



National Center for Homeless Education
Supporting the Education of Children and
Youth Experiencing Homelessness
www.serve.org/nche



BEST PRACTICES IN HOMELESS EDUCATION BRIEF SERIES

Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Important Information for New Liaisons

INTRODUCTION

Homeless children and youth experience many challenges in enrolling and attending school and achieving educational success. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (reauthorized under Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and subsequently referred to as the McKinney-Vento Act in this brief) ensures rights and services for homeless children and youth that remove barriers to their education.

School districts or local educational agencies (LEAs) are responsible for identifying homeless children and youth and linking them with educational and other services. The McKinney-Vento Act requires every school district to appoint a local homeless liaison (local liaison) [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)]. A local liaison who has the skills and capacity to carry out the position is key to ensuring that homeless children and youth receive all protections and services necessary for them to succeed in school.

By describing a set of steps to orient new local liaisons to their position, this brief will assist with

- Understanding the responsibilities of the position;
- Becoming familiar with procedures and resources for serving homeless students in their LEA;

Who is homeless?

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (as reauthorized by Title X, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended)

The term “homeless children and youth”—

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and
- B. includes —
 2. 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; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
 3. 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...
 4. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 5. 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).

- Determining where to target time and effort; and
- Identifying resources and support for becoming an effective homeless liaison.

The brief also includes information on and links to helpful resources.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL HOMELESS LIAISON

Every LEA, whether or not it has a McKinney-Vento subgrant, is required to carry out the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act. LEAs must appoint a local liaison who will ensure that

- Homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through coordination with other agencies;
- Homeless children and youth enroll in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, schools in the LEA;
- Homeless families, children, and youth receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start and preschool programs administered by the LEA, and referrals to health care, dental, mental health, and other appropriate services;
- The parents or guardians of homeless children and youth 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;
- Public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youth is disseminated where they receive services, such as schools, family shelters, and soup kitchens;
- Enrollment disputes are mediated according to the McKinney-Vento Act; and
- The parents and guardians of homeless children and youth, and all unaccompanied homeless youth, are fully informed of

all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing transportation to and from the school of origin. [42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(6)(A)]

The *Non-Regulatory Guidance* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, F-2) lists the following activities that local liaisons must conduct:

- Assisting homeless children and youth with enrolling in school and accessing school services;
- Helping homeless children and youth obtain immunization or medical records;
- Informing parents, school personnel, and others of the rights of homeless children and youth;
- Working with school staff to make sure that homeless children and youth are immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of disputes that might arise over school enrollment or placement;
- Helping to coordinate transportation services for homeless children and youth; and,
- Collaborating and coordinating with the State Coordinator and with community and school personnel responsible for providing education and related support services to homeless children and youth.

NEW LOCAL LIAISON SELF-ASSESSMENT

The checklist in [Appendix A](#) is a self-assessment tool for new local liaisons to determine their level of preparedness to be a local liaison and to identify areas in which they need to build expertise. New local liaisons are encouraged to review the checklist and discuss professional development needs with their supervisor or the State Coordinator for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program.

FIRST STEPS FOR BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE LOCAL HOMELESS LIAISON

1. Connect with the Office of the Coordinator for Homeless Education in the state educational agency (SEA).

Every SEA has a coordinator for the homeless education program. The State Coordinator provides training and technical assistance to LEAs and is a key figure to orienting new liaisons to their position. Upon designation, the local liaison should contact the State Coordinator to ensure that his or her name is added to the email distribution list for all local liaisons to apprise them of professional development opportunities and federal and state updates. Moreover, the State Coordinator will assist with unique challenges and situations in the LEA and inform new liaisons of state-specific policies related to serving homeless children and youth. For State Coordinator contact information, visit the following link: <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/sccontact.pdf>.

2. Learn about the McKinney-Vento Act and good implementation practices.

The McKinney-Vento Act is the federal law that requires states and school districts to remove barriers to the education of homeless children and youth. It guarantees

- Rights to immediate enrollment even if records are not present,
- School stability so that homeless children and youth may remain in their same school even if they find temporary housing outside of the school district (if this is in the student's best interest), and
- Academic and other supports to enable them to be successful in school.

Local liaisons should become familiar with the provisions of the law and good practices for its implementation.

Several resources are available through the National Center for Homeless Education

(NCHE), which operates the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program:

- The McKinney-Vento Act (<http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/mv-full-text.docx>);
- *The Homeless Liaison Toolkit* (http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/liaison_toolkit.php);
- Briefs on specific topics related to the McKinney-Vento Act; (<http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/briefs.php>); particularly useful briefs include
 - » “Determining Eligibility for Rights and Services Under the McKinney-Vento Act” (http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf), and
 - » “Guiding the Discussion on School Selection” (http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/sch_sel_checklist.pdf);
- Monthly webinars (<http://center.serve.org/nche/web/group.php>); and
- Helpline assistance by phone (800-308-2145) or email (homeless@serve.org)

3. Become familiar with the LEA's homeless education program.

Local liaisons should learn as much as possible about services for homeless students in their LEA and about homelessness in the broader community. There should be a number of records and documents with information on homeless students, including memos, phone and email logs, data submitted for the Consolidated State Performance Report, monitoring reports, Title IA expense reports for the homeless set aside, and subgrant applications (if the LEA has received a McKinney-Vento subgrant). LEA program administrators who have worked with homeless students are also an important source of information.

Questions to explore include:

- How much time is allocated to the local homeless liaison position? What additional

staff support is in place?

- How many homeless children and youth did the LEA identify last year? What is the level of poverty in the school district? Does the number of homeless children and youth identified seem appropriate for the level of poverty?
- Does the LEA have a McKinney-Vento subgrant? If so, what are the approved activities to serve homeless children and youth? What are the reporting responsibilities? For how long will the LEA receive funds through this grant?
- How much money is set aside for services for homeless children and youth through Title I, Part A? How was the amount of these funds determined? On what were these funds spent last year? How may they be accessed?
- What are current processes and protocols for identifying and enrolling homeless children and youth, linking them to services, and collecting data?
- What are the challenges to implementing the McKinney-Vento program in the LEA? What are barriers noted by homeless parents, school staff, teachers, and program administrators?
- How many disputes between homeless parents and the LEA have taken place, and what is the nature of the disputes? How were the disputes resolved? Were any practices put in place to prevent disputes in the future?
- Who are contacts in key programs, such as Title I, special education, pupil transportation, child nutrition, and pupil services?
- Who are the local liaisons in neighboring LEAs and charter schools?
- What are the key community agencies with whom the LEA collaborates to provide services for homeless students and their families?

In addition to gathering information about services for homeless students, the new liaison should become familiar with existing processes and protocols. Liaisons should initiate conversations with program coordinators, school enrollment staff, and the prior liaison, as well as review records, handbooks, or other written documents to determine what processes and protocols are in place for the following with regard to homeless students:

- Conducting outreach and identification
- Facilitating immediate enrollment
- Guiding the discussion on school selection with parents or unaccompanied youth
- Arranging transportation to and from the school of origin
- Facilitating the dispute process
- Linking homeless students to programs and services, such as Title IA and child nutrition
- Providing school supplies, basic clothing, and hygiene items
- Coordinating with community services
- Serving unaccompanied homeless youth

4. Plan the work.

Keep organized. Effective local liaisons report a number of time-saving strategies that enable them to provide timely responses to situations that arise. Tips include:

- Keep documents such as handbooks, the *Homeless Liaison Toolkit*, memos from the State Coordinator, the McKinney-Vento Act, the state's McKinney-Vento dispute resolution process, and key briefs readily available;
- Store most frequently used documents on your computer's desktop for quick reference;
- Keep records of phone calls and emails in order to be able to identify persistent barriers and note trends to guide you in planning trainings and technical assistance;
- Keep contact information for program

administrators and collaborators on hand, and schedule periodic meetings and phone calls with them;

- Create a calendar that notes important deadlines (state trainings, deadlines for data submission, monitoring visits) and busy times of the year when it is important to reserve time for or have additional staffing on hand, such as the beginning and end of the school year;
- Designate a contact at each school with whom you will communicate and whom you will involve in trainings; and
- Develop written procedures and protocols for identifying, enrolling, and serving homeless students.

Address urgent needs. Most local liaisons find that their days are filled with situations that require immediate attention, and new liaisons can find themselves overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of problems, whether they involve complicated eligibility determinations, school selection decisions, cross-program coordination, or compliance issues. Reaching out to supervisors, local liaisons from other LEAs, the State Coordinator, or NCHE will enable liaisons to draw upon good practice and alleviate the feeling of isolation.

Plan for improvement. Note areas for improvement for removing educational barriers for homeless children and youth and set a few realistic goals to achieve during the year. Learn from those more experienced in the field, including other liaisons, the State Coordinator, and NCHE staff. The *Homeless Education Toolkit* provides a wealth of practical strategies to implement. Some local liaisons expand their capacity by convening ad hoc committees or task forces to address challenges for serving homeless children and youth.

Maintain cross-program collaborations and community partnerships. Cross-program and interagency collaboration are key to ensuring a coordinated approach to providing services for homeless children, youth, and families

and to linking them to resources. Liaisons should contact program coordinators on a regular basis to increase their awareness of the needs of homeless children and youth and to ensure that students can access services easily. Programs to contact include Title I, child nutrition, transportation, special education, and public preschool programs. Community and business/faith-based partners will enable liaisons to address broader needs of homeless children, youth, and families, such as health and housing. Liaisons should identify task forces and advisory boards on which to serve, such as homeless coalitions, U.S. Housing and Urban Development-funded programs, and youth shelters.

5. Participate in professional development opportunities.

A wealth of knowledge exists for creating effective homeless education programs. New liaisons should contact the State Coordinator for state-level trainings, participate in NCHE webinars, and attend the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY). The NAEHCY conference is the only conference that focuses specifically on the educational needs of homeless children and youth. For more information, visit <http://www.naehcy.org/conference/conference>. Not only will liaisons learn strategies to implement in their LEA, but they will become connected to a strong, supportive network of experts and advocates.

SUMMARY

Becoming an effective local homeless liaison does not happen overnight. If new liaisons are willing to learn about the law, identify challenges in their school district, and learn from colleagues, they will be able to maintain the existing program and make improvements.

Five key steps to becoming an effective local homeless liaison are:

1. Connect with the Office of the Coordinator

for Homeless Education in the SEA.

2. Learn about the McKinney-Vento Act and good implementation practices.
3. Become familiar with the LEA's homeless education program.
4. Plan the work.
5. Participate in professional development opportunities.

REFERENCES

Title X, Part C, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. 20 USC 6301. (McKinney-Vento Act). Retrieved from <http://center.serve.org/nche/legis/mv.php>

U. S. Department of Education. (2004). *Education for Homeless Children and Youth program non-regulatory guidance*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf>

APPENDIX A. LOCAL HOMELESS LIAISON SELF-ASSESSMENT

Rate your experience, knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the position of local homeless liaison on each of the following items from 5-0, with 5 being well qualified to 0 needing significant assistance to be prepared for the position. Note areas for needed improvement, and discuss these with your supervisor or your State Coordinator so he or she can point you to professional development resources. Total possible points: 135

Rating	Experience
	Program coordination
	Working with at-risk students
	Working in the school system as a teacher, administrator, counselor, or social worker
	Working with parents
	Cross-program or cross-agency collaboration
	Knowledge
	Homelessness and its challenges for families, children, and youth
	McKinney-Vento Act
	State specific laws and policies that impact homeless children and youth
	Responsibilities of the local liaison and LEA
	LEA and federal education programs that serve homeless children and youth
	Community resources for homeless children and families
	Contacts in other LEAs
	LEA budgeting system
	SEA and LEA data collection system
	Skills
	Communicating clearly orally and in writing
	Developing clear and logical procedures and protocols, related to homeless students' school enrollment, transportation, and referrals to services
	Establishing trust and communication with homeless children and families
	Demonstrating leadership in enforcing the law and communicating clear expectations for school and LEA staff and administrators
	Diffusing or resolving conflicts
	Organizing and managing multiple tasks
	Record keeping
	Training and professional development
	Initiating and maintaining collaborative relationships with LEA and community programs and services
	Attitudes and Values
	At-risk children need and deserve support to succeed
	Decisions should be child-centered, best interest determinations
	Services for those most vulnerable should go above and beyond those for other children and youth when necessary
	Homeless children and youth should be protected under the rights and services offered through the McKinney-Vento Act
	TOTAL

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800-308-2145 (Toll-free Helpline)

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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.

Local Contact Information: