

HOMELESS EDUCATION POLICY

Decatur County School System

2010-11

Homelessness exists in our community due to a variety of factors including, but not limited to high housing costs, poverty, abuse, neglect, and family conflict. The lack of permanent housing has the potential to lead to serious physical, emotional, and mental difficulties. Children and youth who have lost their housing may live in a variety of places including motels, shelters, shared residences, cars, and campgrounds. The Decatur County School System will ensure that all children and youth receive a free appropriate public education and are given meaningful opportunities to succeed in our schools. The school system will also follow the guidelines set forth in the McKinney-Vento Act.

The term “homeless” will not be used in identifying students in this policy, but will be replaced with the phrase “children and youth in transition”. Our system will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation, and harassment.

IDENTIFICATION

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the homeless liaison will identify children and youth in transition within the boundaries of the school district. The liaison will provide guidance to school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth in transition, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the liaison. The liaison will instruct school secretaries to inquire about living arrangements upon enrollment and withdrawal of every student, and forward such information to the homeless liaison. **The Transportation Director will instruct bus drivers to be alert to situations that would indicate a transient living environment and then forward that information to the Homeless Liaison.** Community agencies which may help with identification could include: motels, welfare and social service agencies, and attendance officers.

The liaison will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the district as provided by counselors and other school personnel in each individual school. The data will include where they are living, academic achievement, school transfers, and/or reasons for educational interruptions.

SCHOOL SELECTION

Each child or youth in transition has the right to remain at his or her school of origin, or to attend any school that students who live in the same attendance area as the child in question are eligible to attend. Children and youth in transition shall remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the wishes of the parent or youth. Students may remain at their schools of origin the entire time they are in transition, and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed.

Feasibility shall be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the wishes of the parent and youth. Potential feasibility considerations include:

- *safety of the student
- *continuity of instruction
- *time remaining in academic year
- *anticipated length of stay in temporary housing
- *school placement of siblings
- *special needs of student that would render the commute harmful

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin and services under federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.

ENROLLMENT

Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students in transition may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nevertheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth in transition. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:

- *proof of residency

- *transcripts/school records (enrolling school must contact student's previous school to obtain records. Initial placement can be based on student's age and information gathered from student, parent and previous school if records are not immediately available)

- *immunizations

- *proof of guardianship

- *birth certificate

- *unpaid school fees

- *any factor related to student's living situation

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

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 a parent's request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition. The length of the commute will only be considered in determining feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student as discussed above. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation

before they select a school for attendance. Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above.

SERVICES

Children and youth in transition shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected, including:

- *transportation (as described above)

- *Title I

- *educational services for which the student is eligible such as special education and English Language Learners

- *vocational and technical programs

- *gifted and talented programs

- *school nutrition programs

- *before and after school programs

- *preschool programs

Evaluations of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability shall be given priority and coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school shall immediately implement it. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption of appropriate services. Preschool age children believed to have special needs will be referred for the Special Education Preschool program offered in the county.

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation shall be excused. Our school district

will follow state procedures to ensure that youth in transition and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. Such students will be identified for school enrollment or GED II services depending on the age of the student. School personnel shall refer children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including but not limited to dental and mental health services. The liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

All parent information required by any provision of this policy must be provided in a form, manner, and language understandable to each parent.

FREE MEALS

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are prepared for learning, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day a child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the district nutrition office for immediate processing.

TITLE I

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I services, regardless of what school they attend. Our district's Title I plan will be coordinated with our McKinney-Vento services through collaboration with Title I and the Homeless Program. Children and youth in transition shall be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance.

TRAINING

The liaison will conduct training and awareness activities for the following LEA staff at least once during the school year: Principals, assistant principals, secretaries, counselors, and others as deemed appropriate. The trainings will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with the policy, and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition. The liaison will also obtain from every school the name and contact information of a building liaison. These liaisons will lead and coordinate their schools' compliance with this policy and will receive training from the district liaison annually.

DISPUTES

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth in transition shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the rights of a student in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent 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 parent 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.

DEFINITIONS

**Children and youth in transition* means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, and 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 a similar reason; are living in motels, campgrounds; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- children and youth who are living in a car, park, public space, substandard housing, or similar setting;
- migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.

**Unaccompanied youth* means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is in transition as defined above.

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

**Immediate* means without delay.

**Parent* means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

**School of origin* means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

**Liaison* is the staff person designated by our LEA and each LEA in the state as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act.