding dearth of available shelters and services for this population in certain areas in the state. In some cases, chronically homeless families have over-used the service system, which can lead to their inability to access the services they require. It is the role of the ECYEH regional and site coordinators to make special efforts to identify and serve these "hidden" youth and to support chronically homeless families in appropriate ways to access available services. In some areas special programs have been developed and funded to address the needs of runaway and unaccompanied homeless youth. Talk to your ECYEH regional/site coordinator for additional information.

The Importance of Coordination and Collaboration

Addressing the unique needs of students experiencing homelessness requires a coordinated and collaborative approach through which the student, the parent, the school, social service agencies and the public are aware and supportive of these families and their children. The following are ways in which coordination and collaboration can be facilitated.

- **Administrators** can help know the rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and help the school board and local community to become more sensitive to the condition of homelessness.
- **Principals** can help establish a true welcome to the school. Introduce the family and child to teachers, counselors and other staff, and give a tour of the school. Set the tone for further parent involvement in the school. Train all staff to be aware of the federal law, and state and district policies.
- **Secretaries** can help parents at school with enrollment by not bringing any special attention to their homeless situation. Assist parents in filling out forms. Be sensitive that some may lack skills to complete them.
- **Teachers** can help discuss privately with the student what accommodations exist for doing homework and make necessary arrangements or adjustments. Tutoring can also provide an opportunity for supportive counseling. Provide or arrange for needed school supplies without bringing the needs to the attention of the class.
- **Schools nurses** can help contact the previous school to obtain immunization records and health records. Get verification by phone to expedite matters and share information with staff members.
- **Counselors, social workers, home and school visitors and school psychologists** can help by knowing the local community resources to be in a position to make referrals for the family in areas like housing, food, clothing and counseling. Make standard forms and information available about key school programs at each shelter. This includes materials on the school calendar, lunch and breakfast programs, and admission/withdrawal.
- **Transportation staff** can help arrange for children to be able to attend the school of origin if in the student's best interest. Set up bus stops to pick students up at the shelter first and drop them off last, to ease the embarrassment of living at the shelter.
- **Shelter personnel** can help be aware of school happenings and help parents and children to be able to participate in school functions.

10 things a principal can do to help students experiencing homelessness:

- Be aware that students have a choice of schools and do not need to prove residency.
- Prepare the staff and especially office personnel in the guidelines for transfer and registration of children experiencing homelessness.
- Distribute information to teachers and office staff, and arrange for in-service for school staff regarding students experiencing homelessness.
- Know the BECs relating to these children and youth and be in position to explain them as needed to other school staff.
- Be aware of, and develop guidelines for, the sensitive issue of abuse and domestic violence.
- Contact parent/s and/or shelter personnel if a child is absent for three or more days to find out if assistance is needed.

- Alert Student Assistance Program (SAP) members of any serious conditions of the student of concern. Teamwork and sharing of information are very important, especially if the child's stay in school is short
- Ensure that the children can participate in field trips, schoolwide activities and class projects even if they do not have transportation or necessary fees.
- Display ECYEH parent and youth posters in appropriate locations in your building/s for the benefit of students, parents and faculty. Contact your ECYEH regional or site coordinator to request posters and other informational materials.
- Information and resources are available online at www.education.pa.gov/homeless and homeless.center-school.org.

Specific activities to assist children and youth experiencing homelessness:

- Provide assistance with transportation.
- Sponsor summer camp scholarships.
- Develop a referral document or resource booklet that provides names and numbers of where to call for services and assistance (school, shelter, and provider information).
- Send school information (newsletters, etc.) to shelters so children can be fully involved in all available programs.
- Establish a special fund for students experiencing homelessness to have school pictures taken and birthday treats for classmates (without embarrassment).
- Study and develop guidelines for the sensitive issue of abuse and how to handle communications with the abuser, both on the phone and in person at the school building.
- Distribute information to fellow teachers and office staff, and provide in-service for school staff on the subject of homelessness, its causes and the effects on children.
- Encourage pupil personnel workers to visit students residing in shelters.
- Find a way to communicate and share students' successes with parents experiencing homelessness.
- Observe warning signs for possible homelessness:
  - A lack of educational continuity (many school moves)
  - School attendance and transportation problems
  - Poor health and nutrition
  - Poor hygiene
  - Lack of privacy and personal space after school
  - Social and behavioral concerns
  - Reactions or statements by the parent, guardian, child, or youth.
- Establish procedures that ensure transmittal of school records in a timely fashion.
- Provide guidance about the effects of school transfers to alert parents to the potential challenges children face when multiple school transfers occur.
- Become involved with interagency efforts to provide families with resources needed to reduce mobility, when possible.

National, State, Regional and Local Resources

The ECYEH regional and site coordinators can assist with:

- School enrollment/placement
- Agency referrals (clothing, food, shelter)
- Tracking/transferring school records
- Accessing educational programs
- Interagency problem-solving
- Relevant literature related to homelessness
- Increasing public awareness on homeless issues
- Consultative phone calls to answer school, agency and shelter questions

To identify your district homeless liaison visit the statewide online liaison directory at homeless.center-school.org/homelessdirectory for a regional map and full listing of the state, regional and site coordinators, or contact your district superintendent.

Additional information and resources can be found on the regional and site websites listed below.

Region 1 – School District of Philadelphia
webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/s/student-placement/homeless-assistance-ecyeh

Region 2 – Berks County Intermediate Unit
www.berksiu.org/homeless

Region 3 – Lincoln Intermediate Unit
www.ecyeh.wikispaces.com

Region 4 – Allegheny Intermediate Unit
www.aiu3.net/Level3.aspx?id=1250

Region 5 – Midwestern Intermediate Unit
www.miu4.org/Domain/161
www.eriesd.org/domain/378
www.iu5.org/#!homeless/c22bk

Region 6 – ARIN Intermediate Unit
www.iu28.org/Page/258

Region 7 – Luzerne Intermediate Unit
www.liu18.org/index.php/ecyeh

Region 8 – Bucks County Intermediate Unit
www.bucksiu.org/homeless
www.allentownsd.org/content/homeless-services

Statewide Contacts
Storm Camara, State Coordinator
Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street, 5th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
Phone (717) 772-2066
Fax (717) 783-4392
scamara@pa.gov

Lynda Becker, Youth Development Coordinator
Center for Schools and Communities
Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit
275 Grandview Avenue, Suite 200
Camp Hill, PA 17011
Phone (717) 763-1661, ext. 156
Fax (717) 763-2083
lbecker@csc.csiu.org

Internet Resources
For additional information, and state and national resources, you can visit any of the following websites:

Note: Inclusion on this list does not denote endorsement by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Pennsylvania Department of Education ECYEH
www.education.pa.gov/homeless

Center for Schools and Communities ECYEH
homeless.center-school.org

Corporation for Supportive Housing
www.csh.org

Handsnet
www.handsnet.com/homelessness

Homelessness Resource Center
www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources

Homes for the Homeless
www.homesforthehomeless.com

Horizons for Homeless Children
www.horizonsforhomelesschildren.org

Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
www.housingalliancepa.org

Institute for Children, Homelessness and Poverty
www.icphusa.org

Legal Center on Foster Care and Education, American Bar Association
www.fostercareandeducation.org

National Alliance to End Homelessness
www.endhomelessness.org

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
www.naehcy.org

National Center for Homeless Education
nche.ed.gov

National Center on Family Homelessness/American Institutes for Research
www.familyhomelessness.org

National Coalition for the Homeless
www.nationalhomeless.org

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
www.nlchp.org

National Low Income Housing Coalition
www.nlihc.org

National Network 4 Youth
www.nn4youth.org

SchoolHouse Connection
www.schoolhouseconnection.org

U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy Students
www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oshs/index.html

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Families and Youth Services Bureau Help for Runaway and Homeless Youth Initiative
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/programs/runaway-homeless-youth

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center
eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc

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