

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

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Causes of Homelessness

- Lack of affordable housing
- Poverty
 - Increase in low vs middle wage employment
- Health problems
 - Lack of health insurance
 - Alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA), mental health
- Domestic violence
- Natural and other disasters
- Abuse, neglect, family dysfunction (unaccompanied youth)
- COVID-19

Homeless Student Enrollment in Wisconsin 2003-2019



Homeless Student Nighttime Residence Data 2012-2019



Total Unaccompanied Youth Enrollment 2012-2019

3,000

2,500

2,000

1,500

1,000

500

2,078

1,892

1,891

2,165

2,283

2,405

2,286

2012-13

2013-14

2014-15

2015-16

2016-17

2017-18

2018-19



Impact of Homelessness on Children and Youth

- Higher incidences of acute and chronic illnesses, depression and anxiety
- Homelessness at any time in early childhood is associated with poor classroom engagement and poor social skills in early elementary school.
- The achievement gap between homeless and low-income elementary students tend to persist, and may even worsen over time.
- A youth who experiences homelessness is 87 percent more likely to dropout of school.



McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

- Originally passed in 1987
- Reauthorized in 2015 by ESSA
- Works hand-in-hand with IDEA, Title I-A and other federal education programs



McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

Main themes:

- Identification
- School stability
- School enrollment
- Support for academic success
- Child-centered, best interest decision making



Homeless Liaisons

Every LEA must designate a McKinney-Vento liaison able to carry out their legal duties.

- **Assist** unaccompanied youth/parents with placement, enrollment, and knowing their rights.
- **Disseminate** public notices of educational rights.
- **Inform and assist** with accessing transportation.
- **Mediate** enrollment disputes.



Homelessness Defined

The term “homeless” children and youth means:

“Children who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence—”

What exactly is a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence?



Fixed, Regular, and Adequate

- **Fixed:**
 - Stationary, permanent, not subject to change
- **Regular:**
 - Used on a predictable, routine, consistent basis
 - Consider the relative permanence
- **Adequate:**
 - Lawfully and reasonably sufficient
 - Sufficient for meeting the physical and psychological needs typically met in a home environment

Can the student go to the **SAME PLACE** (fixed) **EVERY NIGHT** (regular) to sleep in a **SAFE AND SUFFICIENT SPACE** (adequate)?



Eligibility

- Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason (sometimes referred to as doubled-up)
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters
- Living in a public or private place not designed for ordinary use as a regular sleeping accommodation for humans (cars, parks, bus or train stations, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, etc.).
- Children from migratory families who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.
- Unaccompanied youth living in the above circumstances



Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Definition:

Youth who meet the definition of homeless **AND** are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (i.e., youth living with relatives on an emergency basis, youth living with a friend or runaway).



Determining Eligibility

- Case-by-case determination.
- Get as much information as possible (with sensitivity and discretion).
- Look at the McKinney-Vento definition (specific examples in the definition first, then overall definition).
- Considerations for families and youth who are staying with other people:
 - Where would you go if you could not stay here?
 - What led you to move into this situation?
- [Sample questions form on DPI website](#)



Determining Eligibility

What questions can help identify students and families experiencing homelessness in the COVID-19 context?

- Have you had an eviction deferred, and when will the eviction moratorium end?
- Have you had rent or utility payments deferred, and when will those payments resume?
- Have you had steady income?
- Do you have a working stove and refrigerator?
- How long have you been where you are staying currently, and how long do you think you will be able to stay there?



Identification Strategies

- Avoid using the word "homeless" with school personnel, families, or youth.
- Provide awareness activities for school staff (registrars, secretaries, counselors, nurses, teachers, tutors, bus drivers, security officers, dropout prevention specialists, attendance officers, administrators, etc.).
 - <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/learn/webinars/archived-webinars/>
 - <https://nche.ed.gov/self-paced-online-training/>
- Post outreach materials and posters in all schools, and where there is a frequent influx of low-income families and youth in high-risk situations, including: motels, campgrounds, libraries, health centers, and youth services.
 - <https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/>



Identification Strategies (continued)

- Coordinate with community service agencies such as shelters, soup kitchens, law enforcement, legal aid, public assistance and housing agencies, mental health agencies and public health departments.
- Coordinate with youth-serving agencies such as drop-in centers, street outreach, child welfare, juvenile courts, teen parent programs, and LGBTQ youth organizations.
- Make special efforts to identify preschool children, including asking about siblings of school-aged children.
- Use enrollment forms to inquire about living situations.

<http://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/forms>



School Stability

Each LEA shall, according to each child's or youth's best interest:

- Continue the student's education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness, and until the end of the academic year in which the student becomes permanently housed; OR
- Enroll in the resident public school.



School of Origin and Residence

- **School of origin:** school that child or youth attended when permanently housed or last enrolled.
- **School of residence:** school in the local attendance area where the child or youth is staying.



School Stability (*continued*)

In determining best interest, the LEA shall:

- Presume that keeping the student in the school of origin is in the student's best interest
 - Unless contrary to the request of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth
- Consider student-centered factors, including the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety
- Give priority to the parent's/guardian's request.
- Give priority to the youth's request (in the case of an unaccompanied youth)



Transportation

LEAs must provide transportation to and from the school of origin, including until the end of the year when the student obtains permanent housing, at a parent's or guardian's request (or at the liaison's request for unaccompanied youth).

- If staying in the same LEA, that LEA must provide or arrange transportation to the school of origin.
- If crossing LEA lines, both LEAs must determine how to divide the responsibility and share the cost, or they must share the cost equally.



Transportation—Key Provisions

- LEAs must provide students in homeless situations with transportation services comparable to those provided to other students.
- LEAs must eliminate barriers to the identification, enrollment, and retention of students experiencing homelessness (including transportation barriers).



Transportation Strategies

- Develop close ties among local liaisons, school staff, pupil transportation staff, and shelter workers.
- Use school buses (including special education, magnet school, and other buses).
- Develop formal or informal agreements with school districts where children experiencing homelessness cross district lines.
- Use public transit where feasible.
- Use approved carpools, van or taxi services.
- Reimburse parents and youth for gas.
- Pursue interagency solutions.



School Enrollment

When remaining in the school of origin is not in the student's best interest or what the parent, guardian, or youth requests:

Students eligible under McKinney-Vento are entitled to immediate enrollment in any public school that students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend; even if:

- Students do not have required documents, such as school records, records of immunization and other required health records, proof of residency, guardianship, or other documents; or
- Students have missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness.



School Enrollment (continued)

- If a student does not have immunizations, or other health records or screenings, the liaison must immediately assist in obtaining them. The student must be enrolled during this process.
- Enrolling schools must obtain school records from the previous school, and students must be enrolled in school while records are obtained.
- Schools must maintain current records for students eligible under McKinney-Vento so they are available quickly.



Immediate Enrollment— Strategies

- Request all records from the previous school immediately, including immunization records.
 - Parental signature is not required for transfer students.
 - The vast majority of students have been enrolled in school before and have received immunizations.
- Speak with parents and youth about the classes the student was in, previous coursework, and special needs.
- Call the counselor, teachers, or principal at the previous school for information.
- Ensure enrollment staff on every campus are aware of the law and procedures.



Enrollment of Unaccompanied Youth

- Immediate enrollment applies, even without parent or guardian.
 - Youth self-enrollment; Caregiver forms
- Liaisons must help unaccompanied youth choose and enroll in a school, give priority to the youth's wishes, and inform the youth of his or her appeal rights.
- School personnel (administrators, teachers, attendance officers, enrollment personnel) must be made aware of the specific needs of runaway and homeless youth.



Unaccompanied Youth—Strategies

- Develop clear policies for enrolling unaccompanied youth immediately, whether youth enroll themselves, liaisons do enrollment, caretakers enroll youth in their care, or another procedure is in place. Offer youth an adult and peer mentor.
- Establish systems to monitor youth's attendance and performance, and let youth know you'll be checking up on them.
- Help youth participate fully in school (clubs, sports, homework help, etc.).
- Build trust! Be patient, and ensure discretion and confidentiality when working with youth.



Enrollment in Preschool

- States must ensure that children experiencing homelessness have access to public preschool programs administered by the State Education Agency (SEA) or LEAs.
- Preschools are included in the school of origin definition.
- Liaisons must ensure access to Head Start, early intervention (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C), and other preschool programs administered by the LEA.



Support for Academic Success: National School Lunch Act

- Students eligible under McKinney-Vento are automatically eligible for free school meals.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) policy permits liaisons and shelter directors to obtain free school meals for students immediately by providing a list of names of students experiencing homelessness with effective dates.
- <http://www.naehcy.org/educational-resources/food>
- <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/nutrition.pdf>



Support for Academic Success: Coordination with Other Laws/Programs

- LEAs must coordinate McKinney-Vento and special education services within the LEA, and with other involved LEAs
- Information about a McKinney-Vento student's living situation is a student education record subject to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)



Strategies to Support High School Youth



School Engagement

- Find out who the student has a connection to and leverage that connection (counselor, teacher, custodian, etc.)
- Provide a mentor
- Regularly help the student or family check grades and attendance
- Help the student find other ways to engage in school through extracurricular activities



Extracurricular Activities

McKinney-Vento requires barriers be removed for full participation in extracurricular activities:

- **Transportation**
- **Supplies needed (shoes, instruments, apparel, etc.)**
- **Participation fees waived**



Awarding Partial Credit

- McKinney-Vento requires that LEAs identify and remove barriers that prevent [students experiencing homelessness] from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with State, local, and school policies
 - Wisconsin does not have a state law; each district must determine their own policies/procedures
- Process recommended by SchoolHouse Connection:
 - The sending school should calculate and award partial credits, placing them on the student's transcript before sending records to the receiving school.
 - If the sending school does not award partial credits prior to sending records, the receiving school should contact the sending school to start the process.
 - If the sending school still does not award partial credits, the receiving school can and should award partial credits.



Support for Academic Success: Transitioning to Higher Education

- All youth eligible under McKinney-Vento must be able to receive assistance from counselors to advise such youths, and prepare and improve the readiness of such youths for college.
- Liaisons must ensure unaccompanied youth are informed of their status as independent students and may obtain assistance from the liaison to receive verification of that status.



Higher Education Act: FAFSA and Students Experiencing Homelessness

- Youth who meet the definition of “independent student” can complete the FAFSA without parental income information or signature.
- [SchoolHouse Connection FAFSA Information](#)
- SchoolHouse Connection [FAFSA and Homeless Youth: Challenges and Recommendations in the COVID-19 Era](#)



The FAFSA (*continued*)

- Unaccompanied homeless youth are automatically considered independent students.
 - Must be determined to be unaccompanied and homeless after July 1 of the prior year.
- Youth who are unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting are also automatically considered independent students.
 - Must be determined as such during the school year in which the application is submitted.



The FAFSA (continued)

- Determination must be made by:
 - a McKinney-Vento Act school district liaison,
 - a HUD homeless assistance program director or their designee,
 - a Runaway and Homeless Youth Act program director or their designee, or
 - a financial aid administrator.
- Youth who have been in foster care at any time after age 13 are also automatically independent.
- More info and sample letters are available at:

<http://www.naehcy.org/educational-resources/higher-ed>



FAFSA Resources

- SchoolHouse Connection: [FAFSA & Homeless Youth: Challenges + Recommendations in the COVID-19 Era](#)
- SchoolHouse Connection: [The FAFSA: Four Things You Can Do to Help Homeless and Foster Youth](#)
- SchoolHouse Connection: [Federal Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\) and Youth Homelessness](#)
- NAEHCY Higher Education Helpline: NAEHCY Higher Education Helpline: 855-446-2673
- SchoolHouse Connection: [Sample Form Letters to Determine the Independent Student Status of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth](#)



Resources

- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Education for Homeless Children and Youth
<https://dpi.wi.gov/homeless>
- SchoolHouse Connection
<https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/>
- National Center for Homeless Education
<https://nche.ed.gov/>
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
<http://www.naehcy.org/>



Questions?

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