

Homeless Education

Handbook



McKinney-Vento Education Program
Southwest Georgia S.T.E.M. Charter
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Policy for Education of Homeless Children

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that children and youth who are experiencing homelessness receive the same educational opportunities as other students who are not homeless. This policy is intended to ensure that the district is in full compliance with the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

General Policy Statement

The Board of Directors intends that children and youth who are experiencing homelessness have the opportunity to meet the same challenging state and district standards expected of all students. Students in homeless situations should have access to the education and other services they need to meet the standards, including the school choice provisions of the district. Children and youth who are homeless are to be provided educational services comparable to those received by any student in the district.

The term “McKinney-Vento Act” refers only to Subtitle VII-B of the Act, the Education for Homeless Children and Youths program (42 U.S.C. §§11431-11435). The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that supersedes conflicting state laws or local policies.

Age Requirements

The McKinney-Vento Act applies to children and youth age 21 and under, consistent with their eligibility for public education services under state and federal law. For special education students, federal law provides the right to access services until age 22. 20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(1)(A).

The McKinney-Vento Act does not assign financial responsibility. The possibility of nonpayment does not affect districts’ obligation to provide education and transportation. Interdistrict disputes cannot delay the immediate enrollment (defined as attending classes and participating fully in school activities) of children in the school selected. If there are no state policies to address fiscal responsibility, it may be reasonable for the district receiving state and federal funds for the student to retain financial responsibility.

Homeless Liaison

In accordance with 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(J)(ii), Southwest Georgia S.T.E.M. Charter has a designated a liaison for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The McKinney-Vento Act requires SGSC’s liaison to ensure that “homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel and through coordination with other entities and agencies (42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)). The coordination among Southwest Georgia S.T.E.M. Charter and community agencies is an essential identification strategy, as are professional development, awareness and training activities within the school. The Homeless Liaison should be working with the community and any shelters located in Georgia to identify homeless children and youth

The purpose of identification is to offer appropriate services to the family, child or youth. The coordination among Southwest Georgia S.T.E.M. Charter and community agencies is an essential identification strategy, as are professional development, awareness and training activities within school buildings and school districts. Local liaisons should be working with the community and any shelters located in Georgia to identify homeless children and youth.

The Homeless Liaison’s responsibilities shall include, but are not limited to:

1. Ensure homeless children and youth are identified through outreach and coordination activities including coordination with the Georgia Department of Education Homeless Education Liaison, community, and school personnel responsible for education and related services to homeless children and youths;
2. Receive appropriate time and training in order to carry out the duties required by law and this policy;
3. Ensure homeless families and homeless children and youths are referred to health care, dental, mental health, substance abuse, housing and any other appropriate services;
4. Ensure that homeless children and youths:
 - a. Who seek to register without having appropriate transfer forms are assisted in obtaining forms and other required documentation. The receiving school should immediately register the student, contact the former school for transfer information and request that the educational record be forwarded. The sending school should provide requested information during the telephone contact and forward educational records promptly.
 - b. Are enrolled in school which includes attending classes and participating fully in school activities;
 - c. Have a full and equal opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic standards as other children and youths;
 - d. Receive individualized counseling from counselors to prepare and improve their readiness for college, including college selection, application, financial aid, and on-campus supports.
 - e. Unaccompanied youths are informed of their status as independent students under the Higher Education Act of 1965 and may obtain assistance from the Homeless Liaison to receive verification of such status for purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.
 - f. Ensure that public notice of the educational rights and available transportation services of the homeless children and youths is disseminated in locations frequented by parents or guardians of such youths, and unaccompanied homeless youths, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form that is easily understandable.
 - g. Ensure the dispute resolution process identified below is carried out in accordance with the law and district policy.

Definition of Homeless Children and Youth

- A. The term “the Act” means Subtitle B of Title VII of the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act 42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.
- B. The term “homeless children and youth” means individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence as those terms are defined in law. They include:
 1. Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping

grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.

2. Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
3. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
4. Migratory children, as this term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this definition because the children are living in circumstances described in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistant Act.

Under some circumstances, according to the McKinney-Vento Act, children and youth who live in trailer parks are covered by the Act if they live in the trailer park “due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations.” 42 U.S.C. §11434A (2) (B) (i). Therefore, whether children and youth living in trailer parks are covered by the Act is a case-by-case determination to be made by the local liaison, in light of the family's circumstances. The liaison will need to consider the adequacy of the trailer home, including the number of people living in the trailer, the condition of the trailer, and the availability of running water, electricity, and other standard utilities. If the trailer is inadequate, it should be considered a homeless situation. The relative permanence of the living situation must also be examined: if the family is living in the trailer temporarily, they are likely to be covered by the Act. 4

(The McKinney-Vento Act specifically applies to children and youth living in transitional shelters (42 U.S.C. §11434A (2)(B)(i)). This term includes transitional housing programs and transitional living programs. State Coordinators are also required to “coordinate and collaborate with... providers of services to homeless and runaway children and youths and homeless families (including... transitional housing facilities ...and transitional living programs for homeless youths)” (42 U.S.C. §11432(f)(5)(B)).

- C. “School of origin” means the school the student attended when they last had permanent housing or the school last attended.
- D. “Homeless liaison” is a person designated by the district as the district contact for students in homeless situations. A homeless liaison must carry out the provisions of law.
- E. The above definitions shall automatically be modified if the Act modifies these definitions.

Procedures for Identifying Homeless Students and Families

1. Student residency questionnaire shall be included in all enrollment packets.
2. Registrar and enrolling staff shall immediately refer homeless students and families to school social worker/Homeless Liaison.
3. School social worker/ Homeless Liaison shall complete Homeless Worksheet with homeless families/guardians or unaccompanied youth to assess needs including school selection, transportation, academic needs, and other essential needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.
4. Social worker/Homeless Liaison shall ensure academic needs of homeless students or unaccompanied youth are met, including expediting screenings/testing, arranging for tutoring, etc.

5. Homeless Liaison shall provide guidance to school registrars regarding enrollment coding, shall notify Department of food and Nutrition of homeless status, and if needed shall submit a transportation request to the Transportation Department.
6. Transportation shall complete the homeless transportation request form and return to Homeless Liaison.
7. Homeless Liaison shall determine feasibility of transportation and inform parents/guardians or unaccompanied youth and the Transportation Department of decision.

School Selection and Enrollment

1. The district shall keep students, who are in homeless situations, in their school of origin, as that term is defined in the “Definition of Homeless Children and Youth” section of this policy, to the extent feasible, unless it is against the parent’s or guardian’s wishes. If the school of origin is in another district, the student has the right to continue to attend that school at no cost. The cost of transportation shall be born by the two school districts. Students may stay in their school of origin the entire time they are homeless and until the end of any academic year in which they move into permanent housing.
2. A homeless child/youth has the right to attend their school of origin extends for the duration of homelessness. If the homeless child or youth becomes permanently housed during the academic year, they are entitled to stay in the school of origin for the remainder of the academic year. If the child or student becomes homeless in between academic years, i.e. during the summer, they are entitled to attend their school of origin for the following academic year.
3. Subsequent to being registered, the homeless student should be immediately referred to the school social worker who will assist the student, parents/guardian and school personnel in areas of need.
4. In determining whether a homeless student should remain in his/her school of origin, the school shall consider student-centered factors including; the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless children and youth, giving priority to the request of the child’s or youth’s parent or guardian or, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth.
5. Students may choose to enroll in any public school that students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend.
6. If a student is sent to a school other than the school of origin or the school requested by a parent or guardian, the district must provide a written explanation of its decision and inform the parent or guardian of their right to appeal, regardless of whether the parent or guardian disputes the placement.
7. The superintendent shall develop a dispute resolution process consistent with the provisions of Section VI of this policy.
8. The district homeless liaison must assist unaccompanied youth, who are not in the custody of a parent or guardian, in choosing and enrolling in a school consistent with the provisions of the Act.

9. Once the school is selected in accordance with the child's or youth's best interest, that child or youth school/ district must immediately enroll students in homeless situations even if they do not have required documents such as school records, medical records, proof of residency or other documents required by the district. If a student does not have immunizations or other medical records, the homeless liaison must immediately assist in obtaining them. The student must be enrolled in school in the interim. Educational and medical records must be obtained as soon as possible, consistent with the provisions of state law.
10. Homelessness alone is not a reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment. These students shall not be segregated in separate schools, separate programs within schools, or separate settings. This does not prohibit special programs for short periods of time for health and safety emergencies or to provide temporary, special and supplemental services for the students.
11. Services provided with revenue from the Act must not replace the regular academic program and must be designed to expand upon or improve services provided as part of the school's regular academic program.

Transportation

1. At the request of the parent or guardian, homeless students must be provided transportation to and from their school of origin consistent with the district regulations regarding miles from school and other transportation policies and regulations. For unaccompanied youth, such transportation shall be provided when requested by the homeless liaison.
2. If the child or youth continues to attend his or her school of origin, transportation shall be provided promptly even if there is a dispute pending regarding which school is in the child's or youth's best interest to attend. Transportation will continue to be provided to and from the school of origin for the remainder of any academic year during which the child or youth becomes permanently housed.
3. The cost of transportation shall be born by the two school districts. Students may stay in their school of origin the entire time they are homeless and until the end of any academic year in which they move into permanent housing.
4. Southwest Georgia S.T.E.M shall apportion the transportation cost consistent with the regulations of the superintendent.

Responsibilities of the Superintendent

1. The superintendent may develop regulations deemed necessary to carry out this policy.
2. The superintendent shall appoint a person(s) to function as the homeless liaison and youth.

Enrollment Disputes

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school:

- a. The homeless student shall be immediately admitted to the school in which the enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute;
- b. The parent or guardian of the student 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 student to appeal the decision;
- c. The student, parent, or guardian shall be referred to the district's homeless liaison who shall carry out the appeal process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute; and
 - d. In the case of unaccompanied youth, the homeless liaison shall ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

Dispute Resolution

1. The dispute procedure must be available for disputes over eligibility, as well as school selection or enrollment.
2. In the event of a dispute regarding where a child or youth should enroll, the child or youth shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought pending final resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals. The school district shall immediately provide the child's parent or guardian or, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth a written explanation of the decision made regarding the school selection including the right to appeal such decision. Said writing shall be provided in a manner and form understandable to such parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth and also include the Homeless Liaison contact information. The Homeless Liaison shall carry out the dispute resolution process within 30 calendar days from the date of said writing.
3. Appeals: Any parent, guardian or other person having legal or actual charge of a homeless child or youth that is dissatisfied with the decision of a school district after the dispute resolution process may file an appeal with the superintendent.

Enrollment Dispute /Appeal Process

1. If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school which cannot be resolved the following process shall be followed:

Oral Complaint:

In the event that an unaccompanied student or the parent or guardian of a student (hereinafter referred to as the Complainant) disagrees with a school's decision regarding the student's eligibility to attend the school, the Complainant shall orally present his position to the division's homeless liaison.

Written Complaint:

If the disagreement is not resolved within five (5) school days, the Complainant may present a written complaint to the homeless liaison. The written complaint must include the following information: the date the complaint is given to the homeless liaison; a summary of the events surrounding the dispute; the name(s) of the school division personnel involved in the enrollment decision; and the result of the presentation of the oral complaint to the homeless liaison.

Within five (5) school days after receiving the written complaint, the homeless liaison will reach a decision in consultation with the Director of Federal Programs as needed regarding the contested enrollment and shall provide a written statement of that decision, including the reasons therefore, to the Complainant. The homeless liaison will inform the Superintendent of the formal complaint and its resolution.

Appeal to the Superintendent:

If the Complainant is not satisfied with the written decision of the Director/homeless liaison, the Complainant may appeal that decision to the Superintendent by filing a written appeal. The Director of Federal Programs/homeless liaison shall ensure that the Superintendent receives copies of the written complaint and the response thereto. The Superintendent or designee shall schedule a conference with the Complainant to discuss the complaint. Within five (5) school days of receiving the written appeal, the Superintendent, or designee, shall provide a written decision to the Complainant including a statement of the reason therefore.

Records

Any record ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, and evaluations for special services or programs, regarding each homeless child or youth shall be maintained:

1. Such that all records are available, in a timely fashion, when a child or youth enrolls in a new school or school district;
2. Such that all records are available, in a timely fashion, when a child or youth enrolls in a new school or school district;
3. Any information about a homeless child's or youth's living situation shall be treated as a confidential student education record, and shall not be deemed to be directory information; and
4. In a manner consistent with the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act.
5. Such that all records are available, in a timely fashion, when a child or youth enrolls in a new school or school district;

Educational Records, Transfer and Withdrawal

Educational information needed for proper placement should initially be obtained from the student's former school. If educational records or educational information are not available, the student should be registered and an educational record developed in accordance with the Southwest Georgia S.T.E.M. Charter Student Records Guidelines. In these cases, an academic diagnostic test may be administered to assist in determining an appropriate placement according to their level of academic skills.

RECORDS-Any record ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records and evaluations for special services or programs, regarding which homeless child or youth shall be maintained

1. so that the records are available, in a timely fashion, when a child or youth enters a new school or school district.
2. in a manner consistent with section 444 of the General Education Provision Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g).

Tracking system for Homeless Students

Federal and State guidelines mandate that each school division track and report the number of homeless students.

**Southwest Georgia S.T.E.M. Charter
McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act**

Enrollment Dispute Resolution Form

Person Completing Form: _____ Date: _____

Enrollment Request Initiated By: _____

Location: _____

Phone Number(s): _____

School Division(s): _____

School(s): _____

Name/Age/Grade of student(s): _____

- Child/Youth living with:**
- Both parents
 - Mother
 - Father
 - Legal guardian
 - Unaccompanied Youth
 - Other _____

- Residing in:**
- Shelter
 - Doubled-up
 - Motel
 - Car
 - Campground
 - Other _____

Initial Details: _____

Follow up:

Date	Contact	Details of Resolution

Written Notification of Enrollment Decision

To be completed by the receiving school when an enrollment request is denied.

Date: _____

Person Completing Form: _____

Title: _____ School: _____

In compliance with Sections 722(g)(3)(E) and 722(g)(3)(B)(ii) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act of 2001, the following written notification is provided to:

Parent or Guardian: _____

Student(s): _____

After reviewing your request to enroll the student(s) listed above, the enrollment request is denied. This determination was based upon:

You have the right to appeal this decision by completing the second page of this notice or by contacting the school division's local Home Less Liaison :

Liaison's Name: _____ Title: _____

Phone Number: _____

In addition:

The student listed above has the right to enroll immediately in the school of choice pending resolution of the dispute.

You may provide written or verbal documentation to support your position. You may use the form attached to this notification.

You may seek the assistance of advocates or attorneys.

You may contact Project HOPE to discuss this decision with the Georgia Department of Education State Coordinator for Homeless Education at 877-455-3412 or 757-221-1707.

cc: **Homeless Liaison**
Parent

Written Notification of Enrollment Decision

To be completed by the parent, guardian, caretaker, or unaccompanied youth when a dispute arises. This information may be shared verbally with the local liaison, as an alternative to completing this form.

Date Submitted: _____

Students(s): _____

Person Completing Form: _____

Relation to student(s): _____

I may be contacted at (phone or email): _____

I wish to appeal the enrollment decision made by:

School _____

I have been provided with:

A written explanation of the school's decision, and contact information for the local homeless education liaison.

Dispute Resolution can be added to the form after it is finalized.

Optional: You may include a written explanation to support your appeal in this space or provide your explanation verbally.

The school provided me with a copy of this form when submitted. _____ (Initials)

cc: **Homeless Liaison**
Parent

Determining Feasibility for School Placement

The McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to consider the school of origin as the first option in school enrollment. Parents may choose the school of origin or the school in the residency area where the child is currently living. The following individuals may be consulted in determining what placement is in the child's or youth's best interest:

- The homeless child,
- The parents or caretakers of the homeless child,
- Homeless shelter personnel,
- Representatives of social service agencies,
- School division homeless education coordinators,
- School social workers, and
- School counselors.

It is the school division's responsibility to determine the school of origin and residency and to resolve any conflict concerning the school placement that is in the best interest of the student. Whenever possible, the school division is to comply with the parents'/caretakers' wishes. If the school division and parents do not agree on the appropriate placement, the state's enrollment dispute resolution procedure must be followed. The student should be enrolled in the school parents have chosen during the resolution process. If schools of residency and origin are in different divisions and determined as the best placement, the local homeless education liaisons from both divisions must work together to arrange transportation.

The McKinney-Vento Act states that once a child has been identified as homeless, residency requirements do not apply. The federal law requires that a child or youth experiencing homelessness attend:

- The *school of origin*: This is the school that the child last attended before experiencing homelessness or the school where the student was last enrolled; or
- The *school of residency*: The school identified by the attendance zone in which the student is currently physically staying.

Enrollment should take place immediately.

A worksheet is provided to assist in determining the feasibility for school placement decisions that are in the students' best interest.

Worksheet for Determining Feasibility for School Placement

Date: _____

Please provide the following information for the previous schools the child attended, listing the most recent school first.

Dates of Attendance	School Name/Division/State	Living Arrangement at the Time

1. Are the school of origin and the school of residency in the same or different public school divisions?
2. What is the child’s desire concerning the school of his/her best interest?
3. What is the opinion of the parent or caregiver concerning the child’s school of best interest?
4. What is the distance and time spent on travel from the current residence to the school of origin?
5. If transportation is not currently available back to the school of origin, how can it be arranged?
6. What time of year is it (near the end of the school year, the summer)?
7. How long did the child attend the school of origin? Were meaningful social and educational relationships established?
8. Are there specified people in the school of origin who have been providing support or assistance to the family or child experiencing homelessness?

cc: Homeless Liaison

9. Are there special programs such as gifted, bilingual, or remedial education in which the child has been participating at the school of origin?

- If yes, please name.

- Are they available at the school of residency?

10. Based on the knowledge of the family situation, how long is it likely that the family will remain at the current residence?

11. What is the likelihood that the family experiencing homelessness will once again establish residency in the attendance area of the school of origin?

Recommendation:

Individuals consulted on this determination of feasibility for school placement in the student's best interest:

Signatures of the individual(s) making the recommendation:

cc: Homeless Liaison

Check the appropriate box(es) for the identified student in your school.

<u>Housing Status</u>	<u>Living Arrangements</u>	<u>Mobility</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Living with family <input type="checkbox"/> Living with guardian/caretaker other than parent <input type="checkbox"/> Unaccompanied Youth <input type="checkbox"/> Runaway <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Shelter: Date Entered: ___/___/___ mm dd yy Date Discharged: ___/___/___ mm dd yy <input type="checkbox"/> Transitional Shelter Date Entered: ___/___/___ mm dd yy Date Discharged: ___/___/___ mm dd yy <input type="checkbox"/> Hotel/Motel <input type="checkbox"/> Street, car, park, or abandoned building <input type="checkbox"/> Doubled up <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____	<p>Did this student...</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Stay in the school of origin within the district? <input type="checkbox"/> Attend the school of origin across LEA boundaries? <input type="checkbox"/> Transfer to zone school? <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Are you currently experiencing a loss of housing due to foreclosure? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Was transportation to the school of origin provided to this student? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If yes, <input type="checkbox"/> Within District? <input type="checkbox"/> Outside District? Transportation Mode? <input type="checkbox"/> School Bus <input type="checkbox"/> Public Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Taxi <input type="checkbox"/> Spec. Ed. Bus/Van <input type="checkbox"/> Family Reimbursed for Mileage	Number of other schools student previously attended this school year? Number _____	In How Many Districts? Number _____

I, _____ affirm that the residency information provided herein is true and accurate.
Parent's/Guardian's Name

I, _____ have been advised of my rights and my child's rights under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
Parent's/Guardian's Name

Signature of parent or guardian

Name of Student

Date