

Homelessness exists in our community. A combination of high housing costs and poverty causes many families to lose their housing. Many young people leave their homes due to abuse, neglect, and family conflict. Children and youth who have lost their housing live in a variety of places, including motels, shelters, shared residences, transitional housing programs, cars, campgrounds, and others. Their lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious physical, emotional, and mental consequences. The Minidoka County School District, herein referred to as MCSD, will ensure that all children and youth receive a free appropriate public education and is given meaningful opportunities to succeed in our schools. The Board of Trustees directs all District schools to admit children who are homeless regardless of residence and irrespective of whether the homeless child is able to produce records normally required for enrollment. The Board may not require an out-of-District attendance agreement and tuition for a homeless child.

Information regarding this policy, including the educational rights of children and youth identified as homeless, will be distributed to all students upon enrollment and once during the school year, or may be included in any student handbook distributed by the District. It will also be provided to students who seek to withdraw from school, and posted in every school in the District, as well as other places where children, youth, and families who are homeless receive services.

The Superintendent or designee shall review and revise rules or procedures that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youths. In reviewing and revising such procedures, consideration shall be given to issues concerning transportation, immunization, medical records requirements, guardianship issues, uniform or dress code requirements, residence, birth certificates, school records, and other documentation. Students shall be enrolled in school immediately, without delay regarding any required documents. Once such documents are obtained, they shall be maintained so that they are available in a timely fashion when the child enters a new school or school district. The District shall serve students regardless of whether they are in the custody of a parent or guardian.

Definitions

Homeless children -or children and youth in transition means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, and 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; are living in motels, hotels, campgrounds, or trailer parks due to a lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals; ~~or are awaiting placement in foster care.~~

- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
- Children and youth who are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting.
- Migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.
- A child or youth will be considered homeless for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above.

Unaccompanied youth means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is homeless as defined above. The more general term youth also includes unaccompanied youth.

Enroll and *enrollment* means attending school and participating fully in all school activities.

Immediate means without delay.

Parent means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

School of origin means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

Local liaison is the staff person designated by our district and each district in state as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the local homeless education liaison by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

The Superintendent or designee shall appoint a liaison for homeless children. The liaison shall act to ensure that:

1. Homeless students are identified;
2. Homeless students enroll in and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in the schools of the District;
3. Homeless youth who have separated from school are provided with opportunities and assistance to reenroll;
4. Students and families have the opportunity to receive educational services for which they are eligible;
5. Parents or guardians are informed of educational and other opportunities available to their children;
6. Parents or guardians are given opportunities to participate in their child's education;
7. Parents or guardians are informed of all transportation services, including transportation to and from the student's school of origin, and are assisted in accessing transportation services;
8. Public notice of the educational rights of students in homeless situations is disseminated where children and youth receive services;
9. Channels of communication are established between the liaison and local Head Start staff if applicable;

10. Enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with state and federal law as well as District policy;
11. Unaccompanied youth, as defined in the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, are immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of disputes that might arise over school enrollment or placement;
12. Youth who lack immunization(s) or other medical records are assisted in obtaining these;
13. The names of all homeless students shall be submitted to the local school nutrition office so that those students can receive free breakfast and lunch. This need not be accompanied by an application to receive free or reduced meals;
14. Unaccompanied youth are assisted in selecting and enrolling in a school, and that they are provided with notice of the right to appeal an enrollment decision; and
15. Parents, school personnel, and others are informed of the rights of homeless children and youth.

The homeless liaison will also coordinate with, and seek support from, the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children, public and private service providers in the community, housing and placement agencies, local liaisons in neighboring districts, and other such organizations and agencies. Coordination will include conducting outreach and training. Both public and private agencies will be encouraged to support the liaison and the schools in implementing this policy.

Identification

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the local liaison will identify homeless children and youth in transition in the district, both in and out of school. The local liaison will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying homeless families and youth in transition, and procedures for forwarding information indicating possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student to the local liaison. The local liaison will work collaboratively with community partners in the identification of families and youth in transition. Community partners may include the following: family and youth shelters, motels, campgrounds, welfare departments, health departments, and other social service agencies, faith-based organizations, truancy and attendance officers, and legal services.

The local liaison will keep data on the number of homeless children and youth in transition in the district; where they are living; their academic achievement (including state and local assessments); and the reasons for any enrollment delays, interruptions in their education, or school transfers.

School Selection

Each homeless child and youth in transition has the right to remain at his or her school of origin or to attend any school that houses students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both student and our school district. Students who change schools have been found to have lower test

scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. High mobility rates also have been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting our schools to benefit from the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity.

Therefore, in selecting a school, homeless children and youth in transition will remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent or youth's wishes. Students may remain at their schools of origin the entire time they are in transition and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing during the summer.

Feasibility will be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent or youth's wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

- The age of the child or youth
- The commute distance and the impact it may have on the student's education
- Personal safety issues
- A student's need for special instruction (e.g. special education and related services)
- The length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location
- The time remaining in the school year

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin and services under federal and other programs, will not be considered in determining feasibility.

If a student is sent to a school other than the school of origin or the school requested by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth, the District shall provide a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal, whether or not the individual disputes the placement. Such explanation should be complete, as brief as possible, simply stated, and provided in a language the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth can understand. This written explanation shall include:

1. Contact information for the homeless student liaison and state coordinator, with a brief description of their roles;
2. A simple, detachable form to initiate the dispute resolution process. One (1) copy of the form should be retained by the school, and another copy should be returned to the parent/guardian or youth for their records when it is submitted;
3. A step-by-step description of how to dispute the school's decision;
4. Notice of the right to enroll immediately in the school of choice pending resolution of the dispute;
5. Notice that "immediate enrollment" includes full participation in all school activities;

6. Notice of the right to appeal to the State if the District-level resolution is not satisfactory;
and
7. Timelines for resolving District- and State-level appeals

If an unaccompanied youth or parent/guardian chooses to appeal a placement decision, the District will refer him or her to the homeless student liaison, which shall expeditiously facilitate this process.

Enrollment

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students in transition may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must enroll any homeless child or youth in transition immediately. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the 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 to obtain school 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 schools or teachers.)
- Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records (If necessary, the school must refer students to the local liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunization and other medical records.)
- Proof of guardianship
- Birth certificate
- Any other document requirements
- Unpaid school fees
- Lack of clothing that conforms to dress code
- Any factor related to the student's living situation

Unaccompanied youth must be enrolled immediately in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or local liaison.

Transportation

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent's request, transportation will be provided to and from the school of origin for a homeless child or youth in transition. Transportation will be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes. The local liaison will request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will be considered only in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of

origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.

Schools and the local liaison will use the district transportation form to process transportation requests. Requests will be processed and transportation arranged without delay. If the student in transition is living and attending school in the MCSD, the MCSD will arrange transportation. If the student in transition is living in this district but attending school in another, or attending school in this district but living in another, the MCSD will coordinate with the neighboring district to arrange transportation. It is this district's policy that inter-district disputes will not result in a student in transition missing school. If such a dispute arises, the MCSD will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention of the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition will also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to housed MCSD students.

Services

Homeless children and youth in transition will be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the selected school, including:

- Transportation (as described above)
- Title I, Part A services (as described below)
- Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners
- Vocational and technical education programs
- Gifted and talented programs
- Before- and after-school programs

The district recognizes that homeless children and youth in transition suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability will be given priority and coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary to ensure the timely completion of a full evaluation. When necessary, the district will designate expeditiously a surrogate parent or temporary surrogate for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability in accordance with the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school will implement it immediately. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations will then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation will be excused. Our school district will follow state procedures to ensure that youth in transition and youth who are out of school are identified and

accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. School personnel will refer homeless children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The local liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

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 this policy must be provided in a form, manner, and language understandable to each parent.

Disputes

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth in transition will be admitted immediately to the school in which enrollment is sought pending final resolution of the dispute. The student will also have the rights of a student in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I, Part A, services while the dispute is pending.

If agreement cannot be reached between the parties regarding the educational placement or enrollment status of the student, then the District shall promptly seek further assistance from the State Coordinator of Homeless Education to review and determine within ten (10) business days how the student's best interests will be served. All interested parties will be expeditiously informed of the State's determination in writing. The decision of the State Department of Education shall constitute final resolution.

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. The names of all homeless students shall be submitted to the local school nutrition office so that those students can receive free breakfast and lunch. This need not be accompanied by an application to receive free or reduced meals.

Title I, Part A

Any student who is homeless and attends school within the District is eligible for Title 1, Part A services. The District shall set aside funding to provide homeless students who attend schools that do not participate in Title 1, Part A with services comparable to those provided by participating schools. Funding may also be set aside to provide targeted assistance to homeless students who attend participating schools.

Training

The local liaison will conduct training and sensitivity/awareness activities for all MCSD staff. The trainings and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with this policy, and increase sensitivity to homeless children and youth in transition.

Preschool

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Children in transition have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. To facilitate preschool enrollment and attendance, the provisions of this policy will apply to preschools administered by the MCSD. Our district will ensure that homeless children receive priority enrollment in preschool programs operated by the district for which they qualify, including exempting homeless children from waiting lists.

Children in transition with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Children under age three will be referred for at-risk services under Part C of IDEA and screened to determine if referrals for additional Part C services are appropriate. The local liaison will collaborate with Head Start and other preschool programs to ensure that children in transition can access those programs.

**LEGAL REFERENCES: Idaho Code 33-1404**

**The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §11301
Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program: Title VII of the
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, As Amended by the No Child
Left Behind Act of 2001: Non-Regulatory Guidance**

**Title I, Part A, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 U.S.C.
§§6311 – 6315**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§1400 et. seq.

**Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, 42 U.S.C. §§1758 et.
seq.**

**June 5, 1992 Policy of the Administration for Children and Families of the
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.**

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Refer to: 501.66P