

3.15.35 EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

POLICY AND PURPOSE

The Board of Trustees of the School is committed to ensuring that all students experiencing homelessness have equal access to educational programs and services, in compliance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, The Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness program (ECYEH), which is an initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and other federal and state laws and regulations. No students shall be discriminated against, segregated or stigmatized based on their homeless status. The School shall make reasonable efforts to promptly identify students experiencing homelessness, encourage their enrollment, and eliminate barriers to their attendance and education.

QUALIFYING DEFINITION OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

Homeless students are defined as individuals lacking a fixed, regular, and night-time residence, including those experiencing the following conditions:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship;
- Living in motels, hotels trailer parks or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- Living in emergency, transitional or domestic violence shelters;
- Abandoned in hospitals;
- Living in public or private places not designated for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings; or
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, transportation stations or similar settings.

Others who may qualify include:

- Unaccompanied (not living in direct care of a legal parent or guardian) youths;
- Refugee or migratory children who are living in circumstances described above; or
- School-aged parents living in houses for school-aged parents if they have no other available living accommodations.

STUDENT RIGHTS

Eligible students have rights to the following:

- Equal access to all educational programs, extracurricular activities and all other opportunities, as students who can show proof of residency
- “School stability,” for continued attendance at their current school or the school attended prior to becoming homeless, and may stay in the same school even if they move again, until permanent and adequate housing is secured
- Alternatively, immediate enrollment in a new school where eligible students are now living or where they have “any substantial connection,” even without documentation ordinarily required for enrollment
- Free transportation to and from a student’s school of origin
- Free school meals
- Free school uniform and school supplies

DELEGATION OF RESPONSIBILITY

The Board of Trustees of the School directs the Chief Executive Officer to designate a Liaison (McKinney-Vento Liaison) for homeless students and their families to protect their rights and to implement this policy. Upon recommendation of the Chief Executive Officer, the School may waive school policies and administrative procedures which may create barriers to the identification, enrollment, attendance, transportation, school stability and success of students experiencing homelessness. Confidentiality must be maintained.

The McKinney-Vento Liaison has the following responsibilities:

- Identify homeless students and unaccompanied youths;
- Ensure that homeless students and unaccompanied youths have full and equal opportunity to participate in all applicable school programs, academic and extracurricular;
- Identify and assist in removal of barriers to success in school for homeless students and unaccompanied youths;
- Ensure school stability for homeless students and unaccompanied youths by allowing continued enrollment at the School, upon presumption that remaining at their school of origin is in their best interest, or deciding the matter upon a best interest determination;
- Ensure immediate enrollment of new students who are homeless or unaccompanied youths with provision of instruction, if enrollment is sought at

the School, pending a best interest determination -- even if documentation ordinarily required for enrollment is incomplete, in which case assistance must be given for obtaining enrollment documents;

- Assist in obtaining academic and relevant records from the school where the student attended prior to becoming homeless;
- Assist students and youths who do not have immunizations or immunization or medical records to obtain necessary immunizations or medical records; Arrange transportation to and from the school of origin as necessary to ensure school stability;
- Ensure that unaccompanied youths and families of students experiencing homelessness have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible, and referrals to services for health care, dental, mental health, substance use, housing and other appropriate services;
- Inform parents/guardians of the educational rights and related opportunities available to their children, and provide them with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
- Ensure that school selection or enrollment disputes are handled in accordance with Dispute Resolution procedures promulgated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education;
- Inform unaccompanied youths and parents/guardians of students experiencing homelessness about their right to disagree with the school's decision and how to challenge it.

The McKinney-Vento Liaison shall coordinate with:

- Local service agencies that provide services to students and families experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied youths;
- School districts regarding issues of records transfer, per pupil allocation, transportation and special education programs to ensure that homeless students and unaccompanied youths who are in need of special education and related services are located, identified and evaluated; and
- State and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affording strategies.

The McKinney-Vento Liaison is responsible for supporting and educating others regarding McKinney-Vento compliance requirements, including professional development for school personnel. This responsibility also includes dissemination of public notice of educational rights of students experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied youths in places as schools, shelters, public libraries and soup kitchens; such notice shall be provided in a manner and form understandable to

parents/guardians and unaccompanied youths.

The McKinney-Vento Liaison will be responsible for creating processes necessary to effectuate McKinney-Vento compliance, and is directed to utilize appropriate and applicable forms and procedures promulgated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

BEST INTEREST DETERMINATION

The School ensures that the best interests of students and families experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied youths are primary considerations. This means that homeless students and unaccompanied youths shall remain at the School, unless it is determined that it is not in their best interest to remain at their school of origin.

The best interest determination is completed by the School if the school of origin. In case of disputes, PDE's Dispute Resolution procedures shall be followed.