

Local Homeless Education Liaisons



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 brief explains the key provisions in the Act concerning the roles and responsibilities of the local homeless education liaison and offers strategies for implementing the Act in a school district. Additional briefs on various topics in the law may be found at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.

Introduction

Local homeless education liaisons are Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff responsible for ensuring the identification, school enrollment, attendance, and opportunities for academic success of students in homeless situations. Some of these activities may be performed by the local liaison himself or herself, while others are accomplished by coordinating the efforts of other staff.

National evaluations have found that local liaisons are an important factor contributing to the success of a school district's homeless education program; therefore, the McKinney-Vento Act now requires every LEA to appoint a local homeless education liaison and specifies his or her legal responsibilities. By linking students and their families to school and community services, local liaisons play a critical role in stabilizing students and promoting academic achievement at the individual, school, and district level.

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 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 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).

Key Provisions

- Every LEA, otherwise known as school district, must designate an appropriate staff person as a local homeless education liaison. This person may also be a coordinator for other federal programs.
- Local liaisons must ensure that:
 - Children and youth in homeless situations are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies.
 - Students experiencing homelessness enroll, and have full and equal opportunity to succeed, in school.
 - Families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, Even Start, and preschool programs administered by the LEA; and referrals to health, mental health, dental, and other appropriate services.

Local Homeless Education Liaisons (continued)

- Parents or guardians of students experiencing homelessness are informed of educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
- Public notice of the educational rights of students in homeless situations is disseminated where children and youth receive services.
- Enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the Enrollment Disputes section of the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Parents, guardians and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness are fully informed of all transportation services provided under the McKinney-Vento Act, including transportation to the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing these services.
- Local liaisons must:
 - Assist homeless children and youth who do not have immunizations or immunization or medical records to obtain necessary immunizations or immunization or medical records.
 - Help unaccompanied youth choose and enroll in a school, after considering the youths' wishes, and provide youth with notice of their right to appeal an enrollment decision that is contrary to their wishes.
 - Ensure that unaccompanied youth are enrolled in school immediately pending the resolution of any dispute that may arise over school enrollment or placement.
 - Collaborate and coordinate with State Coordinators for Homeless Education and community and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to children and youth in homeless situations.
- State coordinators and LEAs must educate

school personnel, service providers, and advocates who work with families in homeless situations about the duties of the local homeless education liaison.

(See *Endnotes for the text of the law.*)

Strategies for Implementation

- LEA administrators should work with their State Coordinator for Homeless Education to identify an appropriate staff person to serve as the local homeless education liaison. Federal programs, such as Title I, Part A; Even Start; or Migrant Education, are good programs with which to collaborate in supporting the local liaison position. Perhaps most importantly, after reviewing the responsibilities of the local liaison position, the LEA should appoint the person who has the time ability to carry them out.
- LEAs and State Coordinators should create opportunities for local liaisons to receive training focused on homelessness awareness, key provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act, and the legal responsibilities of the local liaison. Training opportunities may be facilitated by State Coordinators for Homeless Education through attendance at local, state, and national conferences; through neighboring school districts that have established local liaison positions; and through materials such as NCHE's *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit* (see *Resources*, page 3). NCHE also hosts homeless education webinars regularly, where participants can train conveniently from their office; visit <http://www.serve.org/nche/webinars.php> to learn more.
- Local liaisons should join local homeless task forces, homeless coalitions, and their local homeless assistance Continuum of Care (visit <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/programs/coc/index.cfm> for more information). A directory of state and local homeless coalitions may be found on the NCHE website at http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php.

Local Homeless Education Liaisons (continued)

- State Coordinators should provide the local liaison with sample forms, policies, procedures, awareness materials (for example, brochures and posters), and fact sheets so that he or she will be well equipped for his or her job and does not have to “reinvent the wheel”. Sample materials may be found in the *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit* (see below), and on the website of the National Center for Homeless Education at <http://www.serve.org/nche>.
- Local liaisons should develop collaborative relationships with community social service providers, including shelters, soup kitchens, food banks, transitional living projects for youth, street outreach teams, youth drop-in centers, community action agencies, welfare departments, housing departments, public health departments, and faith-based organizations. They should inform these agencies of the duties of the local liaison and the responsibilities of the school district in enrolling and serving homeless children and youth.
- Local liaisons should develop relationships with key school district personnel, including administrators, principals, secretaries, registrars, counselors, social workers, transportation staff, food services staff, school nurses, truancy officers, and teachers. They should inform these personnel about the causes and struggles of homelessness, common signs of homelessness, the duties of the local liaison, the responsibilities of the school district, and the rights of students and families in homeless situations.
- Local liaisons should develop relationships with local directors of other school programs, such as preschool; Special Education; Child Nutrition; Title I, Part A; Migrant Education; Neglected and Delinquent; and Even Start to ensure that students in homeless situations can access these services as needed.
- Local liaisons should appoint a school-level point of contact at each school in the LEA. This person can assist the local liaison with school-level tasks and refer issues that need further attention to the local liaison.
- Local liaisons should disseminate posters, brochures, and other awareness materials explaining educational rights, programs, and related services in schools and other locations where homeless children and youth receive services (such as soup kitchens, health clinics, shelters, transitional living projects for youth, street outreach teams, youth drop-in centers, motels, campgrounds, public laundries, and faith-based organizations). Educational rights posters may be ordered free of charge from the NCHE website at <http://www.serve.org/nche/products.php>.
- Local liaisons should seek program support from Title I programs, other education programs, and public and private community organizations.
- LEA staff should communicate with parents, guardians, caregivers, and youth in a manner and language that they can understand.

Resources

Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit, published as a collaborative effort between the National Center for Homeless Education and the staff of Project HOPE-Virginia. The *Toolkit*, which was updated in September 2007, may be ordered or downloaded from NCHE’s website at <http://www.serve.org/nche/products.php>.

NCHE issue briefs on school selection, enrollment, transportation, dispute resolution, identification, and unaccompanied youth are also particularly useful for local liaisons. NCHE briefs can be downloaded at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.

Local Homeless Education Liaisons (continued)

Endnotes

(g) STATE PLAN

(1) *IN GENERAL*—Each State shall submit to the Secretary a plan to provide for the education of homeless children and youths within the State. Such plan shall include the following:...

(J) Assurances that—...

(ii) local educational agencies will designate an appropriate staff person, who may also be a coordinator for other Federal programs, as a local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youths, to carry out the duties described in paragraph (6)(A);...

(3) LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY REQUIREMENTS—...

(B) *BEST INTEREST*—In determining the best interest of the child or youth... the local educational agency shall—...

(iii) in the case of an unaccompanied youth, ensure that the homeless liaison designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii) assists in placement or enrollment decisions under this subparagraph, considers the views of such unaccompanied youth, and provides notice to such youth of the right to appeal under subparagraph (E)...

(C) *ENROLLMENT*—...

(iii) If the child or youth needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the enrolling school shall immediately refer the parent or guardian of the child or youth to the local educational agency liaison designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii), who shall assist in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records, in accordance with subparagraph (D).

(E) *ENROLLMENT DISPUTES*—If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school—...

(iii) the child, youth, parent, or guardian shall be referred to the local educational agency liaison designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii), who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as described in paragraph (1)(C) as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute; and

(iv) in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the homeless liaison shall ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute."...

(6) LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY LIAISON.—...

(A) *DUTIES*—Each local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youths, designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii), shall ensure that—

(i) homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies;

(ii) homeless children and youths enroll in, and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in, schools of that local educational agency;

(iii) homeless families, children, and youths receive educational services for which such families, children, and youths are eligible, including Head Start and Even Start programs and preschool programs administered by the local educational agency, and referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services;

(iv) the parents or guardians of homeless children and youths 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;

(v) public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youths is disseminated where such children and youth receive services under this Act, such as schools, family shelters, and soup kitchens;

(vi) enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with paragraph (3)(E); and

(vii) the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, as described in paragraph (1)(J)(iii), and is assisted in accessing transportation to the school that is selected under paragraph (3)(A).

(B) *NOTICE*—State coordinators established under subsection (d)(3) and local educational agencies shall inform school personnel, service providers, and advocates working with homeless families of the duties of the local educational agency liaisons.

(C) *LOCAL AND STATE COORDINATION*—Local educational agency liaisons for homeless children and youths shall, as a part of their duties, coordinate and collaborate with State coordinators and community and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to homeless children and youths."

This brief was developed cooperatively by:

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<http://www.serve.org/nche>

National Association for the Education of Children and Youth
<http://www.naehcy.org>

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
<http://www.nlchp.org>

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Every state is required to have a State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and every school district is required to have a local homeless education liaison. These individuals will assist you with the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php.



For more information on the McKinney-Vento Act and resources for implementation, call the NCHE Helpline at 800-308-2145 or e-mail homeless@serve.org.



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