



National Center for Homeless Education
Supporting the Education of Children and
Youth Experiencing Homelessness
<http://ncche.ed.gov>



McKINNEY-VENTO LAW INTO PRACTICE BRIEF SERIES

Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Understanding Their Role

This NCHE brief

- provides information on the role of the local homeless education liaison;
- reviews duties of the local liaison, as required by the McKinney-Vento Act; and
- provides strategies for local liaisons to carry out their responsibilities, and for district administrators to support them in their work.

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness often is accompanied by poverty, stress, and instability. As a result, children and youth in homeless situations frequently must overcome many educational challenges; yet for children and youth experiencing homelessness, school provides stability, support, and hope for the future. Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized in 2015 by Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.; hereafter *the McKinney-Vento Act*), guarantees educational rights and supports for students experiencing homelessness, and seeks to remove any barriers these students may face in succeeding in school. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every local educational agency (LEA, hereafter *school district*) must appoint a local homeless education liaison (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii), hereafter *local liaison*). The local liaison serves as the district's lead homeless education contact, and is required to fulfill the duties of the position as established in the Act [42 U.S.C. §

McKINNEY-VENTO DEFINITION OF HOMELESS 42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)

The term "homeless children and youth"—

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and
- B. includes —
 - i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a 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; or are abandoned in hospitals;
 - ii. 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...;
 - iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - iv. migratory children...who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

11432(g)(6)(A)]. This brief explores those duties and suggests strategies for their implementation. Briefs on additional homeless education topics are available at <https://nche.ed.gov/briefs.php>.

DUTIES OF THE LOCAL LIAISON

The McKinney-Vento Act includes a “job description” for the local liaison in the form of a list of duties. According to the Act [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)], local liaisons must ensure that

- (i) children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
- (ii) children and youth experiencing homelessness are enrolled in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, schools within the district;
- (iii) children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Early Head Start and Head Start programs, early intervention services under Part C of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, and other preschool programs administered by the school district;
- (iv) children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness receive referrals to health care, dental, mental health, substance abuse, housing, and other appropriate services;
- (v) the parents or guardians of students experiencing homelessness are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children, and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
- (vi) public notice of the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness is disseminated in locations frequented by families and youth experiencing homelessness, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth;
- (vii) enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the provisions of the Act;

- (viii) parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness are fully informed of all transportation services available to McKinney-Vento students, including transportation to the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing transportation;
- (ix) school personnel providing services to students experiencing homelessness receive professional development and other support; and
- (x) unaccompanied youth
 - (I) are enrolled in school;
 - (II) have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as other children and youth; and
 - (III) are informed of their status as independent students under the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. § 1087vv), and receive assistance verifying this status for purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

The McKinney-Vento Act also states the following regarding the role of the local liaison:

- State Coordinators for Homeless Education (hereafter *State Coordinators*) and school districts must inform school personnel, service providers, advocates working with families experiencing homelessness, parents and guardians of students experiencing homelessness, and students experiencing homelessness of the duties of the local liaison, and publish an annually updated list of local liaisons on the State education department’s website [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(B)].
- Local liaisons must coordinate and collaborate with State Coordinators and community and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to students experiencing homelessness. This coordination must include collecting and providing the State Coordinator with reliable, valid, and comprehensive data on students experiencing homelessness per the requirements of the Act [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(C)].
- Local liaisons who receive training on the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definitions of *homeless* may affirm, without further agency action by HUD, that a child or youth receiving McKinney-Vento services in their school district, or the immediate family of such a child or youth, who meets the HUD definition of *homeless* is eligible for services through HUD's Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions Grants Programs [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(D)].

SKILLS AND CAPACITY NEEDED FOR LOCAL LIAISONS

The McKinney-Vento Act requires that the local liaison be able to carry out the duties of the position listed in the statute [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)]. This means that the individual serving as local liaison should have the knowledge, skills, time, and authority to carry out the role's responsibilities.

KNOWLEDGE

The local liaison should understand the challenges faced by impoverished and homeless children, youth, and families, including unaccompanied youth and preschool-aged children. The liaison also should understand the rights and services provided to children and youth experiencing homelessness through the McKinney-Vento Act and other Federal and State laws and programs. The person must have a clear understanding of the requirements of the local liaison position, and the State and school district systems in which these requirements will be enacted, including the budgeting system and State student data collection system. The local liaison also should be aware of State and school district policies, and other State and local policies, that impact children and youth experiencing homelessness. In addition, an effective local liaison is familiar with community resources that may provide assistance to needy students and their families.

SKILLS

The local liaison position requires a broad set of professional skills. Clear oral and written communication is central to the work. The local liaison will need to provide leadership and guidance to administrators and staff in the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in the form of professional development and technical assistance with case-specific situations. The liaison also will need to exercise diplomacy and good judgment in diffusing

disagreements and resolving disputes between parents, guardians, or unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and school staff over eligibility, school selection, enrollment, or other perceived barriers to a homeless student's education. The local liaison will need to have the ability to develop and maintain collaborative relationships with community agencies to ensure that McKinney-Vento students are linked to services that are beyond what the school or district provides. Finally, managing multiple and varied tasks, and keeping clear records also are important to the role.

TIME

One of the most common concerns among local liaisons is that they do not have adequate time to carry out their responsibilities. District administrators should review the legal requirements for the position and district data on the number of McKinney-Vento students enrolled in recent years, and allocate sufficient time for the local liaison to ensure that these students receive all needed supports and services. Administrators may wish to discuss the time allocation with former district local liaisons, liaisons from other districts, or the State Coordinator to determine what is realistic.

AUTHORITY

Local liaisons often state that they lack the authority they need to ensure full implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. In instances where a school or district staff member is resistant, local liaisons need to know that district administrators will support them and hold others accountable for compliance.

STRATEGIES

The following strategies will assist local liaisons in organizing and carrying out their responsibilities.

- Participate in all professional development and technical assistance opportunities offered by your State Coordinator, as required in the McKinney-Vento Act [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(iv)].
- Remember that you don't have to do everything at once. Plan your activities over time, thinking strategically about what is needed most immediately to support students experiencing homelessness.

- Develop written procedures and protocols for identifying, enrolling, and serving homeless students.
- Train district and school personnel on the McKinney-Vento Act, and related policies and procedures to generate district-wide awareness and avoid compliance issues.
- Meet periodically with district program administrators (e.g., the Title I coordinator, special education coordinator, child nutrition director, and pupil transportation director) to ensure that protocols are in place to coordinate services for students experiencing homelessness in a prompt and efficient manner.
- Designate a school-level point of contact at each school who can assist with school-level tasks and refer issues that need further attention to the local liaison.
- Review district data, technical assistance and communication logs, and SEA monitoring reports to glean insights on where additional focus may be needed.
- Use data to document the time needed to carry out required local liaison duties and request that more time be allocated to your position, if needed.
- Network with other local liaisons with whom you can share good practices and develop interdistrict agreements, if needed.
- Develop collaborative relationships with local service providers, including shelters, soup kitchens, food banks, housing agencies, public preschool programs, faith-based organizations, and business partners.
- Use a trauma-informed approach when communicating with parents, guardians, and students about their needs.

NCHE RESOURCES FOR LOCAL LIAISONS

NCHE provides a variety of resources and supports for both new and seasoned local liaisons, including:

- *Homeless Liaison Toolkit*, which provides an overview of the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act,

suggests good practices, and includes sample forms and links to resources.

(https://ncche.ed.gov/pr/liaison_toolkit.php)

- Homeless education webinars, offered free of charge on a monthly basis.
(<https://ncche.ed.gov/web/group.php>)
- Homeless education issue briefs, which provide summaries of key legislative mandates, and suggest best practices for implementation. Of particular interest to local liaisons are NCHE's *Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Making the Right Selection and Supporting their Effectiveness* and *Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Important Information for New Liaisons* briefs.
(<https://ncche.ed.gov/pr/briefs.php>)
- A Homeless Education Helpline, where local liaisons can call or email for assistance with understanding the law and processing complex scenarios.
(800.308.2145, homeless@serve.org)

REFERENCES

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, 42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq. Retrieved from <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>