



National Center for Homeless Education
Supporting the Education of Children and
Youth Experiencing Homelessness
<http://nche.ed.gov>



BEST PRACTICES IN HOMELESS EDUCATION BRIEF SERIES

Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Making the Right Selection and Supporting their Effectiveness

This NCHE brief assists school district administrators with

- understanding the responsibilities of the local homeless education liaison;
- selecting a local liaison who has the experience, knowledge, skills, and attitude to perform effectively in the position; and
- ensuring the local liaison has the time, authority, and support to carry out his or her responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness often is accompanied by poverty, stress, and instability. As a result, children and youth in homeless situations frequently must overcome many educational challenges. Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized in 2015 by Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.; hereafter *the McKinney-Vento Act*), guarantees educational rights and supports for students experiencing homelessness, and seeks to remove any barriers these students may face in succeeding in school.

The McKinney-Vento Act requires local educational agencies (LEAs, hereafter *school districts*) to identify children and youth experiencing homelessness [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(i)], and connect them with educational and other needed supports [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(iv)]. The Act also requires every school district to designate an appropriate staff person, known as the local homeless education liaison, (hereafter *local*

McKINNEY-VENTO DEFINITION OF HOMELESS 42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)

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 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...;
 - 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).

liaison), who is able to carry out the duties of the position as described in the law [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)]. A local liaison who has the knowledge, skills, time, and authority to carry out the position is key to ensuring that children and youth experiencing homelessness receive all protections and services necessary for them to succeed in school. This brief will help school district administrators understand the duties of the local liaison, select a local liaison who is able to perform effectively in the position, and provide the local liaison with the support needed to fulfill the responsibilities of the role. Briefs on additional homeless education topics are available at <https://nche.ed.gov/briefs.php>.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL LIAISON

Every school district, whether or not it receives dedicated homeless education funding in the form of a McKinney-Vento subgrant, is required to carry out the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act. As the district's key homeless education contact, the local liaison plays a key role in ensuring compliance with the Act in schools throughout the district. The McKinney-Vento Act includes a "job description" of sorts for the local liaison in the form of a list of duties, as detailed below.

According to the Act [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)], local liaisons must ensure that

- (i) children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
- (ii) children and youth experiencing homelessness are enrolled in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, schools within the district;
- (iii) children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Early Head Start and Head Start programs, early intervention services under Part C of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, and other preschool programs administered by the school district;
- (iv) children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness receive referrals to health care,

dental, mental health, substance abuse, housing, and other appropriate services;

- (v) the parents or guardians of students experiencing homelessness 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;
- (vi) public notice of the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness is disseminated in locations frequented by families and youth experiencing homelessness, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth;
- (vii) enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the provisions of the Act;
- (viii) parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness are fully informed of all transportation services available to McKinney-Vento students, including transportation to the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing transportation;
- (ix) school personnel providing services to students experiencing homelessness receive professional development and other support; and
- (x) unaccompanied youth
 - (I) are enrolled in school;

SERVICES PROVIDED BY LOCAL LIAISONS

In a 2012 survey, local liaisons reported spending the most time identifying children and youth experiencing homelessness (66%), ensuring that these children, youth, and their families receive services (47%), and coordinating transportation (37%).

Nearly all local liaisons reported providing school supplies to students experiencing homelessness (91%), while 78% reported helping coordinate efforts between schools and agencies that provided services to these students (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2015).

- (II) have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as other children and youth; and
- (III) are informed of their status as independent students under the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. § 1087vv), and receive assistance verifying this status for purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

The McKinney-Vento Act also states the following regarding the role of the local liaison:

- State Coordinators for Homeless Education (hereafter *State Coordinators*) and school districts must inform school personnel, service providers, advocates working with families experiencing homelessness, parents and guardians of students experiencing homelessness, and students experiencing homelessness of the duties of the local liaison, and publish an annually updated list of local liaisons on the State education department’s website [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(B)].
- Local liaisons must coordinate and collaborate with State Coordinators and community and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to students experiencing homelessness. This coordination must include collecting and providing the State Coordinator with reliable, valid, and comprehensive data on students experiencing homelessness per the requirements of the Act [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(C)].
- Local liaisons who receive training on the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definitions of *homeless* may affirm, without further agency action by HUD, that a child or youth receiving McKinney-Vento services in their school district, or the immediate family of such a child or youth, who meets the HUD definition of *homeless* is eligible for services through HUD’s Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions Grants Programs [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(D)].

JOB QUALIFICATIONS OF THE LOCAL LIAISON

To be well-positioned to fulfill the duties of the position as outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act, a school

district’s local liaison should possess certain qualifications in the form of experience, knowledge, skills, and attitude.

EXPERIENCE

Educational institutions are complex systems with a myriad of policies, priorities, and procedures. The local liaison should have experience working within the State or school district educational system in order to minimize the learning curve for understanding how the McKinney-Vento program operates within the broader educational landscape. The person considered for the position also should have experience in program coordination, and in working with parents, children, and youth who are facing difficult circumstances.

KNOWLEDGE

The local liaison should understand the challenges faced by impoverished and homeless children, youth, and families, including unaccompanied youth and preschool-aged children. The liaison also should understand the rights and services provided to children and youth experiencing homelessness through the McKinney-Vento Act and other Federal and State laws and programs. The person must have a clear understanding of the requirements of the local liaison position, and the State educational agency (SEA) and school district systems in which these requirements will be enacted, including the budgeting system and State student data collection system. The local liaison also should be aware of State and school district policies, and other State and local policies, that impact children and youth experiencing homelessness; for example, an understanding of reporting requirements for runaway youth and minor medical consent laws is critical for serving unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. In addition, an effective local liaison is familiar with community resources that may provide assistance to needy students and their families.

SKILLS

The local liaison position requires a broad set of professional skills. Clear oral and written communication is central to the work. The local liaison will need to provide leadership and guidance to administrators and staff in the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in the form of professional development and technical assistance with case-specific

situations. The liaison also will need to exercise skill and good judgment in diffusing disagreements and resolving disputes between parents, guardians, or unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and school staff over eligibility, school selection, enrollment, or other perceived barriers to a homeless student's education. Administrators should make candidates for the local liaison position aware that the job may be stressful at times, and explore with the candidate his or her ability to remain calm and focused while resolving issues and exercising self-care to avoid burnout.

The local liaison will need to have the ability to develop and maintain collaborative relationships with community agencies to ensure that McKinney-Vento students are linked to services that are beyond what the school or district provides. Finally, managing multiple and varied tasks, and keeping clear records also are important to the role.

ATTITUDE

Many school districts across the country report that the single factor that makes the greatest difference in building a strong homeless education program is having a local liaison who is passionate about ensuring that students experiencing homelessness can succeed in school. These local liaisons are committed to building trust with students and families they serve, navigating complex systems to get services in place, and inspiring others to go above and beyond to benefit students in homeless situations. They are not only administrators; they are also coordinators, champions, and mentors.

When considering candidates for the local liaison position, administrators should explore the person's perspectives on children and youth who are experiencing

EFFECTIVE COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Local liaisons surveyed in 2012 indicated that the coordination and collaboration efforts that most improved services for students experiencing homelessness were those focused on building programmatic linkages among organizations (40%), identifying barriers that impede access to school (36%), and reviewing district policies that affect homeless populations (36%) (ED, 2015).

homelessness, impoverished, or otherwise at-risk. It is critical that the person believe that

- at-risk children need and deserve support to succeed;
- decisions related to students experiencing homelessness should be child-centered and focused on removing educational barriers;
- services for the district's most vulnerable students should go above and beyond those provided to other students when necessary; and
- compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act and other laws that guarantee rights and services for students in homeless situations is paramount.

See [Appendix A. Qualifications Checklist for Local Liaisons](#) for a checklist that may be helpful when considering candidates for the local liaison position.

ROLE GROUPS TO CONSIDER FOR THE LOCAL LIAISON POSITION

The local liaison must be an employee of the school district. The position is frequently assigned to an existing staff person or administrator. District administrators may consider a variety of role groups for the local liaison position, but should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each. [Appendix B: Role Groups to Consider for the Local Liaison Position](#) explores role groups that may be considered for the position, including the potential strengths and weaknesses of each one.

Good practice suggests a careful review of the current responsibilities of the person under consideration for the position to ensure that person will have sufficient time, experience, and authority to carry out all local liaison duties, and will not have any conflicts of interest in identifying and serving students experiencing homelessness. District administrators should take steps to identify and address any deficits or disadvantages for someone from a particular role group being considered for the position.

A PROCESS FOR DESIGNATING A LOCAL LIAISON

While in most cases, the local liaison position is assigned to an existing administrator or staff member, in some cases, a school district will hire a new employee for the position. Regardless of how the position is filled, the

district should have a formal process for considering and documenting the qualifications of candidates. Districts are encouraged to develop a job description that includes qualifications, required duties, and time allocated to the position. See [Appendix C. Sample Local Liaison Position Description](#) for a sample job description.

School district administrators should not designate someone as the local liaison casually, especially if that person already has a full plate. The local liaison position should be viewed as a professional position, with the person filling the position having the appropriate qualifications, time, and desire to carry out the required responsibilities.

CREATING A FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

While getting the right person for the position of local liaison is essential, creating an environment in which that person can be successful is equally critical. To this end, district administrators should ensure that the local liaison has sufficient time, authority, training and technical assistance, and connection to other district programs to be effective.

TIME

One of the most common complaints among local liaisons is that they do not have adequate time to carry out their responsibilities. District administrators should review the legal requirements for the position and district data on the number of McKinney-Vento students enrolled in recent years, and allocate sufficient time for the local liaison to ensure that these students receive all needed supports and services. Administrators may wish to discuss the time allocation with former district local liaisons, liaisons from other districts, or the State Coordinator to determine what is realistic.

AUTHORITY

Local liaisons often state that they lack the authority they need to ensure full implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. In instances where a school or district staff member is resistant, local liaisons need to know that district administrators will support them and hold others accountable for compliance.

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

A wealth of knowledge exists to assist local liaisons with understanding the responsibilities of their position, and

implementing policies and services for students experiencing homelessness.

The State Coordinator is a key resource for local liaisons. The State Coordinator is required to provide professional development and technical assistance to local liaisons and other district staff to ensure that school districts are identifying students in homeless situations and serving them in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Act [42 U.S.C. § 11432(f)(6)]. In addition, the State Coordinator may provide assistance with thinking through case-specific situations - helping local liaisons understand nuances of the law and determine the best way to address particular challenges within their district. The State Coordinator also will inform local liaisons of State-specific policies and practices related to serving students experiencing homelessness. When an administrator appoints a new local liaison, he or she must provide the liaison's contact information to the State Coordinator so that it may be added to the local liaison contact list on the State education department's website. Helping State Coordinators maintain an updated list of local liaisons in districts throughout the State will ensure that liaisons receive communications related to the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program. State Coordinator contact information is available at https://nche.ed.gov/states/state_resources.php.

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) provides a variety of resources and supports for both new

EXPANDING LOCAL LIAISON CAPACITY

A 2015 informal survey of large school districts in North Carolina indicated that most districts expand the capacity of local liaisons by assigning time for addressing the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness to other staff, such as social workers, transportation coordinators, and student services personnel. Some of these staff members are school-based points of contacts that assist local liaisons at the school level, as needed. One liaison stated, "Even with small numbers, one homeless liaison cannot identify and form relationships with students without some type of support system in the schools."

and seasoned local liaisons, including:

- *Homeless Liaison Toolkit*, which provides an overview of the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act, suggests good practices, and includes sample forms and links to resources.
(https://nche.ed.gov/pr/liaison_toolkit.php)
- Homeless education webinars, offered free of charge on a monthly basis.
(<https://nche.ed.gov/web/group.php>)
- Homeless education issue briefs, which provide summaries of key legislative mandates, and suggest best practices for implementation. Of particular interest to new local liaisons is NCHE's *Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Important Information for New Liaisons*.
(<https://nche.ed.gov/pr/briefs.php>)
- A Homeless Education Helpline, where local liaisons can call or email for assistance with understanding the law and processing complex scenarios.
(800.308.2145, homeless@serve.org)

District administrators should encourage local liaisons to reach out to their State Coordinator, and attend all trainings offered by the State EHCY program. In addition, administrators should support local liaisons in utilizing NCHE resources, and attending the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY; <http://www.naehcy.org>), the only national conference that focuses on the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Administrators also should provide support to enable local liaisons to manage self-care and avoid burnout.¹ The regular experience of secondary trauma through the crises of the families and students with whom local liaisons work can potentially impact the ability of a local liaison to function effectively or remain in the position.

CONNECTION TO OTHER PROGRAMS

¹ The National Center for Trauma Informed Care (NCTIC), <https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic>, provides resources to assist service providers in working with people in crisis. The University of Buffalo School of Social Work provides a *Self-Care Starter Kit*, <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html>, that includes resources to assist care providers with addressing their needs.

Many district programs serve McKinney-Vento students, including pupil transportation, child nutrition, preschool, Title I, Title III, migrant education, and special education. District administrators should encourage all program coordinators, including the local liaison, to partner to serve students experiencing homelessness. Periodic cross-program meetings and joint trainings are effective ways to ensure that the needs of McKinney-Vento students are addressed across all district programs.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FOR SELECTING AND SUPPORTING LOCAL LIAISONS

Administrators in every school district must appoint an appropriate staff person to serve as the local liaison. This person must be able to carry out the duties of the position as established in the McKinney-Vento Act. A qualified and committed local liaison will ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified and provided the services they need to be successful in school. The recommendations below serve as a helpful guide in selecting the right person to carry out the responsibilities of the local liaison position.

- District administrators should be familiar with all the requirements of the local liaison position as specified in the McKinney-Vento Act.
- The district should have a formal process for selecting the best candidate for the local liaison position.
- The local liaison should have the appropriate experience, knowledge, skills, and attitude for the position.
- A local liaison who is passionate about serving children and youth experiencing homelessness is key

LOCAL LIAISON TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NEEDS

In a 2012 survey, local liaisons most often reported needing state technical assistance to help them better understand the legal requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act (56%); the legal responsibilities of the local liaison (55%); and how to collect, use, and report data on students experiencing homelessness (44%) (ED, 2015).

to building a successful district homeless education program.

- District administrators are responsible for ensuring that the local liaison has sufficient time allocated to carry out the duties of the position, and the authority needed to ensure compliance with the law.
- The State Coordinator is a key contact to assist the local liaison in understanding and carrying out the duties of the position.
- [NCHE](#) provides a wealth of resources, including a *Homeless Liaison Toolkit*, to support local liaisons in their understanding and implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act.

REFERENCES

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, 42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq. Retrieved from <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>

U.S. Department of Education [ED]. (2015). *State and district implementation of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/homeless/state-district-implementation-homeless-children-report.pdf>

APPENDIX A. LOCAL HOMELESS LIAISON SELF-ASSESSMENT

Rate the applicant for the local liaison position on each of the following items from 5-0, with 5 being well qualified and 0 being not qualified. Total possible points = 135.

EXPERIENCE	
	Program coordination
	Working with at-risk students
	Working in the school system as a teacher, counselor, social worker, or administrator
	Working with parents
	Cross-program and cross-agency coordination and collaboration
KNOWLEDGE	
	Homelessness and the hardships it creates for families, children, and youth
	The McKinney-Vento Act and other Federal laws that impact children and youth experiencing homelessness
	State laws and policies that impact children and youth experiencing homelessness
	District, State, and Federal education programs that serve children and youth experiencing homelessness
	Responsibilities of the local liaison and district to support the education of students experiencing homelessness
	Contacts in other districts
	District budgeting system
	State and district data collection systems
	Community resources for families and youth experiencing homelessness
SKILLS	
	Communicating clearly verbally and in writing
	Developing clear procedures and protocols related to school enrollment, transportation, and referrals to services for children and youth experiencing homelessness
	Establishing trust and communication with families and youth experiencing homelessness
	Demonstrating leadership in ensuring the full implementation of the law, and communicating clear expectations for school and district staff and administrators
	Diffusing or resolving conflict
	Organizing and managing multiple tasks
	Record keeping
	Delivering training and professional development
	Initiating and maintaining collaborative relationships with district and community programs
VALUES	
	Children in at-risk situations need and deserve support to succeed
	Decisions should be child-centered, focusing on the best interest of each student
	Services for the most vulnerable students should go above and beyond those provided to other students when necessary
	Children and youth experiencing homelessness should receive the rights and services offered through the McKinney-Vento Act

APPENDIX B. ROLE GROUPS TO CONSIDER FOR THE LOCAL LIAISON POSITION

ROLE GROUP	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Federal programs administrator	Familiarity with other programs that serve students experiencing homelessness; understanding of how Federal programs operate; administrative skills and authority; experience coordinating across programs	May have other job responsibilities that limit time to serve homeless children and youth; may not have sufficient background in understanding homelessness
School social worker, school counselor; student support services, dropout prevention, and/or at-risk services personnel	Background in working with families, children, and youth in homeless or at-risk situations; familiarity with trauma-informed care	May lack the authority to ensure district-wide compliance with the law; may lack sufficient expertise in educational strategies
Educator	Expertise in academic strategies to improve the school success of students experiencing homelessness	May lack the authority to ensure district-wide compliance with the law; may lack experience working with families, children, and youth in homeless or at-risk situations
Superintendent, assistant superintendent	Has authority to implement and ensure district-wide compliance with the law; has authority to develop, review, and revise district policies	Other job responsibilities could limit time available for serving students experiencing homelessness; may lack experience working with families, children, and youth in homeless or at-risk situations; possible conflict of interest in identifying children who may require significant district resources to be served
Pupil transportation director	Knows the policies, procedures, and strategies for arranging transportation for students experiencing homelessness; has administrative skills	May lack experience working with families, children, and youth in homeless or at-risk situations and linking them to educational and other services; may lack the authority to ensure district-wide compliance with the law; possible conflict of interest in making school selection best interest determinations that may require significant pupil transportation coordination and/or funds
School secretary, support staff	May have direct experience and insight into working with families, children, and youth in homeless or at-risk situations; may serve well as the “eyes and ears” for identifying students experiencing homelessness given his/her frontline work	May lack sufficient background in social work or education for identifying and addressing needs of students in homeless or at-risk situations; may lack the authority and/or standing to ensure district-wide compliance with the law

APPENDIX C. SAMPLE LOCAL HOMELESS LIAISON POSITION DESCRIPTION

Position: Title I Specialist / McKinney-Vento Liaison

Location: Education Center

Employment Term: Full-time – 12 months

QUALIFICATIONS

- Master's degree in education or social work required
- 5-7 years teaching and/or counseling experience
- Strong oral, written, and interpersonal communication skills
- Possession of, or ability to obtain, a valid State education or instruction specialist certification
- 3 years of administrative responsibility preferred
- Previous experience working in a Title I program or school preferred
- Bilingual in Spanish preferred
- Familiarity with the State and/or district data collection system preferred

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Reviews and revises policies and procedures to ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are enrolled in school and receive educational services
- Provides training and professional development to district and school staff about the educational rights and needs of students experiencing homelessness
- Works collaboratively with schools and administrative offices to provide technical and compliance support related to the McKinney-Vento Act
- Works with parents and students experiencing homelessness to provide educational support
- Prepares and submits reports to the State education department
- Maintains records and documentation for district monitoring by the State Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program
- Ensures that data on students experiencing homelessness is collected by the district and submitted to the State education department
- Responds to and resolves difficult and sensitive inquiries and complaints regarding McKinney-Vento compliance
- Collaborates with community agencies providing services to families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness, as needed
- Participates in professional development activities on an annual basis

This brief was developed by:
National Center for Homeless Education
800-308-2145 | homeless@serve.org
<http://nche.ed.gov>

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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 oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at http://nche.ed.gov/states/state_resources.php.

For more information on issues related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, contact the NCHE helpline at 800-308-2145 (toll-free) or homeless@serve.org.

Local Contact Information:

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a light beige background and a thin brown border, intended for local contact information.