



MCKINNEY VENTO & FOSTER CARE

Liaison Tool Kit

Christina Bradley
chbradley@michva.org

Office: 616-306-1600 X 7909

Direct: 616-259-0764

Description

This Homeless Liaison Toolkit is a comprehensive resource that will assist liaisons in carrying out their responsibilities. Updated to reflect the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act, as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the 2026-2027 edition of the Homeless Liaison Toolkit includes requirements of the law, good practices, sample forms, and links to resources.

Overview And History

Did you know that:

- Homeless children and youth must have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youth?
- Any requirements in laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as a barrier to the identification, enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and youth must be eliminated?

Do you know:

- What potential barriers to identification, enrollment, attendance, and success in school may exist in local policies and procedures?
- How those barriers may be alleviated?
- What local educational agencies (LEAs or school districts) are required to do to uphold rights and ensure services for homeless children and youth?

The number of homeless children and youth enrolled in school has more than doubled since the U.S. Department of Education began collecting the information in School Year 2004-05, with 1,508,265 students identified in School Year 2017-18 (NCHE, Federal Data Summary School Years 2015-16 to 2017-18: Education for Homeless Children and Youth). An inadequate stock of affordable housing, fluctuating unemployment rates, high health costs, and natural disasters combined with shrinking public resources has resulted in a steady increase in the number of children experiencing homelessness.

Homeless children and youth face many educational barriers due to the disruption and trauma of not having a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. Most face educational disruption due to changing schools as they move from one temporary location to another. Homeless children and youth also have higher incidences of illness, depression, and exposure to violence than their stably housed peers.

Specific educational challenges faced by homeless students include:

- not being identified for services
- difficulty enrolling without records or, in the case of an unaccompanied homeless youth, without a parent or guardian present
- difficulty regularly attending school
- lack of stable transportation
- frequent school changes
- falling behind in school
- not accruing credits on time
- lack of basic needs including food, clothing, and adequate housing
- stress, depression, trauma
- embarrassment and stigma related to their housing conditions

Many homeless youth are also unaccompanied, meaning they are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. Being both homeless and unaccompanied leaves youth fending for themselves in a world where they are vulnerable to a myriad of potentially life-threatening dangers. For all these reasons, school can often be the one place of stability, safety, and support in the tumultuous lives of these students.

Legal Definition of Homelessness



Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act states the following:

The term “homeless children and youths”—

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103 (a)(1)); 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 (within the meaning of section 103 (a)(2)(C));
- (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 (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses
- (i) through (iii). (42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2))

Common Signs of Homelessness

Lack of Educational Continuity

- Attendance at many different schools
- Missing records needed to enroll
- Inability to pay fees
- Gaps in skill development
- Mistaken assessment of abilities
- Poor organizational skills
- Poor ability to conceptualize

Poor Health/Nutrition

- Missing immunizations & medical records
- Unmet medical & dental needs
- Respiratory problems
- Skin rashes
- Chronic hunger or food hoarding
- Fatigue (may fall asleep in class)

Transportation & Attendance Problems

- Erratic attendance and tardiness
- Numerous absences
- Lack of participation in afterschool activities
- Lack of participation in field trips
- Inability to contact parents

Poor Hygiene

- Lacking shower facilities/washers, etc.
- Wearing same clothes for several days
- Inconsistent grooming

Lack of Personal Space After School

- Consistent lack of preparation for school
- Incomplete or missing homework
- Unable to complete special projects
- Lacking basic school supplies
- Loss of books and supplies on regular basis
- Elevated concern for safety of belongings

Social and Behavioral Concerns

- A marked change in behavior
- Poor/short attention span
- Poor self-esteem
- Extreme shyness
- Unwilling to form relationships with peers & teachers
- Difficulty socializing at recess or lunch periods
- Difficulty trusting people
- Aggression
- “Old” beyond years
- Overly protective of parents
- Clinging behavior
- Developmental delays
- Fear of abandonment
- School phobia (afraid to leave parent)
- Anxiety, especially late in the school day

Reactions or Statements by Parents, Guardians, or Students

- Exhibiting anger or embarrassment when asked about current address
- Avoidance of questions related to current address
- Statements about staying with grandparents, other relatives, friends, or in motels & campgrounds
- Statements such as:
 - o “I don’t remember the name of the last school.”
 - o “We’ve been moving around a lot.”
 - o “Our address is new; I can’t remember it.”
 - o “We’re staying with relatives until we get settled.”
 - o “We’re going through a bad time right now.”

Identifying Children and Youth in Homeless Situations

Identification is the first step to connecting students in homeless situations with the information, resources, and support necessary to ensure their equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as is provided to other children and youth.

Identifying process at MVCA (Michigan Virtual Charter Academy) is the following:

- Student/Family **completes enrollment application**, including answering the question: *Which of the following accurately describes the student's current living situation?*
- If the Student/Family answers in the **affirmative**, the student is **immediately enrolled**, and the student's information is forwarded to the MVCA McKinney Vento Liaison.
- MVCA McKinney Vento Liaison will **make contact** and **assess** the living situation for qualification for McKinney Vento support.
- In addition, the liaison will **confirm** the status of Internet access and **verify** shipping address for relevant school material.

Notifying McKinney Vento Liaison

- Liaison is **notified** of new students that may qualify for MKV enrollees via email, daily Power School search and Child Find document.
- After **completion** of identification/confirmation of McKinney Vento Students/Families, the McKinney Vento Liaison will **notify** the enrollment team of the identified status (call outcome), if needed.
- If MKV status is **confirmed**, then the student will be **enrolled immediately**, even if they lack normally required documents, such as immunization records or proof of residence.
- The student will be marked/**flagged** as McKinney Vento in Power School Special Programs and Power School log will be created.
- If MKV status is **NOT confirmed**, then the student will be placed on the Internal SP document for tracking/documentation purposes.
 - Power School log for the student will still be created.

If Student/Family needs...

- **Hotspot**, a request is submitted through the hotspot request spreadsheet in the local/school SharePoint to notify Operations Department to fulfil request and mail to family
- **Supplies**, liaison orders from Amazon and coordinates with K12 National Special Programs Team (or Operations Department) to fulfill requests and mail to family. Sample supply requests are listed here: [Supplies](#)
- Liaison **sends** Welcome Letter, **provides** families with introduction flyer or new student newsletter which includes state housing and community resources, MKV information, rights, responsibilities, dispute policy and liaison contact information.
- Once a student is **identified** as qualifying for MKV support, the student is added to Liaison's Power School section, a new log is added to the file, and Student is tagged MKV in the student's Power School file.
- Students will **remain** in the Liaison's section until the end of the school year, regardless of whether they find permanent housing during that time.
- Returning students will **require** a new assessment prior to the beginning of the school year to determine whether they will continue to qualify for MKV for the upcoming school year.

Identifying Unaccompanied Youth

Homelessness is a devastating circumstance for any child or youth, but being both homeless and separated from a parent or guardian often puts youth in inadequate and unsafe living situations and makes them at risk for school failure or dropping out—all of which can compound the effects of trauma for unaccompanied homeless youth.

Many barriers can hinder the ability of unaccompanied homeless youth to enroll, attend and succeed in school.

These barriers often include:

- lack of stable housing
- inability to take care of basic needs resulting in fatigue, poor health, poor hygiene, and hunger
- lack of school supplies and clothing
- emotional crises or mental health problems due to experiencing trauma
- lack of support from a caring adult
- concern about being reported to child welfare and law enforcement agencies
- employment that interferes with attendance and schoolwork

- missing school records and other paperwork
- lack of transportation
- irregular school attendance
- difficulty accumulating credits due to school mobility

An unaccompanied youth must fit the definitions of both homeless and unaccompanied in the McKinney-Vento Act to receive assistance under the provisions in the law. That is, **an unaccompanied youth is a child or youth who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.**

Communication With Parents

Communication is critical for developing trust with parents. Good rapport enables local liaisons to establish a working relationship with parents that results in good educational decisions for children.

The following tips will help you develop positive, productive relationships with parents.

- Keep impersonal communication, such as letters and emails, to a minimum; conduct face-to-face or video conference conversations whenever possible.
- Provide a welcoming environment.
- Conduct sensitive conversations in a private and comfortable place.
- Avoid using the word “homeless” and other charged and judgmental language.
- Talk to them about their living situation; be sensitive and discreet.
- Ask them about their needs. A good question to ask is, “How may we be of assistance to you and your family? What would be helpful for you now?”
- Assure them that their children are welcome in your school and that you have their best interest in mind.
- Empower and encourage parents; discuss solutions to challenges with them.
- Discuss things about which they feel positive.
- Listen! Listen! Listen!
- Be aware of your own triggers. Notice when you are having a reaction to what the parent, guardian, or youth is saying and continue being present for them. Make sure you are always putting the needs of the family and youth first.

Liaisons should be available to field any questions, offer time to address parents’ concerns either via phone or virtual conference. Provide tips and information on how to be an effective learning coach by supporting MVCA parent programming, blocking off specific time slot for parents to meet with liaison to discuss issues and solutions, sending regular email with progress updates, newsletter with pertinent information and train parents in MVCA learning platform.

In addition, liaison is responsible for updating and providing additional information regarding housing, community support, state guidelines and legal resources and activities for students.

Dispute Resolution

Parents, guardians, or unaccompanied youths experiencing homelessness may disagree with schools or school districts on issues related to eligibility for McKinney-Vento services, school enrollment, and school selection. There is a formal dispute process available to parents.

Formal dispute resolution

- ensures that each party's views are represented,
- enables the facts of the case to be considered objectively, and
- allows students to attend school while bringing the disagreement to closure.

When a dispute arises over eligibility, school selection, or enrollment in a school, the law requires the following minimum procedures:

- The child or youth “shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals” [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(E)(i)]. In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the local liaison also must ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in the school in which the youth seek enrollment pending the resolution of the dispute [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(E)(iv)]. While disputes are pending, students have the right to participate fully in school and receive all services that they would normally receive, as the definition of enrollment includes “attending classes and participating fully in school activities” [42 U.S.C. § 11434a (1)].
- The parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth must be provided with a written explanation of any decisions related to school selection or enrollment made by the school, the LEA, or the SEA involved, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth to appeal such decisions [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(E)(ii)]. The LEA must provide a written explanation of the reasons for its determination, in a manner and form understandable to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, including information regarding the right to appeal [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(B)(iii)]. In the case of an unaccompanied homeless youth, the notice explaining the decision and the right to appeal are provided directly to the youth [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(B)(iv)].

- The parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth must be referred to the local liaison, who will carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(E)(iii)]. The local liaison must be familiar with the state's McKinney-Vento dispute resolution policy, and follow all procedures outlined therein.

Many disagreements between a parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth and the LEA can be avoided. Diffusing disagreements through effective communication can eliminate the need for a formal dispute.

Additionally, more detailed information about the Dispute Process can be found here: [MDE Dispute Resolution Procedure](#)

Although navigating the child welfare system can be daunting for those working in the field of homeless education, local liaisons and others must determine whether children in the child welfare system are eligible for McKinney-Vento services and collaborate with child welfare staff.

Foster Care

Students involved in the foster care system comprise a diverse and vulnerable group of learners with complex educational needs. Experiencing foster care is associated with academic struggles such as high school mobility, lower academic achievement, heightened experiences of exclusionary school discipline, and decreased school completion and access to postsecondary education.

- Students involved in foster care are more mobile: out-of-home placements increase the frequency of mid-year school transitions and decrease the number of days students spend in school during the academic year.
- Students involved in foster care meet state standards in math, science, and English/language arts at less than half the rate of their same-grade peers.
- Students involved in foster care are less likely to graduate from high school on time

Every Student Achieves Act (ESSA) provides all children and youth in foster care with core protections for school stability and school access through a statutory vehicle that is separate from the McKinney-Vento Act, and that outlines clear, distinct and appropriate responsibilities for both the education and child welfare agencies.

1. [ESSA Guidance on Supporting Foster Care Students](#)
2. [US Department of Education Foster Care Toolkit](#)

Identifying Children and Youth in Foster Care Situations

- Liaison is notified that there is a student with pending enrollment that could be in the foster care system.
- Students confirmed to be in the Foster Care system will be enrolled immediately, even if documentation typically required is not received.
- Notification comes from Enrollment, the Operation Team or any school staff
- Liaison contacts foster parent via phone to confirm they are enrolling a student who is in foster care.
- Liaison inquiries about hotspot, computer and additional needs to be sent if needed.
- Liaison creates a log in Power School file with the information gathered by foster parent.
- Liaison tags the student as Foster Care in Power School.
- Liaison adds foster care student to the MKV section.

- Liaison accounts for student in the Excel spreadsheet entitled State Reporting document to provide to the State of Michigan
- **Students are added to MKV section to follow support protocol set for MKV students.**

NOTE: Students in foster care are no longer considered under the McKinney Vento federal act. However, the obligation to account for the student in accordance with state requirements remains in effect. Since foster care students require additional support and the liaison has contacts with a state foster care worker to ensure their meeting their state educational requirements, they are grouped with students who are receiving MKV supports.