

CHOCTAW COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Procedures Plan For Identifying and Enrolling Homeless Students

2020-2021

Choctaw County School District Procedures for Enrolling Homeless Students

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act assures preschool-aged and school-aged children certain rights.

Definition:

The McKinney-Vento Acts defines “homeless children and youth” as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The term includes:

- Children and youth who are:
 - Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (*sometimes referred to as doubled-up*);
 - Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
 - Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
 - Abandoned in hospitals; or
- Children and youth 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;
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

Requirements:

The McKinney-Vento Act provides certain rights for homeless students. They include waiving certain requirements such as proof of residency when students are enrolling and allowing categorical eligibility for certain services. The Act also states:

- Homeless students may attend their school of origin or the school where they are temporarily residing.
- Homeless students may enroll without school, medical, or similar records.
- Homeless students have a right to transportation to school.
- Students must be provided a statement explaining why they are denied any service or enrollment.
- Students must receive services, such as transportation, while disputes are being settled.

Procedures for Identifying a Homeless Student

A student may be considered homeless if:

- The student indicates a homeless status at the time of enrollment
- An affidavit of residency indicates that the arrangement is temporary due to necessity (due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason)

Procedures for Enrolling a Homeless Student

The school may not deny, delay, or transfer enrollment solely because a student is homeless, or because a homeless student is unable to produce school, medical, or residency records.

A school enrolling, or about to enroll, a homeless student shall:

- Immediately enroll the student, regardless of the availability of educational and/or immunization records
 - If a student attempts to register without a parent/guardian, effort should be made to contact the parent/guardian
 - The homeless student may not be barred from enrollment due to lack of immunization until an effort has been made to obtain records. If records cannot be obtained, assistance should be provided in getting the student properly immunized.
 - If a birth certificate is not available, the student should be registered. Department of Human Services may be contacted to assist in obtaining a copy of the birth certificate.
 - The student will be identified as homeless in MSIS.
- Make a reasonable effort to verify that the child is homeless.
- Contact the school last attended to obtain relevant academic and other records
 - If student records cannot be obtained or records are not available an educational record (cumulative folder) will be developed. In these cases, an academic diagnostic test may be administered to assist in the determination of the student's skill levels and appropriate placement.
 - Priority shall be given in evaluations of homeless student suspected of having a disability.
- Provide free meals within one school day after the student enrolled. If necessary, assistance will be provided for completion of free and reduced lunch forms.
- Provide access to the same services comparable to those offered to other students in the school which the homeless student attends such as:
 - transportation services: Working to keep students experiencing homelessness in school is a key component of the McKinney-Vento Program. CCSD will collaborate with schools/districts when necessary to coordinate transportation to and from the school of origin if the student's best interest to remain in the school of origin.
 - educational services
 - school nutrition programs
 - preschool: students experiencing homelessness will be prioritized
 - vocational and technical programs
 - extra-curricular and enrichment activities
- Coordinate with and/or refer students to other community resources that aids the homeless student/family

Assisting Unaccompanied Youth

The term "unaccompanied youth" includes a youth who is not in the physical custody of a parent/guardian (McKinney-Vento Act Sec. 725 [6]). These youth may have been denied housing by their families, left home voluntarily, or been abandoned by their parents or guardians.

Unaccompanied youth include youth in homeless situations and have the same rights as other students experiencing homelessness. Specifically, they have the right to

- Remain in their school of origin or enroll in the school where they are temporarily residing
- Transportation to and from the school of origin
- Immediately enroll in a school serving the area in which they are currently living even if they do not have the typically required documents or a parent or guardian to authorize their enrollment.
- Equal access to programs and services: School counselors will guide unaccompanied youth as they choose and enroll in a school, after considering the youth's wishes.
- Be informed of their rights to transportation.
- Be informed of their right to appeal school or school district decisions and ensuring that youth are immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of disputes.

Determining Feasibility of School Placement

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance 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 one of the following:

- The school of origin: The school that the child last attended before experiencing homelessness or the school where the student was last enrolled.
- The local attendance area school: Any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.

Enrollment must take place immediately.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance 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 local attendance area school. The following individuals may be consulted in determining what placement is in the child's or youth's best interest:

The homeless child or youth. The parents or caretakers of the homeless child or youth
Homeless shelter personnel. Representatives of social service agencies such as local homeless education liaisons School social workers or school counselors

It is the school district's responsibility to determine the school of origin and local attendance area school and to resolve any conflict concerning the school placement that is in the best interest of the student. Whenever possible, the school district is to comply with the parents'/caretakers' wishes. If the school district and parents/caretakers do not agree on the appropriate placement, the state's dispute resolution procedure must be followed. The student should be enrolled in the school that the parent or caretakers (or the student himself/herself, in the case of an unaccompanied youth) have chosen during the resolution process. If the local attendance area school and the school of origin are in different districts and the school of origin is determined to be the best placement, the local homeless education liaisons from both districts will work together to arrange transportation.

Homeless Dispute Procedure

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, CCSD will immediately enroll the homeless student in the school in which enrollment is sought by the parent or guardian, pending resolution of the dispute and all services and programs will be available to the student. The dispute resolution process will take place as expeditiously as possible. Our goal is to resolve any dispute within a timely fashion as to not impede student success in our school.

Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth may initiate the dispute resolution process directly at the school they choose, as well as at the district or LEA homeless liaison's office

The following steps will take place for the dispute resolution:

- The on-site principal or counselor for the school in which enrollment is sought will contact the CCSD Homeless Liaison immediately.
- The Federal Programs Director and the Superintendent will meet to discuss the specifics of the issue with the parent/guardian. If there are multiple children involved in multiple schools, then all may be discussed to resolve the school in question one at a time. The District will consider the following factors, or feasibility criteria, when deciding whether it is in the "best interest" of the child to remain in the school of origin:

The age of the child or youth.

The distance of a commute and its impact on a student's education.

Personal safety issues.

A student's need for special instruction (i.e. special education and related services).

The length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location; and the time remaining in the school year.

If the district determines it is not in the best interest of the child to remain in the school of origin the District must provide written notice of:

The decision not to honor the request to remain in the school origin.

That the parent has the right to dispute the decision.

The procedure for challenging the placement decision.

The student's right to remain in the school of his/her choice, with no interruption of his/her education, until the dispute is resolved.

The contact information for the District Homeless Liaison and the State Coordinator.

The dispute process will proceed according to the following **Dispute Resolution Procedures:**

1. The District must notify the parents in writing within 10 working days if it determines placement in the student's school of origin is not in the best interest of the child. This notification must contain all the items mentioned in the previous paragraph and a Notice of Dispute Form.
2. The parents must complete the Notice of Dispute Form and return it to the school, the District Office, or the Homeless Liaison within 10 working days. A copy of the Notice should be made and immediately forwarded to the District Homeless Liaison, and the original returned to the parent for their records. While the dispute is being resolved the student has the right to attend his/her school of choice and to fully participate in all activities of the school.
3. The District must schedule a meeting (at a time convenient to the parents) to settle the dispute within 10 working days of the receipt of the Notice of Dispute letter. The parents may present pertinent information in oral and/or written form. A Committee who are not directly involved in the issue will decide the Dispute and will provide a written summary of the decision within 5 days of the meeting.
4. If the parents are not happy with the result of the dispute at the District level, the parents may contact the State Coordinator for an appeal of the district decision within 10 working days of the decision given.

It is important that the academic and educational programs for children who are temporarily without a home are no different than those of the general student population.