



Guiding Discussion on School Selection

**National Center for Homeless Education
Adapted from the Texas Homeless Education Office
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McKinney-Vento Act

“722(g)(3)(B) Best Interest—In determining the best interest of the child or youth under subparagraph (A), the local educational agency shall—

- (i) to the extent feasible, keep a homeless child or youth in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wished of the child’s or youth’s parent or guardian;*
- (ii) provide written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal under subparagraph (E), to the homeless child’s or youth’s parent or guardian, if the local educational agency sends such a child or youth to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian; ...”*

2004 U.S. Department of Education Guidance

“G-4. What should a school district consider when determining the extent to which it is feasible to educate a homeless child in his or her school of origin?

As stated above, to the extent feasible, a district must educate a homeless child or youth in his or her school of origin, unless doing so is contrary to the wishes of the parent or guardian. The placement determination should be a student-centered, individualized determination. Factors that an LEA may consider include the age of the child or youth; the distance of a commute and the impact it may have on the student’s education; personal safety issues; a student’s need for special instruction (e.g., special education and related services); the length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location; and time remaining in the school year.”

How LEAs and Parents (Guardians) can Make Best Interest Decisions

In order for parents or guardians to make informed decisions about selecting the school that is in their child's best interest, they need to have as much practical information as possible. Parents may have less knowledge and information about the implications of the choice they will make for the student than the homeless liaison or other district staff involved in the enrollment process. The homeless liaison and school or school district staff can serve an instrumental role in assisting parents with choosing a school that is in the best interest of their children.

The homeless liaison, teachers, and other school staff can

- Reinforce the importance of school stability and education continuity for children
- Provide valuable input to the parents on the academic, social, and emotional impact that transferring to a new school could have on a particular child
- Help the parents find out which programs at the two schools are comparable and appropriate for the child and make arrangements for the parents and child to visit the school considered for a possible transfer
- Provide information on the distance to the schools under consideration, both in terms of miles and travel time. A parent needs to know that while a district must provide transportation to a homeless student who wants to remain at the school of origin, this transportation only applies to compulsory school attendance during the regular school day--districts are not obligated to provide transportation from the school of origin after regular school hours. Therefore, transportation from

after-school activities is not mandated and a student's ability to participate in extra-curricular activities might be affected

- In the event that the LEA selects a school other than the one the parents feel is in their child's best interest, provide a written explanation to the parents and explain their right to appeal the decision—in the event of a dispute, these steps are mandatory

Key Questions to Consider

1. How permanent does the family's move appear to be?
2. How deep are the child's ties to his or her current school?
3. How anxious is the child about his or her family's upcoming move?
4. How strong is the child academically?
5. To what extent are the programs and activities at the potential new school comparable to or better than those at the current school?
6. Does one school have programs and activities that the other school does not have that addresses unique needs or interests of the student?
7. Would the timing of the transfer coincide with a logical juncture, i.e., after testing, after an event that is significant to the child, or end of the school year?
8. How would the length of the commute impact the child?
9. Are there any safety issues to consider?

Decisions regarding the school of origin should be made on a case-by-case basis, for each individual student. The following chart may help liaisons guide a discussion on the options available to parents and the advantages and disadvantages for each school available. If a district has large numbers of homeless and mobile students, it may be beneficial to train several staff members to work with parents in this decision-making process.

Checklist for Decision Making

School of Origin Considerations

- Continuity of instruction
Student is best served due to circumstances that look to his or her past
- Age and grade placement of the student
Maintaining friends and contacts with peers is critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation; the student has been in this environment for an extended period of time
- Academic strength
The child's academic performance is weak, and the child would fall further behind if he/she transferred to another school
- Social and emotional state
The child is suffering from the effects of mobility and has developed strong ties to the current school and does not want to leave
- Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education or special needs
A lengthy commute may affect the student's concentration, attitude, or readiness for school; the advantages of the school environment outweigh the disadvantages introduced by the commute
- Personal safety of the student
The school of origin has advantages for the safety of the student
- Student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be better met
- Length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location
The student's current living situation is outside of the school-of-origin attendance zone but his living situation or location continues to be uncertain; the student will benefit from the continuity offered by attending school in the same location
- Likely area of the family's or youth's future housing
Location of future housing is uncertain, could be in any number of communities
- Time remaining in the school year
There is only a short time left in the school year, and the child would likely have difficulty recovering academically, socially, or emotionally from the transition to a new school close to the end of the school year

Local Attendance Zone Considerations

- Continuity of instruction
Student is best served due to circumstances that look to his or her future
- Age and grade placement of the student
Maintaining friends and contacts with peers in the school of origin is not particularly critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation; student has been in the new school of origin for only a brief time
- Academic strength
The child's academic performance is strong and at grade level, and the child would likely recover academically from a transfer to another school
- Social and emotional state
The child seems to be handling mobility and does not feel strong ties to the current school and does not mind transferring
- Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education or special needs
A shorter commute may help the student's concentration, attitude, or readiness for school; the local attendance zone school can supply all of the necessary educational and special needs resources for the student
- Personal safety of the student
The local attendance zone school has advantages for the safety of the student
- Student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be better met
- Length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location
The student's current living situation is within the school attendance zone and his living situation appears more stable and less likely to change suddenly; the student will benefit from the developing relationships with peers in school who live in his immediate community
- Likely area of the family's or youth's future housing
Location of future housing is uncertain, but could very well be in this community
- Time remaining in the school year
There is considerable time left in the school year, and the child could most likely recover academically, socially, and emotionally from the transition

School of Origin (continued)

- School placement of siblings
Other siblings are attending this same campus/district

- Student must meet all of the attendance criteria for school
Tardiness or absences are likely to become a problem because the student may miss the school bus or other transportation provided by the district due to inconvenient pick-up times in order to accommodate the distances/time needed to get to school; students experiencing homelessness are not exempt from the regular student provisions pertaining to tardiness or absences, and transportation provided through alternative means may not be reliable

- Student's participation in after-school tutoring or extra-curricular activities
School districts are not obligated to provide transportation home from after-school activities, so a student dependent upon school transportation may not be able to participate fully in these activities; some schools require students who are performing below standard to participate in after-school tutoring in order to be assured of promotion and other educational benefits; student does not plan to participate in any after-school activities

- Parent is able to participate in parent-teacher organizations and in conferences with teachers to address their student's needs
Distance to school and access to transportation may or may not hinder a parent's ability to fully participate in the educational environment and experiences of the student; limited access to teachers and school activities could lessen the school experience for the student; distance to school could make this a difficult obstacle

- Administration of medicines or special care to students; access to parents in case of illness
Parents must decide if they will be able to meet the school requirements for dealing with the administration of medicines to a student or for picking up a student from school who is ill

- Other considerations:
- _____
- _____
- _____

Local Attendance Zone (continued)

- School placement of siblings
No other siblings are attending the school-of-origin campus; other siblings are attending the school-of-origin campus/district but there is nothing to keep them from changing schools

- Student must meet all of the attendance criteria for school
Tardiness and absences are likely to be minimal because of the travel times required to get to school as a result of the location of the school; pick-up times for the school bus are more convenient because of the proximity of the school.

- Student's participation in after-school tutoring or extra-curricular activities
Student's proximity to the school will be less likely to impact on participation in after-school tutoring and extracurricular activities; student is more likely to participate in required after-school activities that could affect promotion or other educational benefits

- Parent is able to participate fully in parent-teacher organizations and in conferences with teachers to address their student's needs
Distance to school access to transportation may or may not hinder a parent's ability to fully participate in the educational environment and experiences of the student; limited access to teachers and school activities could lessen the school experience for the student; proximity to school could lessen this obstacle

- Administration of medicines or special care to students; access to parents in case of illness
Proximity of school may make it easier to meet the school requirements for dealing with the administration of medicines to a student or for picking up a student from school who is ill

- Other considerations:
- _____
- _____
- _____