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# Handbook for the Support of Homeless Students

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Smackover-Norphlet  
School District

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## Introduction

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized by Title X, Part C, of the No Child Left Behind Act, ensures educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

This handbook is intended to set forth procedures and policies for the Smackover-Norphlet School District which comply with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

### Who is Homeless? (Sec. 725)

The term “homeless children and youth” –

(A) Means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and

(B) Includes –

- i. 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, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- 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).

Local Contact Information:

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## Key Provisions

- The Smackover-Norphlet School District will develop, review, and revise their policies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of children and youth in homeless situations.
- Children and youth experiencing homelessness have the right to attend either the school of origin, if this is in the student's best interest, or the local attendance area school.
  - *School of origin* is defined as the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.
  - *Local attendance area school* is defined as 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.
- Homeless students have the right to enroll in school immediately, even if lacking documentation normally required for enrollment, such as previous school records, medical or immunization records, proof of residency, birth certificate, proof of guardianship, or other documents.
- The term "enroll" and "enrollment" include attending classes and participating fully in school activities.
- The Smackover-Norphlet School District will address problems resulting from enrollment delays caused by immunization and medical records requirements; residency requirements; lack of birth certificates, school records, or other documentation; guardianship issues; or uniform or dress code requirements.
  - If a student does not have immunization, or immunization or medical records, the local homeless education liaison must assist in obtaining them immediately; the student must be enrolled in school in the interim.
  - The enrolling school must contact the student's previous school to obtain school records; the student must be enrolled in school while records are obtained.
- The Smackover-Norphlet School District will maintain records for homeless students so that they are available quickly and can be transferred promptly, as necessary.
- Local liaisons must help unaccompanied youth select and enroll in a school, after considering the youth's wishes.
- If a student is sent to a school other than that requested by a parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, the school must provide a written explanation of its decision to send that student to a different school and the parent's, guardian's, or youth's right to appeal this decision.

Children and youth experiencing homelessness often do not have the documents ordinarily required for school enrollment.

However, school may be the only opportunity for these children and youths to benefit from a stable environment, uninterrupted adult attention, peer relations, academic stimulation, and reliable meals.

Enrolling homeless students in school immediately provides them with needed stability and avoids disconnection them from school for days or weeks while

## Strategies for Implementation

The Smackover-Norphlet School District will...

- ✓ Review all district policies and bring them into compliance with federal law.
- ✓ Train all school enrollment staff, secretaries, school counselors, and principals on the legal requirements for enrolling homeless students.
- ✓ Inform families and youth of the student's right to attend either the school of origin, if this is in the student's best interest, or the local school and to be enrolled immediately.
- ✓ Inform families and youth of the student's right to receive transportation to and from the school of origin.
- ✓ Develop clear, understandable forms to use when providing written explanations of decisions and explaining the parent's, guardian's, or youth's right to appeal the school's decision.

Smackover Elementary School, Norphlet Middle School, and Smackover High School will...

- ✓ Provide short educational assessments to place students immediately while awaiting the arrival of complete academic records.
- ✓ Accept previous school records directly from families and youth.
- ✓ Contact the previous school for records and assistance with placement decisions.
- ✓ Follow up quickly on any special education referrals or services.
- ✓ Provide needed remediation/tutoring.
- ✓ Have counselors meet with parents and students when registering.
- ✓ Include information on the educational rights guaranteed under the McKinney-Vento Act in parent handbooks so that parents will understand their children's options in the event that they become homeless.
- ✓ Establish school-level and classroom-level routines for incoming and departing student transfers.

Teachers in the Smackover-Norphlet School District can help support students experiencing homelessness by...

- ✓ Getting to know new students with a “get-to-know-you” questionnaire or journal assignment.
- ✓ Taking time to talk to and welcome new students individually.
- ✓ Giving new students a “welcome gift” (e.g., school supplies, school clothes).
- ✓ Introducing new students to the class.
- ✓ Identifying faculty and peer mentors/buddies.
- ✓ Keeping a short, simple written list of classroom rules and procedures.
- ✓ Making sure all students have a chance to have a class job/role and to participate in extracurricular activities.
- ✓ Starting files and a portfolio of classwork for students to take with them when leaving the school.
- ✓ Maintaining a relationship with departing students by providing them with stamped, self-addressed envelopes and stationery.

Information for this handbook was taken from *McKinney-Vento – Law Into Practice* which can be retrieved from <http://www.serve.org/nche> .

For more information about supporting homeless children and youth, visit the following:

- National Association for the Education of Children and Youth at <http://www.naehcy.org>
- National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty at <http://www.nlchp.org>
- Arkansas Department of Education at <http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/federal-programs/homeless%20education%20services>