

# WINCHESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS EDUCATION STAFF MANUAL

*Revised July 2015  
Sections courtesy of the Milton Public Schools*

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**Winchester Public Schools  
Homeless Education Liaison**

Homeless Education Liaison

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**Winchester School Committee Policy - JFABD**

**HOMELESS STUDENTS: ENROLLMENT RIGHTS AND SERVICES**

To the extent practical and as required by law, the district will work with homeless students and their families to provide stability in school attendance and other services. Special attention will be given to ensuring the enrollment and attendance of homeless students not currently attending school. Homeless students will be provided district services for which they are eligible, including Head Start and comparable pre-school programs, Title I, similar state programs, special education, bilingual education, vocational and technical education programs, gifted and talented programs and school nutrition programs.

Homeless students are defined as lacking a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, including:

1. Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship;
2. Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
3. Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
4. Being abandoned in hospitals;
5. Awaiting foster care placement;
6. Living in public or private places not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings;
7. Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, transportation stations or similar settings;
8. Migratory children living in conditions described in the previous examples.

The superintendent shall designate an appropriate staff person to be the district's liaison for homeless students and their families.

To the extent feasible, homeless students will continue to be enrolled in their school of origin while they remain homeless or until the end of the academic year in which they obtain permanent housing. Instead of remaining in the school of origin, parents or guardians of homeless students may request enrollment in the school in the attendance area in which the student is actually living, or other schools. Attendance rights by living in attendance areas, other student assignment policies, or intra and inter-district choice options are available to homeless families on the same terms as families resident in the district.

If there is an enrollment dispute, the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent or guardian shall be informed of the district's decision and their appeal rights in writing. The district's liaison will carry out dispute resolution as provided by state rule.

Unaccompanied youth will also be enrolled pending resolution of the dispute. Once the enrollment decision is made, the school shall immediately enroll the student, pursuant to district policies. If the student does not have immediate access to immunization records, the student shall be admitted under a personal exception. Students and families should be encouraged to obtain current immunization records or immunizations as soon as possible, and the district liaison is directed to assist. Records from the student's previous school shall be requested from the previous school pursuant to district policies. Emergency contact information is required at the time of enrollment consistent with district policies, including compliance with the state's address confidentiality program when necessary.

Homeless students are entitled to transportation to their school of origin or the school where they are to be enrolled. If the school of origin is in a different district, or a homeless student is living in another district but will attend his or her school of origin in this district, the districts will coordinate the transportation services necessary for the student, or will divide the costs equally.

The district's liaison for homeless students and their families shall coordinate with local social service agencies that provide services to homeless children and youths and their families; other school districts on issues of transportation and records transfers; and state and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies. This coordination includes providing public notice of the educational rights of homeless students in schools, family shelters and soup kitchens. The district's liaison will also review and recommend amendments to district policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless students.

***Adoption: June 16, 2015***

## **Winchester Public Schools Homeless Education Procedures**

### Enrollment

The Winchester Public Schools recognize that the consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students in transition may not have enrollment documents available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth in transition. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to lack of any document normally required for enrollment including:

- Proof of residency
- Transcripts/school records. (The enrolling school must contact the student's previous school(s) to obtain records. Initial Placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the student's age and information gathered from the student, parent, and previous teachers or schools.
- Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records (if necessary, the school must refer students to the homeless liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunizations and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from previous schools. Local physicians may be contacted to initiate immunizations when needed)
- Proof of guardianship may often be obtained from a social worker or court documents
- Birth Certificate
- Any other documentation required, e.g. IEPs, Section 504 Plans, School Discipline Records
- Unpaid school fees
- Any factor related to the student's living situation

Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or liaison from the courts or state agency. The terms "enroll" and "enrollment" are defined to mean attending school and participating fully in school activities.

The school district recognizes the needs for enrollment of unaccompanied children and youth and at the same time reserves its rights and legal authority to balance those needs versus the safety of the school. As a result these procedures and the accompanying policy do not preclude the district from exercising its rights to ensure the public safety of all of its children. Should the district find that information it was provided was deliberately falsified either orally or in writing it reserves the right to pursue criminal charges to the extent of the law.

## Services

Children and youth in transition shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected, including:

- Transportation (as described below)
- Title I (as described below)
- Educational services for which the students meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners
- Vocational and technical education programs
- School nutrition programs
- Before and after school programs

The Winchester Public Schools recognize that children and youth in transition suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet may not be frequently evaluated or provided with special education services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth suspected of having a disability shall be given priority and coordinated with the student's prior and subsequent schools as necessary to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. When necessary, the district will expedite the request for designation of a surrogate parent. If a student has an individualized education plan (IEP), or Section 504 Accommodation Plan the enrolling school shall immediately implement. Any necessary TEAM meetings or re-evaluations will be expedited. If complete records are not available, IEP TEAMS will use their best judgment in choosing the best course of action balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goals will be to avoid a disruption in services.

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absences related to a child or youth's living situation will be excused. The Winchester Public Schools will ensure that every effort is made to identify and afford equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. The homeless liaison in concert with appropriate school personnel will refer students for appropriate healthcare services, including dental and mental health services.

School personnel must also inform parents of all educational and related opportunities available to their children and provide parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education. All parent information required by any provision of these procedures must be provided in a form, manner, and language understandable to each parent

## Disputes

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in the policy or procedures, the child or youth in transition shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the rights of a student

in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or the youth to the district's homeless liaison. The liaison shall ensure the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice and receiving services to which he/she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The liaison will keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are repeatedly delaying or denying enrollment of children and youth in transition.

### Free Meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, The U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day that the child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school will submit the student's name to the Director of Food Services for immediate processing.

### Title I

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness puts such students at risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The Title I Coordinator will reserve such funds that are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title I students to children and youth in transition attending non-participating schools. The amount reserved shall be determined by a formula based upon per pupil Title I expenditure and developed jointly by the Title I Coordinator and the homeless liaison. Reserved funds will be used to provide education related support services to children and youth in transition, both in school and outside of school, and to remove barriers that prevent regular school attendance.

The Winchester Public School's Title I Plan will be coordinated with our McKinney-Vento services.

Children and youth in transition will be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems, as required by state and federal law and regulations.

### Training

The homeless liaison or designee will conduct training and sensitivity awareness activities for the following school staff on an annual basis:

- Superintendent and/or designee
- Principals
- Assistant Principals
- Federal Program Administrators
- School Secretaries
- Counselors, Adjustment Counselors, School Psychologists
- School Nurses
- Teachers and Other Professional Staff

The training and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with the policy and procedures and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition.

Each principal will provide the name and contact information of a building liaison to the district's liaison. Building liaisons will lead and coordinate their school's compliance with the district's policy and procedures and will receive annual training from the district liaison.

#### Procedures for Transportation of Homeless Students

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his/her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, transportation shall be provided to the school of origin for a child or youth in transition. Transportation will be provided for the entire time that the youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes. The homeless liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin if there is potential harm to the student. Factors that may be considered are time of day of transportation, distance to and from school, age of the child or unaccompanied youth, medical or other disabilities. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.

Transportation requests from schools should be made to the homeless liaison in a timely manner in order to avoid or minimize delay. If the student in transition is living in Winchester, but attending school in another district, the Winchester Public Schools will work mutually with the other district to determine who must arrange transportation. It is the Winchester Public School's policy that inter-district disputes shall not result in a student in transition missing school. If such disputes occur, the Winchester Public Schools will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin, children and youth in transition shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to all other students.



Once a child/family has been identified as being in a “homeless” situation (usually via school faculty/staff, supporting agency notification, etc.), the following steps are taken to secure transportation.

- Contact is made with supporting agency if applicable
- Information on temporary housing location is confirmed
- Parent/Guardian contact information is obtained
- Contact information for shelter, hotel, etc is obtained
- Notification w/above information is sent to transportation company
- Company then sets a route in place as soon as possible. This sometimes take several days depending on where the location is and whether there are any existing routes that new location will fit into.
- Parent/Guardian is notified when transportation will begin and pickup and drop off times are given.
- Contact with the student’s school is constant
- Families are sometimes moved to different locations and transportation changes are implemented as soon as possible.

#### Cost Share

Notification is sent to the homeless liaison for school system where student/family is living. Agreement is signed by both. WPS is billed directly for 100% of transportation and other system is billed accordingly.

## **Winchester Public Schools Homeless Education**

### Administrator Tips

#### You Can Support the Access and Success of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in School

- Be familiar with common characteristics of children who are homeless. Common signals are attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class.
- Welcome the student and the family, and let them know that the school is a safe and secure place.
- Make sure the child enrolls in the free and reduced-price meal programs.
- Ensure that the student has every opportunity that a non-homeless student has for after-school activities and in-school programs.
- Let parents know of their child's educational rights.
- Know your attendance zone, visit shelters to make contact with the shelter director, and reinforce that students will find the school safe and supportive.
- Hold school meetings, such as the PTA meeting, in neighborhood centers to increase accessibility to school events.
- Provide city bus tokens to get parents to school for conferences, school events, or PTA meetings.
- Encourage parents to volunteer. Discuss their interests and offer suggestions that allow them to use their expertise. Many parents will help if invited to do so.
- Support the school staff as they work with the student.
- Contact the school district homeless liaison for additional support.
- Show that you care about the student!

**Winchester Public Schools**  
**Homeless Education**

Administrative Assistant Tips

Things Administrative Assistants Can Do for Students Experiencing Homelessness

- Learn to identify the following tell-tale signs of homelessness:
  - Chronic hunger or tiredness
  - Erratic attendance at schools
  - Attendance at multiple schools
  - Poor grooming or clothing that draws attention
  - Lack of records, such as birth certificate, immunization record, pre-school physical, and school records, or incomplete records
  - Parent who seems confused when asked about the last school attended
  - Low-income motel address on enrollment form
  - Statements from families when enrolling, such as:
    - “We’ve been having a hard time lately.”
    - “It’s a new address. I can’t remember.”
    - “We’ve moved a lot and are staying with friends until we find a place.”
- Assure families that children can enroll if you think that they are experiencing homelessness. (This is mandated by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act, P.L. 107-110)
  - Enroll the child immediately (even without records). Ask for the name and city of the last school attended; then call that school and ask to have the records sent.
  - Arrange for the child to take a placement test if records are not available.
- Take the family to a private place to fill out enrollment forms.
- Offer to assist with filling out the enrollment forms. Hesitation may indicate an inability to read.
- Assist with filling out free and reduce-priced meal program forms. Arrange for lunch that day.
- Have copies of the school/class supply lists.
- Provide a welcome pack with paper, pencil, pen, and crayons (younger grades).
- Privately and confidentially alert the child’s teacher and guidance counselor of the student’s living situation.
- Before a student leaves, prepare a parent pack
- Be sensitive, patient, calm, and reassuring. YOU can make a difference!

**Winchester Public Schools**  
**Homeless Education**

Guidance Counselor Tips

**You Can Support the Access and Success of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in School!**

- Be familiar with common characteristics of children who are homeless. Common signals are attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class.
- Introduce yourself as someone who works as an advocate for the child's success in school.
- Arrange a follow-up meeting with parents a couple of weeks after enrollment.
- Ask if the child participated in any after-school activities or had special classes at a previous school, then work to connect the child with similar resources if they are available.
- Make sure the child enrolls in the free and reduced-price meal programs.
- Let parents know of their child's educational rights.
- Know your attendance zone, visit shelters to make contact with the shelter director, and reinforce that students will find the school safe and supportive.
- Offer support for the physiological needs of the student (food, clothing) as well as the social/ emotional needs (safety, security, and belonging).
- Train peer buddies to orient students to the school.
- Contact the school district homeless liaison for additional support.
- Show that you care about the student!

**Winchester Public Schools**  
**Homeless Education**

School Nurse Tips

You Can Support the Access and Success of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in School

- Be familiar with common characteristics of children who are homeless. Common signals are attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class.
- Verify immunization records and, if needed, refer the student to the local health department.
- Observe and alert the principal to any serious medical concerns.
- Ask about glasses; the child may need them but not have any.
- Make sure the child enrolls in the free and reduced-price meal programs.
- Assist parents with the completion of medical records.
- Remember that sending a sick child “home” may not be a safe or stable place for a child who is experiencing homelessness. Help families determine options for their children, if ill.
- Contact the school district homeless liaison so that additional services can be coordinated.
- Follow-up with children sent to obtain immunizations or physicals.
- Contact the parent or shelter if a child is absent for three or more days.
- Develop reliable, accessible resources for medical, dental, and eye care.
- Sponsor a PTA health night.
- Show that you care about the student!

## **Winchester Public Schools Homeless Education**

### Teacher Tips

#### Support Classroom Access and Success of Students Experiencing Homelessness

- Be familiar with common characteristics of children who are homeless, such as attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class.
- Assist other students in being sensitive to stereotypes of homeless people.
- Adjust assignments so children not living in permanent settings can complete them. (Such children may not have a place to perform a science experiment or the resources to cut out an article for current events.)
- Make sure the child enrolls in the free and reduced-price meal programs.
- Ensure that the student has every opportunity that a non-homeless student has for after-school activities and in-school programs.
- Communicate with parents about school performance.
- Connect the child with tutoring and remediation services, if needed.
- If you have a snack break, keep a store of snacks for students who don't bring one.
- Do not take away possessions. Students may need their "stuff" nearby for security.
- Hold the child accountable for what he or she can control (e.g., behavior or attitude) not what is not in the child's control (e.g., inability to watch a news program or purchase a poster board for a project).
- Before you receive a new student
- Prepare a list of your class routines and procedures.
- Prepare a new student file with information for parents and guardians.
- Maintain a supply of materials for students to use at school.
- Prepare a "getting-to-know-you" activity available for the class to do when a new student arrives.
- Have the class schedule visible.
- Support Classroom Access and Success of Students Experiencing Homelessness
- When a student enters the class
- Introduce the student to the class.
- Assign a class buddy to assist with routines.

- Review the academic record and closely monitor the educational progress of the student.
- When a student leaves
- Support the class and the student by discussing the move and having classmates write letters to the departing student.
- Give the student a copy of the school's address so that letters can be written back either via e-mail or snail mail.
- Show that you care about the student!

**Winchester Public Schools  
Homeless Education Helpful Organizations & Links**

Helpful Organizations

The Better Homes Fund  
181 Wells Ave., 3rd Floor  
Newton, MA  
617-964-3834

National Coalition for the Homeless  
2201 P St., NW Suite 600  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
202-462-4822  
[www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org)

Inn Between  
25 Holten Street  
Peabody, MA 01960  
978-532-2372  
<http://cahns.org/inn-between/>

Lazarus House Ministries, Inc.  
48 Holly Street  
Lawrence, MA 01842  
978-689-8575 (x5225)  
<http://www.lazarushouse.org/>

Mass. Coalition for the Homeless  
300 Congress Street 5th Floor  
Boston, MA 02210  
617-423-9162  
[www.mahomeless.org](http://www.mahomeless.org)

National Alliance for HUD Tenants  
353 Columbus Ave.  
Boston, MA 02116-6005  
617-267-9564

Mass. Housing and Shelter Assistance  
5 Park Street  
Boston, MA 02116-6005  
[www.mhsa.net](http://www.mhsa.net)

Department of Children and Families (DCF)  
<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dcf/>



Massachusetts Coalition for The Homeless  
15 Bubier St.  
Lynn, MA 01901  
781-595-7570  
<http://www.mahomeless.org/home/home.html>

Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance  
1803 Dorchester Ave.  
Dorchester, MA 02124  
617-822-9100  
<http://www.mahahome.org/index.html>

Massachusetts Department  
of Housing  
and Community Development  
617-573-1400

#### Helpful Links

National Center for Homeless  
Education (NCHE)  
<http://www.serve.org/nchel>

National Association for the  
Education of Homeless Children  
and Youth (NAEH CY)  
<http://www.naehcy.org>

U.S. Department of Education  
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/lese02/pg116.html>

National Law Center on  
Homelessness and Poverty  
(NLCHP)  
<http://www.nlhcp.org/>

Massachusetts Department  
of Elementary & Secondary Education (MA DESE)  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/hssss/program/homeless.html>

## **Winchester Public Schools Homeless Education FAQ's**

### Questions & Answers

Question: What is the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act of 2001?

Answer: The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act is Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This legislation ensures that children and youth experiencing homelessness have full and equal access to an appropriate public education and that they experience success in school.

Key components include:

#### Enrollment

- Schools must immediately enroll children and youth in homeless situations, even when:
  - School or immunization records are unavailable at time of enrollment.
  - Proof of residency is not available.
- Students may stay in their school of origin, if feasible.
- Public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youth must be posted in every public school and in appropriate places throughout the community.
- Unaccompanied youth must be provided educational access through the support of the local homeless education liaison. (See definition under “Who is considered homeless.”)

#### Attendance and Success

Students with appropriate support are more likely to attend school on a regular basis. Attendance is critical if school success is to be realized. School districts must provide appropriate case management to ensure students have access to all educational services to which they are eligible.

- Students experiencing homelessness must receive services comparable to those of housed students.
- Transportation to the school of origin must be provided, when appropriate.
- Social service agencies and school districts must work together to serve students.
- Families and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness must be fully informed of available enrollment options and educational opportunities.
- Schools must provide written explanations of placement decisions and the enrollment dispute process.
- Separate schools or programs for children and youth experiencing homelessness are prohibited, with the exception of several programs specifically named in the McKinney-Vento Act.

Question: Who is Considered Homeless?

Answer: The McKinney-Vento Act (Section 725) defines a “homeless children and youth” (school age and younger) as:

- Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who are:
  - Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.
  - Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, cars, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, camping grounds or similar settings due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations.
  - Living in emergency or transitional shelters
  - Abandoned in hospitals.
  - Awaiting foster care placement.
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.
- Unaccompanied youth, including any youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, such as runaways, youth denied housing by their families (sometimes referred to as throwaway children and youth), and school-age unwed mothers, living in homes for unwed mothers, who have no other housing available.

Question: How can schools verify that students are homeless?

Answer: There is no universal system of verification. Shelter providers may verify homeless status. Children and youth must be enrolled immediately when the school is informed that the family or youth is experiencing homelessness. If questions regarding homeless status based upon the definition of the McKinney-Vento Act exist, schools should contact their local home-less education liaison.

Question: Are all children and youth who live with friends or relatives considered homeless?

Answer: No. Lack of affordable housing and permanence of the living arrangement, not cultural preference or the desire to save money, are criteria to assist in determining who should be considered homeless.

Question: Are children and youth who qualify for migrant services considered homeless?

Answer: The children of migrant workers should only be considered homeless if they meet the definition of homelessness cited earlier. A migratory life-style is not sufficient to be considered homeless.

Question: Are children or youth incarcerated or in correction facilities considered homeless?

Answer: No. The McKinney-Vento Act specifically excludes any person who is imprisoned or otherwise detained by Act of Congress or state law from the definition of homelessness. Even children or youth who were homeless prior to incarceration, are not considered homeless while incarcerated.

Question: What additional guidance is available regarding the definition of homelessness and the education of homeless students?

Answer: The organizations listed on the last page of this information brief have developed materials to support state and local efforts. Continue to visit their websites for new materials and resources.

Question: How quickly must children and youth experiencing homelessness be enrolled in school?

Answer: Schools must immediately enroll a child or youth experiencing homelessness, even if the child or youth is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment.

Question: Must a school enroll children or youth without proof of immunizations or physicals?

Answer: Yes. The school must enroll students who do not have health records if they meet the definition of homeless. The school should refer the family or youth to the local homeless education liaison to obtain the necessary documentation. The sending school may provide a copy of the health record to the parent when the student leaves and fax a copy to the new school to facilitate this process.

Question: Must schools enroll students in homeless situations who do not have previous school records?

Answer: Yes. Students experiencing homelessness must be enrolled in school while waiting for the previous school records to be received. Parents can request copies of critical documents such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), gifted testing records, and report cards from the sending school. Parent packs, developed by NCHE, (see additional resources) may assist in maintaining important school documents.

Question: If a student in a homeless situation moves without returning books or paying fees, can a school district withhold student records?

Answer: No. A school district cannot withhold records when books or charges have not been paid.

Question: Can a school require proof of residency (rent receipt, lease agreement, utility receipt) that prevents or delays enrollment?

Answer: No. Homeless students, by definition, lack a fixed residence and cannot be required to provide traditional proof of residency if doing so is not possible or would delay enrollment. An affidavit explaining the lack of residency proof can be completed as an alternative.

Question: When children or youth experiencing homelessness are not living with parents or legal guardians, is the school required to enroll the child?

Answer: Yes. Guardianship cannot be a barrier to enrollment. Some students, due to family situations, may not be able to live with their family; others are not permitted by their parents or guardians to live at home. The local liaison should be contacted to assist unaccompanied youth who wish to enroll in school.

Question: If families in homeless situations move within a school district, can students stay at the same school, even if they move out of the school's attendance zone?

Answer: Yes, the McKinney-Vento Act states, that when feasible, students have a right to stay in the school of origin. The school of origin is the school that the child attended when permanently housed or the last school in which the student was enrolled.

Question: Can school districts educate children and youth experiencing homelessness in separate schools (e.g., classes located on shelter sites)?

Answer: Homelessness is not a reason to separate students from their housed peers. Students in homeless situations must not be isolated from the mainstream school environment except in a few limited circumstances defined in the McKinney-Vento legislation.

Question: What services must school districts provide to children and youth in homeless situations?

Answer: The McKinney-Vento Act requires school districts to provide services to students experiencing homelessness that are comparable to services provided to other students in the school district. Homeless children and youth must have access to any educational services for which they qualify, including special education, gifted education, free and reduced-lunch programs, before- and after-school activities, and Title I services. The students are not to be segregated or stigmatized.

Question: Can Title I funds be used to address the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness?

Answer: Yes. According to the No Child Left Behind Act, children and youth experiencing homelessness automatically qualify for Title I support, whether students attend school-wide, targeted assistance, or non-Title I schools. Title I must coordinate services in order to promote the academic achievement of homeless students.

Question: May children and youth experiencing homelessness attending non-Title I schools be served under Title I?

Answer: Yes. Title I, Part A funds must be reserved to provide comparable services to eligible home-less children who might attend schools not receiving Title I funding. This may include providing educationally related support services to children in shelters.

Question: Are children experiencing homelessness eligible to enroll in pre-kindergarten classes?

Answer: Yes. Students who are homeless should have the same access to programs as students who are housed. Head Start and Even Start may reserve slots for students experiencing homelessness to avoid waiting list delays that occur when children arrive after the school year has begun.

Question: How should special education programs serve students experiencing homelessness?

Answer: Not all students experiencing homelessness are students with disabilities. However, under the Child Find component in IDEA, districts must identify un-served children with disabilities who are homeless.

Question: Can a school expedite the child study and eligibility process for students in homeless situations?

Answer: Yes. The eligibility process that educators use to determine if a disability exists may require significant time. Families experiencing homelessness often move before the eligibility process is complete. If parents inform the receiving school that an eligibility process was in progress, the school may decide to speed up the process.

#### Other Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What academic concerns commonly impact students in homeless situations?

Answer: Due to changing schools and the stress of being homeless, students may fall behind academically, causing learning lags and gaps that can be more than four months. Students may not have quiet places to study or access to school supplies, books, or computers. Students need to know of study halls or after-school tutoring availability. If a child was receiving special education services or was participating in gifted and talented programs, the continuity of instruction needs to be maintained.

Question: What are some common health-related issues affecting students experiencing homelessness?

Answer: Students who are homeless are often at an increased risk to becoming ill due to their living conditions. If the students become sick, they often have no quiet place to rest.

These students are more likely than their peers to get the flu, have stomach ailments, have respiratory problems, and visit the emergency room. School nurses can help by offering referrals for screenings, maintaining a clothes closet, assisting parents in filling out forms, and ensuring that students are aware of the school's procedure for participating in the free and reduced-lunch program.

Question: What are some of the other issues that commonly affect students experiencing homelessness?

Answer: Students in homeless situations often are concerned about their safety because they may not have a secure place to go to school. In these instances, students should be told about and about community programs, such as a Boys and Girls clubs. In addition, homeless students must also deal with the stigma associated with being homeless. They may have difficulty establishing friendships. Guidance counselors or school social workers may assist students dealing with emotions associated with being homeless. Schools can create welcome packs for all new students and assign peer buddies to tour the school.

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