

# Hamilton County Board of Education

Monitoring: Review: Annually in April	Descriptor Term: <b>Homeless Students</b>	Descriptor Code: 6.503	Issued Date: 05/18/17
		Rescinded:	Revised: 05/11/23

Under federal law, HCS will ensure that all homeless students shall have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education as provided to other children and youth. They must be included in state and district-wide assessments and accountability systems.

Information regarding this policy will be included in the Hamilton County Student Handbook which will be distributed to all students annually and upon enrollment. Information about the rights of homeless children and youth will be posted in every school in the system as well as other places where homeless children and families receive services.

## A. Definitions

*Homeless children and youth* refer to children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, yet 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 similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, campgrounds, or trailer parks due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals.
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings.
- Children and youth who are living in a car, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
- Migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.

A child or youth shall be considered homeless for as long as he or she is in a living situation described that is not fixed, regular, and adequate. Eligibility for McKinney-Vento services will be evaluated at the beginning of every school year.

*Unaccompanied youth* mean a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is also living in a homeless situation as defined above.

*Enroll and enrollment* mean attending school and participating fully in school activities.

*School of origin* means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the last school attended. This includes the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools when a student completes the final grade level served by the school of origin. Preschools are also considered school of origin when they establish a feeder school pattern.

*Liaison* is the staff person designated by the Hamilton County Schools as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act. The liaison is to assist

homeless children and youth to enroll and succeed in school and ensure that homeless children and youth receive educational services for which they are eligible, including head start and Even Start programs, preschool programs (if offered to others), and referrals to health care, dental, mental health and other appropriate services.

## **B. Identification**

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the liaison designated for the school system will identify homeless children in the district, both in and out of school. The liaison will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying homeless families and youth, and procedures for forwarding information indication homelessness to the liaison. The liaison will also instruct school registrars and secretaries to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment in school. Community partners in identification may include the following: family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels, campgrounds, drop-in centers, welfare departments, and other social services agencies, street outreach teams, faith-based organizations, truancy and attendance officers, local homeless coalitions, and legal services.

## **C. School Selection**

Each homeless child has the right to remain at his or her school of origin or to attend the school for which the child is zoned based upon where the child is actually living. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both the student and our district. Therefore, in determining the school that is in the child's or youth's best interest to attend, school personnel must presume that staying in the school of origin is in the child's or youth's best interest unless it is against the wishes of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied homeless youth. Student-centered factors must be considered, including factors related to the impact of mobility on the achievement, education, health, and safety of the student. Students may remain at their schools of origin the entire time they are homeless and until the end of any academic year in which they acquire stable housing. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing between academic years.

In determining what is in the child's best interest, the school system will within parameters set forth by the McKinney Vento Act comply with the request made by a parent or guardian or unaccompanied youth regarding school selection. If a school decided not to allow the child to enroll at the school selected by the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, the school will provide a written explanation of the school's decision to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. The written explanation must also inform the parent or guardian of his/her right to appeal the decision. The parent or guardian, or unaccompanied youth shall be referred to the liaison who shall carry out the dispute process.

## **D. Enrollment**

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, homeless students may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any homeless child.

Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to lack of any 1 document normally required for

enrollment, including:

- Proof of residency, including residency affidavit
- 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. Health records may often be obtained from previous schools or state registries, and school-or community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed. Students coming from areas where natural disasters have occurred may never be able to provide immunization records, but it should be assumed that they had the immunizations necessary to attend public school in their state.
- Proof of custody of guardianship
- Birth certificate
- Any other document requirements
- Unpaid school fees
- Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes
- Missing application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness
- Any factor related to the students living situation

Homeless unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They must either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or liaison.

The school at which the homeless student enrolls shall immediately contact the last school attended to obtain academic or relevant records. If the child needs immunizations or medical records, the school shall contact the liaison. The liaison shall assist in obtaining immunizations or medical records, as necessary.

### **E. 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 the parent's, guardian's or unaccompanied youth's request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a homeless child.

Transportation shall 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 liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth.

School contacts and the liaison shall assist in arranging transportation requests. If a homeless student is living and attending school in this district, the Hamilton County Schools shall arrange transportation. If the homeless student is living in this district but attending school in another, or attending school in this district but living in another, the Hamilton County Schools will seek a shared reimbursement of transportation expenses from the other school district or, if applicable, be financially responsible for a portion of the other school districts expenses in transporting the homeless student. Inter-district disputes shall not result in a student in transition missing school. If such a dispute arises, this district will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention.

of the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

Homeless students shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to housed students.

## **F. Services**

All homeless children and youth in Hamilton County Schools will be enrolled and receive instruction in the same schools and classrooms as all other students enrolled. They will not be isolated or stigmatized by any activities of the school system. Homeless children shall be provided appropriate services comparable to services offered to other students in the school, including:

- Transportation
- Title I
- 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
- School nutrition programs
- Before and after school care (if offered and available to others)

The Hamilton County Schools will follow state procedures to ensure that homeless children and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. School personnel shall refer homeless children to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary. The liaison and school personnel must inform unaccompanied homeless youth of their status as independent students for college financial aid and that they may obtain assistance to receive verification for the FAFSA.

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.

## **G. Disputes**

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, including eligibility, the homeless student shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the right to all appropriate educational services, transportation, and school nutrition programs.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or youth to the liaison. The liaison shall ensure the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice, within the parameters of the McKinney-Vento Act and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of

the dispute. The liaison shall keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are repeatedly delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth in transition.

The parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, or school district may appeal the liaison's decision as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

#### **H. Free Meals**

To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all homeless children are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day a homeless child enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the food services office.

#### **I. Title I**

Homeless children are automatically eligible for comparable Title I services, regardless of what school they attend. The Hamilton County School System shall reserve such funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title I student to homeless children attending non-participating schools. The amount reserved shall be determined by a formula based upon the per-pupil Title I expenditure and developed jointly with the liaison and the Title I director. Reserved funds will be used to provide educational-related support services to homeless children.

Our district's Title I plan will be coordinated with our McKinney-Vento services, through collaboration between the Title I director and the liaison. Homeless children shall be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems, as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance.

#### **J. Training**

The school system liaison will conduct training and awareness activities for the appropriate school system employees. The training and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate identification and immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with this policy, and increase sensitivity to homeless children and youth. The liaison has appointed the school social workers/truancy officer as the building point of contact for homeless education. The building level contact will lead and coordinate their school's compliance with this policy and the McKinney-Vento Act and will receive training from the district liaison at least annually.

#### **K. Coordination**

The Hamilton County School System and its liaison shall coordinate with and seek support from the state coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children, local social service agencies and other agencies or programs providing services to homeless children and families in order to eliminate barriers to the identification, enrollment, attendance and academic success of homeless children and youth.

**L. Pre-school**

Homeless children between the ages three (3) and five (5) before August 15 who also have disabilities, will be referred for pre-school services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Homeless children with disabilities under age three (3) 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 liaison will collaborate with Head Start and Even Start programs and other preschool programs within the district to ensure that children in transition can access those programs.

**M. Privacy**

Schools must treat information about a homeless child's or youth's living situation as a student education record, subject to all the protections of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

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**Legal References:**

1. McKinney Vento Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001, Part C, 721

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**Cross References:**

Student Transportation 3.400  
Parental Involvement 4.502  
Promotion and Retention 4.603  
School Admissions 6.203  
Migrant Students 6.504