

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT, INCLUDING DISASTER RESPONSE

“We wanted to serve them, but we get hung up on the paperwork requirements. The [McKinney-Vento] law allowed the district to move very expediently. It gave us the flexibility to serve the human being, and not worry about the documentation.”

School District Administrator and Former Principal

“We just used our regular McKinney-Vento policies that we already had. If the McKinney-Vento Act was not in existence, a lot of our children would’ve fallen through the cracks, because of policy. So it really helped out—enrollment without a parent, immunizations, that they must have transportation. Otherwise, kids would’ve been turned away for no records, even though we knew their records were under water.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

School districts that have been impacted heavily by disasters agree that the McKinney-Vento Act was the cornerstone of their response. In fact, the procedures and systems that districts use to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness form the basis for responding to any disaster. From identifying families and youth in homeless situations, to ensuring immediate enrollment and appropriate placement, to providing critical supportive services such as physical and mental health care, transportation, and meals, McKinney-Vento programs are school districts’ “First Responders” in disaster situations.

Recognizing the importance of a robust McKinney-Vento program in disaster response, most of the tools in Section II are generally applicable to implement the basic requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act. Section II concludes with tools for managing data, the media, and donations.

A. LOCAL LIAISON UNDERSTANDS THE RIGHTS OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH, AND DISTRICT POLICIES ARE IN LINE WITH THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT, TO SUPPORT THE FULL, EFFICIENT, AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF FEDERAL LAW.

“We already had our program, and we were already working with homeless families, so it was easier to respond to the hurricanes.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

The McKinney-Vento Act confers various rights on children and youth experiencing homelessness, to ensure that they can enroll in and attend school. Those rights allow homeless children and youth to:

- Go to school, no matter where they live or how long they have lived there. Students must be given access to the same public education, including preschool education, provided to other children.
- Continue in their school of origin - the school they attended before they became homeless or the school in which last enrolled if that is their choice and is “feasible.”
- Receive transportation to and from the school of origin, upon request.
- Attend school and participate in school programs with those who are not homeless. Children and youth cannot be separated from the regular school program because they are homeless.
- Enroll in school without giving a permanent address. Schools cannot require proof of residency that might prevent or delay school enrollment.
- Enroll in school and attend classes while the school arranges for the transfer of school and immunization records or any other documents required for enrollment.
- Enroll and attend classes in the school of their choice (school of residence or school of origin) even while they and the school seek to resolve a dispute over enrollment.
- Receive the same special programs and services, if needed, as provided to all other children served in these programs.
- Receive transportation to and from school, comparable to that of other children in the school district.

It is imperative that local homeless education liaisons understand these rights. More information on the McKinney-Vento Act is available from NCHC at <http://www.serve.org/nche>, as well as in the resources listed in Section II.B.2 below.

To ensure that the rights of children and youth are implemented fully in states and school districts, the McKinney-Vento Act requires all state and local educational agencies to develop, review, and revise their policies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention in school of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Of course, this includes children and youth experiencing homelessness due to natural or other

disasters. Such policies are critical for the full, efficient, and effective implementation of the Act, resulting in the enrollment and attendance of homeless students in school.

During disasters, strong district policies are even more important. They provide schools with something tangible to uphold during the confusion of initial disaster response. If school and district personnel are familiar with McKinney-Vento policies and practices, the immediate school district response to a disaster will be more deliberate and appropriate. This section provides tools to assist in:

- 1. Developing strong McKinney-Vento policies in school districts**
- 2. Developing additional policies specific to disaster situations**

I. DEVELOPING STRONG MCKINNEY-VENTO POLICIES IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The following tips taken from a “Sample Local Educational Agency (LEA) Policy to Implement the McKinney-Vento Act” may help school districts develop flexible, appropriate policies to implement the McKinney-Vento Act and respond effectively to disasters.



TIPS FOR DEVELOPING A LOCAL POLICY FOR HOMELESS EDUCATION

The entire LEA community can be involved in developing a new policy. Often, one person taking the lead is enough to get a new policy enacted. Strategic allies in getting LEA policies revised may include:

- Superintendent and assistant superintendents
- School board members
- Title I and other federal programs directors
- School staff, including school counselors, social workers and teachers
- The mayor
- City council members
- County government officials
- Other city and county agencies, such as departments of housing, social services, child and families, transitional assistance, welfare and/or Medicaid
- Parents and students
- Homeless coalitions
- Domestic violence coalitions and agencies
- Legal aid attorneys
- Community advocates
- HUD Continuum of Care programs
- Family and youth shelter and service providers
- The faith-based community
- Higher education, including schools of education, law, public policy, social work, nursing, sociology and psychology
- State legislators
- The state educational agency
- The state board of education

Ways to involve these allies in the process initially may include:

- Using the requirements and rationale of the McKinney-Vento Act as support for needing new policies
- Sharing positive results from districts that have already revised their policies
- Taking them on tours of shelters and/or schools, as appropriate
- Making direct personal contact and explaining how the policies affect real children, schools, and the LEA as a whole ¹

In addition to the strategic allies listed above, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) can also support local liaisons' efforts in working with school boards. NSBA has featured the McKinney-Vento Act in its national publications and at its annual conference. For example, see Q&A at http://www.nsba.org/site/doc_cosa.asp?TrackID=&SID=1&DID=33536&CID=164&VID=50 and *Helping Homeless Students: Complying with the McKinney-Vento Act*, an April 22, 2004 audio conference, available to order at <http://www.nsba.org/site/docs/31500/31483.pdf>

¹ Julianelle, P. (2003). *Sample Local Educational Agency policy to implement the McKinney-Vento Act*. Retrieved August 6, 2006, from the National Center for Homeless Education website: http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_g.pdf

SAMPLE LEA POLICY

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty drafted a sample LEA policy. The policy was adapted from the existing policies of LEAs around the country, the requirements of the reauthorized McKinney-Vento Act and No Child Left Behind Act, and U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance. It is broad and specific and can be abbreviated or otherwise adapted to accommodate the needs of any LEA. It is located in Appendix E of the NCHC *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit* http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_f.pdf

2. DEVELOPING ADDITIONAL POLICIES SPECIFIC TO DISASTER SITUATIONS

While McKinney-Vento policies form the backbone of a school district's disaster response, crisis situations also require additional policies beyond those mandated by the McKinney-Vento Act. For example, school districts should be prepared for disasters with policies that address the following challenges:

- Hiring temporary employees, including teachers, counselors, secretaries, bus drivers, and others
- Obtaining emergency certification and clearance for out-of-state or new staff, including teachers, bus drivers, and counselors
- Evaluating the structural safety of buildings to determine if students can return safely to damaged school sites
- Accepting monetary donations and donations of goods and services (See Section II. J for strategies and tools)
- Gathering and managing information needed for potential reimbursements from the state, FEMA, the U.S. Department of Education, or other sources (See Section II. H for data management strategies and tools)
- Requesting short-term, emergency waivers of class size limits
- Purchasing, renting, and/or installing necessary infrastructure, including portable classrooms, air conditioners, heating units, desks, books, buses, sanitary facilities, and others

“If we had to purchase something, if we had to purchase an air-conditioning unit, we utilized the emergency purchasing procedures that the law allows us to do in the case of emergency.”

School District Administrator

The following tips from the Pennsylvania Center for Safe Schools and Communities may assist school districts in developing good policies for responding to the unique challenges posed by disasters.

TIPS FOR DEVELOPING POLICIES FOR DISASTER RESPONSE

Where to begin. . . A good crisis plan takes its lead from clear and supportive district policies. These policies, in turn, must mesh with local and state laws, ordinances, and procedures. For example, you would not want your district's policy on weapons to contradict the procedures of your local law enforcement agencies. Where to begin? Check federal, state, and local mandates (laws, standards, codes, regulations). Because the regulations are binding on a school district, it's a good idea to start with them. Here are some steps to follow:

First, examine federal, state, and local policies and procedures. You may find these in:

- agency directives and memoranda
- bulletins from central office
- community agencies' files (police, protective services, emergency management agency, courts, mental health agencies, hospitals and health care agencies).
- individual school building guidebooks

Second, be sure you have a policy and procedures for each of these potential crisis situations

- facilities problems (electrical outage, heating, plumbing)
- unrest, protests, strikes
- natural disasters or events (weather)
- transportation delays, problems, and accidents
- individual child accidents (indoors and outside)
- medical problems affecting many (head lice, meningitis)
- individual medical crises (including alcohol and other drugs)
- individual mental health crises (depression, suicidality, trauma)
- intentional acts against persons (abuse; assault; rape; assaults with chemical, syringe, mace; bomb threats; sexual harassment; bullying)
- hostage situations
- kidnapping or missing person
- intentional acts against property (theft, vandalism, graffiti)
- events outside school that affect the school community (students/staff witnessing a crime or accident, airline crash)

Third, collaborate on policies. "Swap" policies and procedures with other youth-serving agencies in your community. Request policies from comparable institutions. If you do not have a solid relationship with the other schools, law enforcement, and youth-serving agencies in your community, this policy-and-procedure discussion may be a good place to begin an ongoing dialogue. ²

² Note. From "Developing good crisis plans" by M. M. Kerr, 1997. Copyright 1997 by Center for Safe Schools and Communities. Adapted with permission. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.safeschools.info/developcrisis.php>

Self Assessment II. A

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in applying the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless and implementing identification strategies.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence	In existence but not effective	Moderately successful	Successful but needs improvement	Strength of the program

A. Local liaison understands the rights of homeless children and youth, and district policies are in line with the McKinney-Vento Act, to support full, efficient, and effective implementation of federal law.

The school district has reviewed and revised all its policies to ensure they are in compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act.	1	2	3	4	5
The school district has reviewed and revised all its policies to ensure they provide for smooth implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act	1	2	3	4	5
The school district has reviewed and revised all its policies to ensure they support the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth in school.	1	2	3	4	5
The school district conducts ongoing reviews of all its policies in light of the needs and legal rights of students experiencing homelessness.	1	2	3	4	5
School district policies contemplate and support positive, interdisciplinary disaster response and recovery.	1	2	3	4	5
School district policies contemplate and support effective, interdisciplinary disaster response and recovery.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

30-40 Points This is a strength of the program.

20-29 Points The program is moderately successful in this area.

<20 Points This area is weak. Needs program improvement.

B. LOCAL LIAISON HAS A FULL UNDERSTANDING OF THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT'S DEFINITION OF HOMELESS, AND EXPEDITED IDENTIFICATION STRATEGIES ENSURE THAT CHILDREN AND YOUTH ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES ARE IDENTIFIED.

While not all students displaced by disasters are eligible for McKinney-Vento services, most are. Students who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence are considered homeless under the law and are eligible for services. Therefore, in most cases, children and youth made homeless by disasters should receive McKinney-Vento services.

Schools must know who and where students experiencing homelessness are in order to serve them. This requires both: (1) understanding how to apply the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless; and (2) increasing awareness of homelessness and the McKinney-Vento Act in schools and the broader community, including disaster relief agencies. This section offers tools to assist school districts in both of these tasks.

It is important to note that displaced children and youth may be harder to locate and draw into school than other homeless students. The practical burdens and overall trauma experienced by families and youth affected by disasters may tend to keep them away from school. Families may also believe they will return home shortly, and therefore be hesitant to enroll their children in a new school. Others may be traveling to their former home regularly to make repairs or look for work, causing their children to miss school.

"Also for many people, school just wasn't a priority. They'd had the opportunity at the Reliant Center, but didn't enroll there, and then they went to hotels. They were working on clothes, food, and housing, and not enrolling their kids. So we went out to hotels and enrolled there. HEB is a grocery store, and they donated \$100 gift cards, so we gave out a gift card when they enrolled, and then a second gift card when they got on the bus."

Local Homeless Education Liaison

"A lot of them are going back to [their former homes] every other week, and the kids are missing school."

Local Homeless Education Liaison

"We are also dealing with truancy issues in the trailer parks. We are working with truancy officers."

Local Homeless Education Liaison

STRATEGIES TO FIND DISPLACED STUDENTS AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO ENROLL IN AND ATTEND SCHOOL

- Use TV, radio, and school billboards to send a message to parents and youth that the school welcomes them. (See Section II.I for strategies and tools for media outreach).
- To the extent possible, register students where they are located rather than requiring them to come to a school or registration center, as lack of transportation or child-care may be a barrier. (See Section I.C.1.)

“My responsibility was to get teams out everywhere to register children—shelters, hotels, homes, etc. They were registered with a paper registration form.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

- Talk with parents and students about any reservations they may have about enrolling in school, including mental health concerns (See Section II.D.2.)
- Inform parents and students of all the services and supports school can offer them, including free meals, clothing, school supplies, and physical and mental health support.
- Provide snacks, a comfortable place to sit, and mental health support in registration centers to help families and youth feel comfortable.

“The fact that area restaurants donated lunch and we provided breakfast so there was always something to eat or drink at registration, was really important. People just went on and on about how nice we were to them. If they wanted to sit there all day, we let them. That worked really well.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

- Talk to parents about their housing options and intentions.
- Inform parents and students of their right to remain in the school of origin, to the extent this is feasible, even if they move.
- Inform parents and students of their transportation options.
- Take advantage of community relations and collaborations to locate students (see Sections I.A and I.B, pages for collaboration strategies and tools).

“Our outreach efforts that we had with our community worked really well. Churches and shelters all knew I was the homeless liaison, so they contacted me to tell me when they were bringing people from the Astrodome.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

- Take advantage of community relations and collaborations to provide services for parents on school grounds, such as pro bono legal assistance (see Sections I.A and I.B. for strategies and tools.)
- Put appropriate mental health supports in place in the schools (see Sections II.E.2 and III.A.)
- Provide welcoming activities for parents and students (See Section II.E.2.)

I. UNDERSTANDING HOW TO APPLY THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT'S DEFINITION OF HOMELESS

Understanding the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless is a critical first step to identifying and serving children and youth experiencing homelessness. Appendix 5 contains a brief entitled *Determining Eligibility for Rights and Services Under the McKinney-Vento Act*, which is a detailed tool to help school districts determine if particular students are eligible for McKinney-Vento services. The tool supports local liaisons in making case-by-case eligibility determinations by providing a flowchart, definitions of key terms, questions to solicit information from families and youth, and additional strategies.

Eligibility determinations should follow this general outline:

Step 1: Get the facts. What is the family's or youth's situation?

Strategies and questions designed to help determine the extent to which the children and their families or the youth are living in a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Step 2: Analyze the facts. Is the student eligible for McKinney-Vento services?

A. Does the child or youth's living situation fit into one of the specific examples of homeless listed in the law? These examples include:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- Living in a motel, hotel, trailer park, or camping ground due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- Living in an emergency or transitional shelter
- Abandoned in a hospital
- Awaiting foster care placement
- Living in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
- Living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting

B. If the child's, family's, or youth's situation does not fit any of the examples provided in the definition, consider the following: Is the child or youth living in another situation that is not fixed, regular, and adequate?

Consult Appendix 5 for the detailed definitions and eligibility tool or visit the NCHC website at http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Determining Homelessness by the Definition. National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (2003). A flowchart to help guide schools in determining if a child or youth is eligible for protections and services under the McKinney-Vento Act.

http://www.nlchp.org/fa_education/flowchart.pdf

Who Is Homeless? (McKinney-Vento Law Into Practice Issue Brief Series). NCHE (2002). A brief explaining the definition of homeless.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/who_is_homeless.pdf

Identifying Students in Homeless Situations. (McKinney-Vento Law Into Practice Issue Brief Series). NCHE (2002). A brief providing strategies to identify students experiencing homelessness.

<http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/identification.pdf>

Who are Homeless Children and Youth? flyer from the *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*. NCHE. A two-page summary and explanation of who is considered homeless under the MV Act.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_b.pdf

2. INCREASING AWARENESS OF HOMELESSNESS AND THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT IN SCHOOLS AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY

Local liaisons use varied strategies to increase awareness of homelessness and the McKinney-Vento Act in their communities including:



A particularly effective strategy for increasing awareness among school staff is to identify a homeless education contact in each school building. With support from the local liaison, this contact can increase awareness in the school and the local community. Appendix F in NCHE's *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit* contains a School-Level Point of Contacts form for naming school-level contacts and an information sheet explaining the role and importance of school-level contacts.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_f.pdf

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following additional resources can support awareness efforts:

Educational rights posters for parents and youth, in Spanish and English. NCHE. Posters for raising awareness throughout the community, including schools, shelters, motels, food pantries, social services offices, health clinics, laundromats, and other locations. Order online at http://www.serve.org/nche/online_order.php#hard_copy or call 1-800-308-2145

Parent brochure, in English and Spanish. NCHE. A brochure to explain the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness and inform parents about ways in which they can support their children's education during times of mobility.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/parentbrochure_eng.pdf

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/parentbrochure_sp.pdf

Homeless Education: An Introduction to the Issues. NCHE. A brief to introduce community and school district members to homelessness and the McKinney-Vento Act.

<http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/introduction.pdf>

McKinney-Vento online training presentations. NCHE. These presentations, complete with audio and video, give brief introductions to key issues covered in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

<http://www.serve.org/nche/training.php#breeze>

Enrollment Ready Reference for Schools. NCHE. A fold-out card for enrollment personnel that explains the basics of the McKinney-Vento Act and suggests enrollment strategies. Order online at http://www.serve.org/nche/online_order.php#hard_copy or call 1-800-308-2145

Educating Homeless Children and Youth: The 2005 Guide to Their Rights. National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (2005). A Q&A booklet that provides an overview to the McKinney-Vento Act.

[http://www.nlchp.org/FA%5FEducation/Basic%20McKinney%20Booklet%20\(2005\).pdf](http://www.nlchp.org/FA%5FEducation/Basic%20McKinney%20Booklet%20(2005).pdf)

Family Brochure. Project HOPE, Virginia (2005). Brochures for families in English and Spanish.

<http://www.wm.edu/hope/infobrief/Engbrochure.pdf>

<http://www.wm.edu/hope/infobrief/BrochureSpan.pdf>

Questions and Answers on Homeless Education. Project HOPE, Virginia (2005). A Q&A brief with basic information about the McKinney-Vento Act. <http://www.wm.edu/hope/infobrief/QA.pdf>

Homeless Education Awareness Folder. NCHE. A sturdy, laminated folder that can be customized with local information to inform colleagues and potential donors about the issues central to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Order online at http://www.serve.org/nche/online_order.php#hard_copy or call 1-800-308-2145

Student Residency Questionnaire. Texas Homeless Education Office. In English and Spanish. http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/pdf/files/RP11_StuResidencyQues_RevFeb04.pdf

Introduction to Homelessness and Introduction to the McKinney-Vento Law. Texas Homeless Education Office. PowerPoint presentations. <http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/toolkits.html#powerpoints>

Poverty USA Tour. U.S. Conference of Bishops (2004). A multi-media, web-based presentation to increase awareness of poverty in the U.S. and explain why families in poverty confront homelessness.

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/cchd/povertyusa/tour2.htm>

Common Signs of Homelessness. NCHE. Flyer from the *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_c.pdf

Tip Sheets. NCHE. *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*. For school administrators, school nurses, guidance counselors, teachers, school secretaries, and parents.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_i.pdf

Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit. NCHE. Chapter 6 offers strategies for increasing awareness in the school and community. <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/chapters.pdf>

Webpage Development Form. NCHE. *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*. A sample form for developing an LEA or SEA homeless education website.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_h.pdf

Kids Without Homes Toolkit: Awareness and Compliance Manual. Region 12 Education Service Center in collaboration with Region 10 Education Service Center and the Texas Homeless Education Office. A toolkit with awareness materials for a wide variety of school and district personnel.

<http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/KidsWithoutHomes.html>

Unaccompanied and Homeless Youth Review of Literature (1995-2005). NCHE (2005).

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/uy_lit_review.pdf

Domestic Violence, Homelessness, and Children's Education. (McKinney-Vento Law Into Practice Issue Brief Series). NCHE. A brief describing the connection between domestic violence and homelessness, with strategies for service providers and schools.

<http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/domestic.pdf>

Migrant Children and Youths Experiencing Homelessness: Rights and Services Through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. (McKinney-Vento Law Into Practice Issue Brief Series). NCHE. A brief describing the connection between migrant workers and homelessness, with strategies for collaborations and schools.

<http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/migrant.pdf>

Self Assessment II. B

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in applying the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless and implementing identification strategies.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence	In existence but not effective	Moderately successful	Successful but needs improvement	Strength of the program

B. Local liaison has a full understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless, and expedited identification strategies ensure that most children and youth are eligible for services and identified.

The local liaison and others understand how to apply the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless.	1	2	3	4	5
Awareness activities are sufficient to ensure that most educational personnel can identify children and youth who may be eligible for services.	1	2	3	4	5
The district utilizes a uniform method for identifying children and youth who may be eligible for services (e.g., residency information form, disaster response survey, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Awareness materials are available in bulk, present at every school, and can be disseminated to community agencies (e.g., program brochures, posters, pocket folders, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Disaster relief agencies in the community are aware of the McKinney-Vento Act and the extent to which the definition of homeless covers children and youth displaced by disasters.	1	2	3	4	5
The local liaison and others are trained in identification procedures to provide technical assistance.	1	2	3	4	5
A data management system is in place for tracking and reporting students identified for services.	1	2	3	4	5
Strategies are in place for identification and outreach to families coping with the trauma and practical burdens of displacement by a disaster.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

30-40 Points This is a strength of the program.

20-29 Points The program is moderately successful in this area.

<20 Points This area is weak. Needs program improvement.

C. IMMEDIATE ENROLLMENT STRATEGIES ENSURE THAT BARRIERS TO ENROLLING AND REMAINING IN SCHOOL ARE ELIMINATED.

Children and youth experiencing homelessness, including those displaced by disasters, often lack documents typically required for school enrollment. Upon fleeing a disaster, it is unlikely that families would have gathered immunization records, birth certificates, or school records. They are unlikely to be able to produce proof of residency in their temporary locations. Some youth may have been separated from their parents and are staying with friends or relatives or on their own, without any formal guardianship arrangement.

The McKinney-Vento Act requires that states and school districts eliminate barriers to immediate school enrollment for students experiencing homelessness. Local homeless education liaisons overcome the challenges associated with immediate enrollment by using practical strategies such as streamlining paperwork and using alternate forms to substitute for documents that are normally required.

Tip: When enrolling displaced students, school districts should consider trying to match students with the schools where they will feel most comfortable. Sensitive enrollments can help prevent mental health and academic problems later on.

“It was important to do due diligence in relocating students in school sites that closely matched where they came from, pairing them with students, pairing them with faculty members, and trying to lessen the emotional burden. We also had some folks that actually had relatives in the area, and we would try and locate them at schools where their relatives lived.”

School Administrator

This section contains tools and strategies to assist school districts with the immediate enrollment of all homeless students, including specific strategies related to displaced students:

1. Forms for use during the enrollment process
2. Talking to parents and youth: Timing of enrollment and school selection
3. Enrollment checklist
4. Dealing with overcrowding when receiving a large number of displaced students
5. Other enrollment tools

I. FORMS FOR USE DURING THE ENROLLMENT PROCESS

Many school districts use simple forms to assist in identifying, enrolling, and serving students experiencing homelessness. These forms are key strategies to help gather information immediately upon enrollment and to start appropriate services immediately. The following five forms are attached in Appendix 6 and available at the websites indicated.

Sample Student Residency Questionnaire. From *Education For Homeless Children And Youth Program Non-Regulatory Guidance*. U.S. Department of Education (Updated July 2004). A one-page sample student residency questionnaire to help identify students in homeless situations. (p.37)

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/guidance_jul2004.pdf

Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Common Form. Illinois State Board of Education. A two-page enrollment form in Spanish and English to help identify students in homeless situations and assess their needs.

<http://homelessed.net/schools/default.htm> (under “Common Form”)

Educational Services For Homeless/Transitional Students Confidential Referral Form. Louisiana Department of Education (2003). This one-page form should be filled out upon enrollment to assess the basic services a student experiencing homelessness needs, including transportation, clothing, tutoring, school records, school supplies, mental health support, and medical attention.

<http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/uploads/2529.pdf>

Caregiver’s Authorization Form. NCHE. *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*, Appendix D. A reproducible form to allow caregivers to enroll unaccompanied youth in school.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_d.pdf

Dispute Resolution Process School Sample Form. From *Education For Homeless Children And Youth Program Non-Regulatory Guidance*. U.S. Department of Education (Updated July 2004). Sample forms for informing parents of an enrollment decision contrary to their wishes and beginning the dispute resolution process. (p.38)

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/guidance_jul2004.pdf

An additional resource for enrollment personnel is the *Enrollment Ready Reference for Schools* from NCHE. This fold-out card explains the basics of the McKinney-Vento Act and suggests enrollment strategies. Order online at:

http://www.serve.org/nche/online_order.php#hard_copy or call 1-800-308-2145

2. TALKING TO PARENTS AND YOUTH: TIMING OF ENROLLMENT AND SCHOOL SELECTION

The following strategies can help guide local homeless education liaisons and school enrollment personnel in discussing enrollment options with displaced parents and youth.

A. TIMING OF ENROLLMENT

After experiencing violence or a serious loss as a result of a major disaster or other event, children and youth may be traumatized. Local liaisons have reported that some students are so traumatized following a major disaster that they may need a few days with their parents to begin to feel safe again, prior to enrolling in school. In addition, following large-scale evacuations such as those caused by Hurricane Katrina, families and youth may be placed in large, congregate shelters for a few days pending a more stable placement. In instances of immediately pending moves, it may be in the students' best interests to delay enrollment for a few days so as to coordinate school enrollment with housing placements.

As a general practice, it is important for children and youth experiencing homelessness to be enrolled in school immediately. Immediate enrollment in school can provide students with safety, a routine, meals, clothing, academics, mental health services, and friendship. Immediate enrollment is also a legal right of homeless students under the McKinney-Vento Act. In certain individual cases, however, parents or unaccompanied youth may choose to delay school enrollment for a very brief period of time to give students a chance to regain their emotional footing and find a more stable housing situation. This delay must be the voluntary choice of the parent or youth; any school denying immediate enrollment to a student experiencing homelessness would be violating the McKinney-Vento Act.

Appendix 7 contains a checklist of suggested questions that local liaisons and enrollment personnel can ask to guide this discussion with parents and unaccompanied youth.

B. SCHOOL SELECTION

"[T]o 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."³

³ U.S. Department of Education. (2004, July). *Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Non-Regulatory Guidance*. [Sec 722(g)(3)]

Parents and youth experiencing homelessness may need assistance in choosing between the school of origin and the local school. This may be particularly true for those displaced by disasters, since they may be completely unfamiliar with the local schools and community. To assist parents and youth with school selection, the local liaison and/or school enrollment personnel can:

- Reinforce the importance of school stability and educational continuity for students.
- Provide input on the academic, social, and emotional impact that transferring to a new school may have.
- Help the parents and youth find out which programs at the two schools are comparable and appropriate for the child and make arrangements for the parents and youth 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.

The checklist in Appendix 8 may help local liaisons guide a discussion on school selection. It is also available for download at: http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/sch_sel_checklist.pdf. If a school district has large numbers of homeless and mobile students, it may be beneficial to train several staff members to assist parents in this decision-making process.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

“Determining Feasibility of School Placement.” NCHE. Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit, Appendix D. Instructions and questionnaire for determining the feasibility of students remaining in their schools of origin.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_d.pdf

3. ENROLLMENT CHECKLIST

Appendix 9 contains a checklist to help local homeless education liaisons and enrollment personnel ensure that students are enrolled in school immediately, placed in appropriate classes, welcomed warmly into the school community, and able to participate fully in school activities.



4. DEALING WITH OVERCROWDING WHEN RECEIVING A LARGE NUMBER OF DISPLACED STUDENTS

Overcrowding can be an issue in school districts that receive large numbers of displaced students. Several strategies can help districts address this issue, including:

- Consider capacity issues when determining school placements for students from large, congregate shelters.
- Work with disaster relief agencies and housing agencies to locate housing near schools with greater capacity.
- Request temporary waivers of class-size laws.
- Install portable classrooms on school grounds.
- Hire retired and displaced teachers.
- Re-open closed schools.
- Re-open schools that were closed temporarily for repairs.

5. OTHER ENROLLMENT TOOLS

- “Potential Enrollment Barriers and Possible Solutions.” NCHE. *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*. (Chapter 3 Table 2.). A chart that notes enrollment barriers and strategies to remove them. <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/chapters.pdf>
- *Enrollment*. (McKinney-Vento Law Into Practice Issue Brief Series) NCHE (2002). A brief explaining the McKinney-Vento Act requirements for immediate enrollment with strategies for implementation. <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/enrollment.pdf>
- *School Selection*. (McKinney-Vento Law Into Practice Issue Brief Series) NCHE (2002). A brief explaining the McKinney-Vento Act requirements for school of origin with strategies for implementation. http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/school_selection.pdf
- *From the School Office to the Classroom*. NCHE (March 2006). A handbook with basic information and strategies for confronting various enrollment barriers, including issues related to guardianship, immunizations, academic records, special education, mental health needs, academic placement and support, and enrolling large numbers of displaced students. http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/dis_hb/enrollment.pdf
- *Resolution of Disputes*. (McKinney-Vento Law Into Practice Issue Brief Series). NCHE (2002). A brief explaining the McKinney-Vento Act requirements for dispute resolution with strategies for implementation. <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/resolution.pdf>
- “Ensuring Enrollment for Unaccompanied Youth.” NCHE. *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*. NCHE. Brief on suggested methods to ensure immediate enrollment for unaccompanied youth, including state laws, school board policies, and caregiver forms. http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_d.pdf
- *Unaccompanied Youth*. (McKinney-Vento Law Into Practice Issue Brief Series). NCHE. A brief explaining the McKinney-Vento Act’s requirements for unaccompanied youth with extensive strategies for implementation. <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/youth.pdf>

Self Assessment II.C

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in eliminating barriers to immediate enrollment.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1
No evidence
2
In existence
but not effective
3
Moderately
successful
4
Successful but
needs improvement
5
Strength of the
program

C. Immediate enrollment strategies ensure that barriers to enrolling and remaining in school are eliminated.

All enrollment personnel are aware of the McKinney-Vento Act's requirements for immediate enrollment and trained in enrollment procedures.	1	2	3	4	5
District personnel understand that the "immediate enrollment" rights of homeless children and youth temporarily exempts them from the requirement of providing academic, health, and discipline records in order to enroll in school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents are active participants in the enrollment process – including making decisions about school location, timing, and the selection of programs.	1	2	3	4	5
District and school personnel have policies and procedures in place to collect information and guide a quick analysis of information based on available resources about the student being enrolled.	1	2	3	4	5
During times of disaster, enrollment procedures are coordinated with housing providers and shelters.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents, school administrators, and staff understand "school of origin" services, frequent mobility, and feasibility issues used to determine school placement with parent involvement.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents, school administrators, and staff understand the definition of "unaccompanied youth" and the procedures for establishing temporary guardianship or "in loco parentis" rights.	1	2	3	4	5
There is a system in place for the purchase and provision of school uniforms.	1	2	3	4	5
There is a system in place to accommodate sibling enrollments.	1	2	3	4	5
There is a system in place to address over-crowding and safety concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
All schools have access to school supplies that may be required for participation and can be given to students in need.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has developed and adopted a federally-required dispute resolution procedure related to school of origin services.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

- 50-60 Points** This is a strength of the program.
- 40-49 Points** The program is moderately successful in this area.
- <40 Points** This area is weak. Needs program improvement.

D. STRATEGIES ARE IMPLEMENTED FOR PLACING STUDENTS IN APPROPRIATE CLASSES WITHOUT ACADEMIC RECORDS AND FOR OBTAINING COMPLETE SCHOOL RECORDS.

Due to their mobility, students in homeless situations often arrive to enroll in school without academic records. Students fleeing disasters and violence are even less likely to have records. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, receiving schools must contact previous schools immediately to obtain academic records. Schools must also maintain the records of homeless students such that they are available to be transferred to subsequent schools in a timely fashion. Despite these legal requirements, academic records may not always be available quickly. This is particularly true for displaced students whose home schools may have been destroyed or severely damaged in the disaster.

While waiting for records to arrive, schools must enroll students experiencing homelessness and place them in the most appropriate academic environment possible. Implementing creative strategies to make the best possible immediate placement is imperative for several reasons. First, as homeless students already suffer the effects of school mobility, it is important that their first classroom placement be appropriate to avoid further disruption of academic progress. The individual student's academic progress will be impacted negatively by inappropriate placement and subsequent changes, as will the well-being of classmates who are subjected to the student's entry and removal. Students with special needs are at an even higher risk of emotional, mental, and academic disruption caused by a change in placement.

When students are mobile between states, these risks are even more acute due to differences in academic standards. For example, 80 percent of students who were displaced to Texas by Hurricane Katrina did not pass Texas tests to proceed to the subsequent grade. Texas schools provided intensive summer school for those students but still faced large-scale retentions. Immediate, appropriate academic placements may help avoid some of these consequences. Intensive academic and mental health support is also critical (see Sections III.A and III.C for strategies and tools).

This section offers the following tools to assist in appropriate academic placements for students without records:

- 1. Tools for obtaining academic records**
- 2. Placing students without records**
- 3. Enrolling students with special needs**
- 4. Strategies to help preserve records in cases of disasters**

I. TOOLS FOR OBTAINING ACADEMIC RECORDS

A note on the privacy of academic records: FERPA, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, DOES allow transferring records between schools without parental consent when a child is changing schools.

ELECTRONIC DATABASES

“The State Department of Education was able to give us information on the majority of the children, through a statewide database that the school counselors could access. That database even had special education information. They were able to be placed and served right away, thanks to the state database.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

More and more states and school districts are putting academic records into electronic databases. The hurricanes of 2005 underscored the usefulness of such databases in transmitting academic records quickly, particularly when previous records had been destroyed. School counselors were provided access to databases directly or through CDs. Databases can include a wide array of academic information, including age, grade level, classes, grades, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and special needs, while still containing adequate safeguards to preserve student privacy. School districts and states should consider establishing such databases and including the most extensive academic information possible, particularly relating to special needs students.

ORDERING BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Most states have online forms to order copies of birth certificates. A simple web search using your state’s name and the term “birth certificate” should yield the information. For example:

- **Alabama:** <http://ph.state.al.us/Chs/VitalRecords/Birth/BIRTH.HTML>
- **California:** <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/chs/ovr/BirthOrderCert.htm>
- **Florida:** http://www.doh.state.fl.us/planning_eval/vital_statistics/birth_death.htm
- **Louisiana:** <http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/offices/page.asp?id=252&detail=6489>
- **Mississippi:** <http://www.msdh.state.ms.us/phs/forms/form522i.htm>
- **New York:** <http://www.dhfs.state.ny.us/VitalRecords/birth.htm>
- **Pennsylvania:** http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/CWP/view.asp?A=168&QUESTION_ID=202219
- **Texas:** http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/pdf/RP15_BVS_birthcertApp_English.pdf (English) and http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/pdf/RP16_BVS_birthcertApp_Spanish.pdf (Spanish).
- **Wisconsin:** <http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/VitalRecords/birth.htm>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

From the School Office to the Classroom. NCHE (March 2006). A handbook with basic information and strategies for confronting various enrollment barriers, including issues related to academic records, placement, and support. http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/dis_hb/enrollment.pdf

Prompt and Proper Placement: Enrolling Students Without Records. In Appendix 10 and available at: <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/assessment.pdf>

2. PLACING STUDENTS WITHOUT RECORDS

“Once they were registered at school, the school did the schedules for those children. Every school had an enrollment team with every needed personnel on it—preK, special ed. preK, special ed., regular ed., etc. They started with the basic schedule, and made adjustments based on the information the family could provide.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

As demonstrated by schools across the country, it is very possible to place students without academic records in appropriate classes immediately. To do so requires implementing strategies for gathering information, conducting rapid assessments, and making good placement decisions. The NCHE brief, *Prompt and Proper Placement: Enrolling Students Without Records*, attached in Appendix 10, contains such strategies. The brief is also available at <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/assessment.pdf>.

3. ENROLLING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

SEAS (Special Education Automation System), a private, web-based data management system used in many school districts, allows immediate transfer of special education information between schools. SEAS was a vital tool following the hurricanes of 2005. A majority of the school districts affected by Hurricane Katrina used SEAS. Computer Automation, the maker of SEAS, was able to transfer IEP information directly to receiving school districts in cases in which the prior school district was not operational. Computer Automation worked with the Departments of Education in Louisiana and Mississippi to allow this information to be available upon request by the receiving district. For more information about this database, visit: <http://www.computerautomation.com/>

The following information based on *From the School Office to the Classroom*, summarizes the legal requirements and some basic strategies for enrolling and serving students with special needs experiencing homelessness:

ENROLLING AND SERVING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Students who have special education needs must be enrolled in school and provided the most appropriate services possible immediately. **For students who are not changing school districts**, their current IEPs remain in effect (or, if they are still in the process of being evaluated, the process must continue uninterrupted). Strategies for serving students who are changing school districts vary slightly depending on whether the students have a current IEP.

For students entering a new district with current IEPs, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the enrolling school to provide appropriate services, comparable to those described in the IEP, immediately. The new district then must hold a meeting with the parents to adopt the previous IEP or create a new one.

To streamline special education services for displaced students at the Astrodome, Houston Independent School District conducted IEP meetings on-site as special needs students were enrolled. Students arrived at school the first day with a current Houston IEP, and services were put in place immediately.

If the previous school district was in the process of doing evaluations or developing an IEP but hadn't finished the process, the new district must continue with the process immediately. IDEA now says that standard evaluation time limits do not apply to students who change school districts while evaluations are pending, but only if the new district is 'making sufficient progress to ensure a prompt completion of evaluations' and 'the parent and the LEA agree to a specific time when the evaluation will be completed.' Therefore, enrolling districts must ensure that evaluations are completed promptly and set a deadline with the parents, or they must complete the evaluations within the time remaining from the original referral.

THE EVALUATION SHUFFLE

While evaluations are in process or before services are implemented, special needs students may be struggling in regular classrooms, unable to make any academic progress. To avoid this situation, schools must coordinate evaluations with prior schools and implement creative strategies to expedite evaluations and services. For example:

- Get from the previous school(s) all the evaluations, questionnaires, and other paperwork completed on the student.
- Talk to the school counselor, teachers, and evaluation team from the previous school(s) about the student's needs.
- Implement appropriate supportive services immediately. Services such as academic support, behavior management interventions, priority seating, mentors, and others can be extremely helpful and don't need to be labeled as special education.
- Collaborate with community medical and mental health providers, Medicaid service providers, social workers, and others to pursue necessary evaluations.
- Consult with your special education team to see if interim IEPs or other interim services can be provided.

For students who are changing districts and have not been evaluated, but whose academic level, behavior, or parents indicate that special education services may be needed, the enrolling school should work with the parent to begin the evaluation process immediately.

Accessing Special Education for Unaccompanied Youth

IDEA requires that an appropriate adult sign for special education evaluations and services for a student under 18 years old: a parent, foster parent, guardian, person legally responsible for the child, or person with whom the student is living and who is acting in the place of a parent (check with your special education team to see if this person must be related to the student). Since many unaccompanied youth do not have such an adult in their lives, IDEA now requires school districts to assign surrogate parents for unaccompanied youth within 30 days.

Surrogate parents must be trained in special education procedures and cannot be school district employees or anyone who might have a conflict of interest. For unaccompanied youth, however, appropriate staff of emergency shelters, transitional shelters, independent living programs, and street outreach programs can be temporary surrogates while someone who meets the legal criteria is found. These temporary surrogates should be appointed immediately so the evaluation process can begin.⁴

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Hurricane Katrina and Relocated Students With Special Needs: Recommendations for Receiving Schools. National Association of School Psychologists (2005). Comprehensive brief with practical strategies for providing services to students with special needs in the absence of an IEP. http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/katrina_specneeds.html

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004: Provisions for Children and Youth with Disabilities Who Experience Homelessness. NCHE. A brief outlining the most relevant changes to IDEA in 2004 for enrolling and serving children experiencing homelessness. <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/idea.pdf>

Prompt and Proper Placement: Enrolling Students Without Records. NCHE (2006). <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/assessment.pdf> Reprinted in Appendix 10.

Unlocking Potential! Project HOPE Virginia. Briefs with basic information on the rights of homeless children with special needs and strategies to provide them services. For families and shelters: <http://www.wm.edu/hope/infobrief/family-complete.pdf>
For special education staff: <http://www.wm.edu/hope/infobrief/personnel-complete.pdf>

4. STRATEGIES TO HELP PRESERVE RECORDS IN CASES OF DISASTERS

Appendix 11 contains a checklist to help evacuating schools preserve health and academic records in cases of evacuations and disasters, thus ensuring a smoother transition into new schools for evacuating students.

⁴ NCHE (2006). *From the school office to the classroom*, Retrieved August 11, 2006 from: http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/dis_hb/enrollment.pdf

Self Assessment II. D

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in placing students without records and obtaining school records.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence	In existence but not effective	Moderately successful	Successful but needs improvement	Strength of the program

D. Strategies are implemented for placing students in appropriate classes without academic records and for obtaining complete school records.

There is a system in place for aggressive pursuit of any or all records, including academic records, that may be available for homeless children and youth.	1	2	3	4	5
There is a system in place to collect information quickly about the students' needs for immediate supplemental services, including mental health and academic support.	1	2	3	4	5
District and school personnel have access to a variety of quick assessment strategies and tools in multiple languages that can be utilized to guide critical academic placements in areas such as reading, language, and math.	1	2	3	4	5
Strategies, policies, and procedures effectively address immediate enrollment and placement for special needs populations (i.e., teen parents, special education students, students with 504 and health plans, pre-kindergarten, ESOL, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
There is a system in place to execute expedited or transitional Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for special education students.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has established a pool of surrogate parents for special education students and unaccompanied youth.	1	2	3	4	5
Strategies and procedures are in place to preserve records in cases of disasters.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

27-35 Points This is a strength of the program.

18-26 Points The program is moderately successful in this area.

<18 Points This area is weak. Needs program improvement.

E. AGGRESSIVE AND TIMELY STRATEGIES ENSURE FULL, PRODUCTIVE PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING TACTICS TO ADDRESS PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS.

“It’s one thing to accommodate students into your schools that are displaced, but it’s another thing to get them in school and actively engaged in learning again.”

School District Administrator

Beyond just getting children registered and placed in school, school districts must enact strategies to engage them actively in learning. Such strategies must address the immediate physical and mental health needs of students in homeless situations, including those displaced by disasters. Schools must also work to involve students in extracurricular activities and the social life of the school. These interventions help incorporate students and families into the school community and are essential for the well-being of the students and the schools. The McKinney-Vento Act requires that homeless students be enrolled immediately with the definition of enrollment including attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

“We’re educators, and we wanted to get them in school. But I think that we need to remove barriers to learning and teaching, and those emotional and physical and trauma issues are barriers.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

This section contains tools to assist schools in addressing immediate physical and emotional barriers to learning, including:

- 1. Obtaining health records and addressing physical health needs**
- 2. Welcoming students and families into the school community and addressing immediate mental health needs**
- 3. Preventing conflicts between new and pre-existing students and serving all homeless children and youth**
- 4. Ensuring access to participation in school athletics and extracurricular activities**
- 5. Contact list for students who have experienced a traumatic event**

I. OBTAINING HEALTH RECORDS AND ADDRESSING PHYSICAL HEALTH NEEDS

“And we had nurses who did triage on-site. We interviewed parents right there to ask about any health problems or issues, so if someone had asthma or needed a prescription, we got it taken care of.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

The McKinney-Vento Act requires that schools enroll homeless students immediately, even if they cannot produce documents that are typically required for enrollment. As such, schools must enroll immediately any homeless students who do not have immunization records or other medical records. Schools, in conjunction with the local liaison and the family, should then work to obtain those documents and/or necessary health services. Collaborating with the local health department can be a key to obtaining both records and services. The health department may be able to retrieve health records more quickly and easily than the schools. For example, after Hurricane Katrina, health departments in states that received displaced students worked with health departments in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi to obtain health records and transmit them to receiving schools.

Immunization Information Systems (IIS) can also be critical aids in obtaining immunization records. IIS's are confidential computerized information systems that attempt to collect vaccination data about all children within a geographic area. One of the national health objectives for 2010 is to increase to 95% the proportion of children under age six who participate in IIS.

Currently, IISs are being developed or are operational in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. States such as California and New York have a network of regional immunization registries. As of 2004, the following jurisdictions had an IIS with information on over three-quarters of children under age six: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, DC, Delaware, Idaho, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, New York City, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Philadelphia, Rhode Island, San Antonio, Tennessee, Washington, and Wisconsin.⁵

To find the website for your state's immunization program, see http://www.immregistries.org/profiles/state_proj.phtml

To find contact information for the manager of your state's IIS, visit: <http://www.immregistries.org/public.php/ImmRegs/regMain.php>

⁵ Department of Human Health and Service, Centers on Disease Control (2004). *Immunization registries annual report participation rates*. Retrieved August 11, 2006, from: http://www.cdc.gov/NIP/registry/irar-particip-rates/2004rp_child_particip_map_508.htm

STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR OBTAINING HEALTH DOCUMENTS

- Call, fax, and/or e-mail previous schools, doctors, and health clinics to get immunization records.
- Collaborate with state and local public health agencies to access immunization databases, where available.
- If records are slow to arrive, try direct communication between school nurses or other health care providers, or direct communication between local liaisons. These strategies can sometimes produce records faster than standard procedures.
- If necessary, try contacting the State Coordinator for Homeless Education to help expedite the process.
- Since every state has mandatory immunizations for school enrollment, it is extremely likely that students who have been enrolled in school previously have received all necessary immunizations. The vast majority of homeless students have been enrolled in school before and have had required immunizations.
- When enrolling immigrant students, be aware that many foreign countries, including most Latin American and many Asian countries, immunize children at rates comparable to or higher than those in the United States (More information is available from the World Health Organization and UNICEF: <http://www.who.int/vaccines/GlobalSummary/Immunization/>)
- Every state provides for exemptions to immunization requirements for families with religious and/or philosophical objections. These exemptions are considered medically reasonable: Since the vast majority of students are immunized, the community is protected against a major outbreak of disease. (Scientists call this concept 'herd immunity.')
- Should an outbreak of illness occur, the same procedures used to protect unimmunized children can be used to protect students whose immunization records have not yet been obtained.
- Establish a school-based immunization clinic and/or collaborate with schools or health clinics that offer immunizations to streamline the process for those students who do need immunizations.”
- Local liaisons should collaborate with the school district health advisory committee to learn, network, and educate others.⁶

⁶ NCHE. (2006). *From the school office to the classroom*. Retrieved August 11, 2006, from: http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/dis_hb/enrollment.pdf

In September 2005, the Centers for Disease Control issued a memo recognizing that students previously enrolled in school most likely have received all needed immunizations. The memo states: 'States affected by Hurricane Katrina had immunization requirements for school and daycare, and it is likely that children enrolled prior to the disaster would be vaccinated appropriately. It is not necessary to repeat vaccinations for children displaced by the disaster, unless the provider has reason to believe the child was not in compliance with appropriate state requirements.'⁷

FERPA, HIPAA, and the privacy of immunization records

FERPA, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, allows transferring records between schools without parental consent when a child is changing schools.

*HIPAA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, regulates the disclosure of health information. According to HIPAA staff, HIPAA allows transferring immunization records between schools and other health providers without parental consent for transferring students. You can streamline the transfer of immunization records by contacting local health care providers to discuss HIPAA; providers can even provide you with consent forms for parents to sign upon enrolling in school, if such forms will facilitate the process.*⁸

ADDRESSING PHYSICAL HEALTH NEEDS

School nurses are an important resource for children and youth experiencing homelessness. For services that a school nurse cannot provide, local liaisons need to collaborate with community resources, such as: health clinics; dental clinics; local medical, dental, and nursing schools; private providers willing to volunteer time; optometrists and ophthalmologists willing to volunteer time and/or donate eyeglasses; civic groups able to donate medical supplies; and shelters and other homeless service providers. For collaboration tools and strategies, see Sections I.A and I.B.

For additional information about the role of school nurses, see: *School nurses: It's not just bandages any more!* Project HOPE Virginia (2004). Information brief for school nurses. http://www.wm.edu/hope/infobrief/School_Nurses.pdf

⁷ Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control. (2005). *Interim immunization recommendations for evacuees of Hurricane Katrina*. Retrieved August 11, 2006, from: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/katrina/pdf/vaccineedisplaced.pdf>

⁸ NCHE. (2006). *From the school office to the classroom* (p.11). Retrieved August 11, 2006, from: http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/dis_hb/enrollment.pdf

2. WELCOMING STUDENTS AND FAMILIES INTO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY AND ADDRESSING IMMEDIATE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Welcoming children, youth, and families to school with warmth and enthusiasm is a critical first step in addressing immediate mental health needs. The following strategies can help schools start off on the right foot with new students and families.

“A memo went out from our superintendent telling schools to assign buddies to the new children, to give them an orientation to the building, to welcome our parents, to be kind and compassionate. And in the homeroom period, they were supposed to have meetings with the children to tell them new students were coming and that we needed to welcome them. Many principals met the school bus every morning at the Astrodome, to welcome and meet the kids. They were walking around saying, ‘Good morning, I’m the principal, we’re so glad to have you here.’”

Local Homeless Education Liaison



STRATEGIES TO WELCOME STUDENTS AND PARENTS TO SCHOOL

How can school staff help new students and parents feel welcome and become invested in our school?

- Start a 'New Students' club.
- Replicate beginning of the year rituals, procedures and events when new students enter, so they receive the same orientation to the culture of school as other students. For example, have counselors and/or administrators meet with parents and students when registering. Follow-up with a second meeting in the weeks following enrollment, to address any questions or concerns.

In St. John the Baptist Parish Public School District, LA, administrators and staff from all local schools set up orientation rooms at the site where displaced students were being enrolled. Once assigned to a school, students and their families went to their orientation room to meet the staff, ask questions, and identify 'friendly faces' to look for during their first day at school.

- Organize periodic school-wide activities to encourage the student body to welcome and accept new students.
- Give new students a faculty and peer mentor/buddy. Peer mentors or buddies not only help new students feel more comfortable in their new school, but also give pre-existing students a window into the circumstances that have brought their buddies to their school. Such connections can help avoid conflicts or turf issues between new arrivals and other students.
- Make sure new students have a chance to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities.
- If the student previously attended a school that is considered a rival or competitor of your school, meet with the student to address potential feelings of exclusion or aggression upfront.
- Give new students a small welcome gift that shows the school colors and/or team name, to invite them to share school spirit and pride.
- Invite the students to share a story, food, or activity from their background or their home town; use this as a teachable moment for the current students.

After receiving a large number of students from New Orleans in the weeks following Hurricane Katrina, a school district in Arkansas held a Mardi Gras party for the school community. New students were able to show off their culture and home town, while the whole school learned to appreciate the gifts the new arrivals had to offer.

AND FOR PARENTS...

- Organize non-threatening events to encourage communication between parents and the school (for example, potluck meals, ice cream socials, health nights where parents can consult with medical and mental health professionals).
- Create an orientation video for parents, service providers, and students. Have a comfortable place in the school for viewing the video, and consider providing copies to local shelters and service providers.
- Create a Parents' Place in the school – a room with videos, a telephone, and information on the local community, health care, babysitters, school activities, child rearing, and coping strategies. Provide staff to discuss concerns.

Families in homeless situations may have no knowledge about your local community. Schools may want to make available maps and printed information about local services, including public transportation, grocery stores, pharmacies, clothing stores, discount stores, public benefits, health care, employment offices, shelters, and housing agencies....

‘We also had several lawyers volunteer to conduct classes for the parents on the paperwork involved with hurricanes, insurance, FEMA, services and benefits, etc. That was really a good thing to do, because lowering the stress level for the parents lowered the stress level for the kids.’

Homeless Education Liaison

How can classroom teachers help new students feel comfortable and involved?

PREPARE NOW...

- Keep extra copies of review materials and assignments for students who arrive without prior notice. Also keep some basic school supplies on hand in case the student is in need.
- Post a class schedule so students will know what is happening next.
- Prepare a short, simple written list of classroom rules and procedures.
- Keep small welcome gifts on hand (for example, school supplies or school clothes).
- Establish a home base (for example, a rug or a person) for a child to reconnect with something familiar if she feels overwhelmed.

AND WHEN THE STUDENT ARRIVES...

- Take time to talk to and welcome students individually. Take the time to play welcome games or similar inclusion activities, and get to know new students with a get-to-know-you questionnaire or journal assignment. When students feel they belong, they feel some ownership in their new room.
- Introduce new students to the class and team them with a buddy.
- Make sure the students have a chance to have a class job/role.
- Use a Polaroid or digital camera to take an individual picture on the child's first day and a picture of the child with the class.
- Start and maintain a portfolio of class work for the students to take when leaving the school.
- Send notes home highlighting students' good behavior and work, as well as sharing concerns.
- Periodic welcome parties and goodbye parties can help ease the transition for new students and those who have been in the school for some time.

'And a school in one of the northeastern states adopted our school and sent cameras and memory books for every one of our Katrina students. We knew that we wouldn't keep them permanently, so we wanted to give them something to help focus more on what they gained than on what they'd lost. So we went out and took pictures and created books for them.'

School counselor

How can we ease the transition for those left behind when students leave our school?

- Prepare a 'Goodbye Book.' Students may be given time to autograph the book and brainstorm with the departing student about special memories.
- Have classmates write letters to their departing peer.
- Maintain a relationship when the students leave by providing stamped, self-addressed envelopes and stationery.⁹

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (OSDFS) is organizing emergency teams of physicians and medical personnel to provide immediate mental health services to local communities. The OSDFS has established a toll-free hotline for people in crisis. By calling 1-800-273-TALK, callers will be connected to trained professionals from a network of local counseling centers that are prepared to help those suffering from emotional trauma, such as anger, grief, hopelessness, shock,

⁹ NCHE. (2006). p.27-31.

and sleeplessness, as a result of the disaster. The hotline is operational 24 hours a day, every day.

What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families. Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA (2006). Guidebook with sample materials for incorporating new students and families into the school community.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/WELMEET/welmeetcomplete.pdf>

Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Helping Students Relocate and Supporting Their Mental Health Needs. National Association of School Psychologists. Brief for schools on positively integrating displaced students into a new school.

http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/Katrina_relocate.pdf

Tips for Supporting Mobile Students. Project HOPE Virginia. A brief with strategies for welcoming new students into the school and dealing with school mobility.

<http://www.wm.edu/hope/infobrief/mobility.pdf>

From the School Office to the Classroom. NCHE (March 2006). A handbook with basic information and strategies for confronting various enrollment barriers, including issues related to guardianship, immunizations, academic records, special education, mental health needs, academic placement and support, and enrolling large numbers of displaced students.

http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/dis_hb/enrollment.pdf

Enrollment. (McKinney-Vento Law Into Practice Issue Brief Series). NCHE (2002). A brief explaining the McKinney-Vento Act requirements for immediate enrollment, including tips for welcoming new students into the school.

<http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/enrollment.pdf>



3. PREVENTING CONFLICTS BETWEEN NEW AND PREVIOUSLY ATTENDING STUDENTS AND SERVING ALL HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

“We really forgot about our own homeless children. We were focusing so much on enrolling the (displaced) children that nobody in the district was identifying homeless children who normally live (here). And I think the children felt that. They felt that people were donating for (displaced) kids, but not for them. There were people who felt that these children and their families were getting more attention than they ever got in this school district. So I sent out a memo to all the schools reminding them to check addresses and identify all homeless children in the school.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

“And there has been a rift between the locals and the (displaced) people, because priority has been given to (displaced) people, even over people who have been on waiting lists here, some for four to five years.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

A sudden influx of new students displaced by a disaster can demand a disproportionate amount of a school district’s staff time and financial resources. Local liaisons who have received large numbers of displaced students have noted a tension between serving new students and serving those who had lived in the district for some time. Local liaisons have also noted resentment among homeless families and students who were living in the district prior to the arrival of those displaced by the storms. Unfortunately, some community members draw distinctions between children and youth who are homeless due to disasters and those who lost their housing for other reasons. Displaced students may seem to receive more services, more donations, and more attention than other students experiencing homelessness. These distinctions increase tensions and create difficult situations for schools.

Therefore, it is important that school districts provide equal service to **ALL** children and youth experiencing homelessness, regardless of the reason for the loss of housing. Following major disasters, it may help to send a memo to schools reminding them of this responsibility. Local liaisons should also encourage their community partners and donors to ensure equal treatment, interest, and effort in their services.

Some communities that received large numbers of displaced students after the hurricanes of 2005 also reported conflicts between new and local students. These “turf” issues sometimes resulted in physical confrontations. However, many school districts were able to prevent conflict by sensitizing their students with deliberate, planned activities.

“Our schools had dinners, picnics, welcoming backpacks (with help from community agencies) full of school supplies and extra books. The younger kids were especially supportive. We had almost no problems with turf issues.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

STRATEGIES TO PREVENT CONFLICTS BETWEEN NEW AND PREVIOUSLY ATTENDING STUDENTS.

The arrival of a large number of new students can be threatening to previously enrolled students in the district. Liaisons, district administrators, principals, school counselors, and teachers must be aware of these ‘turf’ issues and seek to preempt them and prevent serious conflicts. Classroom and school-wide activities are essential, both immediately and in the long-term, to help local students feel secure about their place in their school and to sensitize them to the issues facing new students.

School districts that have confronted this challenge recommend some of the following activities:

- Have honest and open conversations with the student body before the new students arrive, explaining the changes and challenges students can expect, suggesting coping strategies, and reinforcing their role as hosts and peers. These conversations should be facilitated by mental health staff and could take the form of schoolwide assemblies, classroom-based discussions, and/or small group meetings with a school counselor.
- Continue with open conversations at the school and classroom level after the new students arrive.
- Use the arts to help students understand the trauma their new peers have experienced; for example, through performing a play about a natural disaster, watching and discussing a film about disaster and dislocation, or doing art projects that reflect important events or cultural icons of the affected area.
- Organize ongoing support and conversation groups. Separate groups for new and pre-existing students may be appropriate for certain purposes, but mixed groups are also essential to promote shared insights and mutual understanding.
- Collaborate with relief agencies, who may have specially trained staff and resources to support the adjustment of both pre-existing and displaced students.
- Collaborate with community mental health resources and all departments within the school district that offer mental and/or emotional support services.

- Seek information about potential gang conflicts from relief agencies, school administrators, and law enforcement from the local and affected communities. Use this information to design interventions and security measures to prevent potential violence.
- Offer anger management and conflict resolution workshops to school staff and students.
- Provide adult mentors and a 'safe place' on campus for displaced students. Encourage students to make use of these support systems in times of stress and crisis.
- To the extent possible, provide mentors of the same ethnic, faith, or cultural background as enrolling students. This kind of cultural sensitivity can help neutralize feelings of insecurity and hostility and provide a more comfortable 'listening presence' for students. ¹⁰

4. ENSURING PARTICIPATION IN ATHLETICS

School athletic associations generally have residency and attendance standards that regulate participation in school sports. Students experiencing homelessness, including those displaced by disasters, often do not meet those standards due to their mobility. It is important that school districts make exceptions to athletic policies to eliminate barriers to the participation of students experiencing homelessness.

“And we had the athletic department there at the Astrodome to hook them up with the coaches. So they might say, ‘you’re tall, you look like maybe you play basketball,’ or ‘you look strong, did you play football?’ And we had a lot of kids who started right away. They waived a lot of the eligibility requirements.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison



¹⁰ NCHE (2006). p.32.

Good Example: In Illinois, the State Coordinator for Homeless Education collaborated with various staff within the state education agency and the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) to develop a procedure for the participation of students experiencing homelessness. A school need only send the IHSA a participation request and the standard state enrollment form (see Section II.C. I) that documents the student's status as homeless, and the IHSA approves participation. The State Coordinator reports that the procedure has worked very well, and the support of the director of the IHSA has been a tremendous asset.

Good Example: The Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association has gone as far as to enact a formal policy on the participation of homeless students. The policy is attached in Appendix 12.



5. CONTACT LIST FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED A TRAUMATIC EVENT

Appendix 13 contains a blank contact list for students who have experienced disasters or other traumatic events. Local homeless education liaisons or school counselors can help students fill out the contact list with important phone numbers. The local liaison or counselor may want to help the student choose a safe place to keep the list and keep a copy in case the student misplaces it.

Self-Assessment II. E

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in ensuring full participation in all educational activities.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence	In existence but not effective	Moderately successful	Successful but needs improvement	Strength of the program

E. Aggressive and timely strategies ensure full, productive participation in educational activities and include tactics to address physical and mental health needs.

There is a system in place to aggressively pursue any and all records, including health records, that may be available for homeless children and youth.	1	2	3	4	5
There is a system in place for paying any fees associated with school enrollment (lab, parking, sports fees, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
There are both school-wide and classroom-based systems and procedures in place to welcome new students to the school. Immediate mental health services are available and accessible.	1	2	3	4	5
The school district serves all children and youth experiencing homelessness, regardless of the reason, with equal respect, treatment, and services.	1	2	3	4	5
The school district uses its collaborative relationships to encourage other service providers to serve all children and youth experiencing homelessness equally.	1	2	3	4	5
There are both school-wide and classroom-based systems and procedures in place to minimize tension and conflict between new and local students.	1	2	3	4	5
Plans are in place to minimize student exposure to media coverage of the incident/disaster (especially for younger students). Media coverage may actually re-traumatize individuals by creating the perception that grief is ever-present.	1	2	3	4	5
There is a system in place to accommodate student participation in sports and extracurricular activities at alternate times during the school year.	1	2	3	4	5
Records requirements do not prevent homeless children and youth from participating in educational, extracurricular, or sports activities.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

- 27-35 Points** This is a strength of the program.
- 18-26 Points** The program is moderately successful in this area.
- <18 Points** This area is weak. Needs program improvement.

F. STRATEGIES, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ADDRESS ANTICIPATED TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS.

“Transportation worked well—I use a certification form that I fax to transportation to reroute, and set up transportation. We can get school of origin transportation in place very, very quickly.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison



Although providing transportation for students in homeless situations is critical to their academic success and to increased school stability for the entire district, it can be challenging. That challenge is intensified when school districts are confronted with large numbers of students displaced by disasters. In such cases, sudden shortages of buses, fuel, and bus drivers complicate the logistical challenges of coordinating transportation. School districts must prepare ahead of time to deal with such shortages.

“We are working towards resolving the issue of gasoline, so we’ll have a relationship with local vendors that we can get gasoline when we need it to run our buses, to move people around.”

School District Administrator

Local liaisons agree that the most important strategy to streamline transportation services is to establish a strong relationship with the school district transportation department, including involving transportation staff immediately in the enrollment and transportation of displaced students, implementing a reliable and flexible communication system, and nurturing a mutual understanding of each other’s systems and requirements. School districts also must have plans in place to deal with transportation challenges in times of disaster.

Appendix 14 contains two forms currently used in school districts. The first is completed upon enrollment at school sites and faxed immediately to the pupil transportation

department. The second explains to parents their responsibilities and the kinds of transportation offered for their children.

Additional forms and documents and many practical strategies for implementing transportation are available in the publication *Increasing School Stability for Students Experiencing Homelessness: Overcoming Challenges to Providing Transportation to the School of Origin*, available at http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/nche_transp_full.pdf. A brief outlining the legal requirements for transportation and some basic strategies is available at <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/transportation.pdf>.

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services passed a resolution in 2000 supporting the safe and efficient school transportation of homeless children and youth. Read the resolution at http://www.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc_transport.php

Self-Assessment II.F

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in meeting transportation needs.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence	In existence but not effective	Moderately successful	Successful but needs improvement	Strength of the program

F. Strategies, policies, and procedures accommodate anticipated transportation barriers.

The district has developed alternative methods of transporting students to and from school.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has developed systems and procedures to put transportation services in place quickly.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has established memoranda of understanding with nearby districts to address the need to transport students across district lines to their schools of origin.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has a consistent feasibility procedure in place that is used in all school placement decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
Transportation barriers are considered when deciding where to enroll large number of students.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

- 20-25 Points** This is a strength of the program.
- 15-19 Points** The program is moderately successful in this area.
- <15 Points** This area is weak. Needs program improvement.

G. STRATEGIES, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE TO EXPEDITE PLACEMENT IN SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS.

“The other thing that we did was set up an automatic certification system for free lunch, with no paperwork. We can get the meals by the same day, or at the latest by the next day.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

According to federal law, children and youth experiencing homelessness, including those displaced by disasters, are automatically eligible for free school meals. Upon identification as homeless by a local liaison or shelter director, the student is eligible; he or she does not need to provide income information or even complete an application. Once determined eligible, the student remains so for the rest of the school year. This streamlined procedure allows children and youth experiencing homelessness to receive free meals immediately.

In conjunction with their school district nutrition offices, local liaisons use various methods to provide free meals to students experiencing homelessness, including:

- Asking the data processing department to do a data match of the homeless and free meal fields of the district database to ensure that all students identified as homeless are receiving free meals
- Asking the data processing department to assist in developing a protocol for transmitting information on homelessness to the school nutrition office on a daily basis so free meals can be put in place automatically
- E-mailing the homeless student database to the school nutrition office
- E-mailing or faxing lists of homeless students to the school nutrition office
- Faxing individual applications for free meals, completed by parents, youth, or the local liaison, to the school nutrition office
- Incorporating a simple check box for “McKinney-Vento eligible” or “homeless” on the district’s standard free meal form
- Writing “McKinney-Vento eligible” or “homeless” on the district’s standard free meal form

Appendix 15 contains a sample of the type of form that can be used to streamline the process. Once the student’s homeless status is indicated on the form, no further documentation is needed and free meals start immediately.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued several memos to assist schools in providing immediate meals for homeless students. Those memos are available as follows:

Emergency Feeding of School Children in Areas Devastated by Hurricane Katrina, dated August 31, 2005. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2005-08-31.pdf>

Important Clarification of August 31, 2005 memo in communication dated September 6, 2005. http://www.serve.org/nche/katrina/usda_clarify.php

Guidance on Determining Categorical Eligibility for Free Lunches and Breakfasts for Youth Served under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, dated September 17, 2004. http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_b.pdf

Categorical Eligibility for Free Lunches and Breakfasts for Migrant Children, dated August 16, 2004. http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_b.pdf

Categorical Eligibility for Free Lunches and Breakfasts of Runaway, Homeless, and Migrant Youth: Reauthorization 2004 Implementation Memo SP 4, dated July 19, 2004. http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_b.pdf

Self-Assessment II.G

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district’s implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in expediting placement in school nutrition programs.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence	In existence but not effective	Moderately successful	Successful but needs improvement	Strength of the program

G. Strategies, policies, and procedures are in place to expedite placement in school nutrition programs.

The district has developed an expedited alternative method for certifying large numbers of students for free meal services.	1	2	3	4	5
The district is aware of any state and/or federal procedures that may be utilized to certify all students as eligible for lunch services during the time of a community disaster.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has a system in place to re-determine free lunch eligibility at the beginning of the next school year for those students still eligible for services.	1	2	3	4	5
Free and reduced lunch rates at schools are monitored for implications of eligibility for other programs (Title I, after-school programs, etc.) and planning is adjusted to accommodate those needs.	1	2	3	4	5
The district is aware of any state and/or federal procedures that may be utilized to extend free lunch services to family members and host families.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has a system in place to ensure that every student identified as eligible for McKinney-Vento services is also eligible for free meals – and the system can accommodate a large influx of students.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has a plan in place to extend free meal services to after-school and summer program participants.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

27-35 Points

This is a strength of the program.

18-26 Points

The program is moderately successful in this area.

<18 Points

This area is weak. Needs program improvement.

H. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE TO MANAGE DATA TRACKING AND REPORTING OF STUDENT OUTCOMES EFFECTIVELY.

Effective data management is essential in homeless education programs. It can help with program improvement and evaluation and is necessary to meet state and federal reporting requirements. Good data can also translate into funding, through both formula and competitive grants and in cases of emergency, when state or federal governments may provide supplemental funds.

Effective data tracking and reporting requires organized systems to be in place prior to an emergency. School districts may track homeless students through separate databases, entries in the regular district database, or through color-coded paper files.

Data management also can be aided by data-sharing among agencies. Collaborating with disaster relief agencies, social services, youth-serving agencies, and others to share information can aid schools in their data management activities. For example, some school districts collaborate with their local Continuum of Care's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to share information. (See Section II.A.2 for more information on Continuum of Care programs.) Schools can view the services that other agencies are providing to see what unmet needs remain and input the services they provide into the HMIS system. Families receive more holistic services and are spared the need to recount the same information to several agencies. Joint release of information consent forms are required to share such information. See Section II.B for information-sharing strategies.

KEY DATA ELEMENTS BASED ON PAST REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND BEST PRACTICES

- age, grade level, and enrollment date
- homeless status
- specific residential situation, including hotel, shelter, doubled-up, unsheltered (car, camping, bus station, etc.)
- whether the student is an unaccompanied youth
- whether the student was displaced by a disaster, including the specific storm or event in which the student lost housing
- program improvement data, such as any barriers that impeded the student's immediate enrollment and academic success
- services provided
- whether the student took statewide assessments and his/her performance level

Local liaisons should work with enrollment staff to ensure that this information is obtained upon enrollment, perhaps through using an enrollment form such as the *Student Residency Questionnaire* from the Texas Homeless Education Office, available at http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/pdf/RP11_StuResidencyQues_RevFeb04.pdf

NCHE's *McKinney-Vento Data Standards and Indicators Guidebook* also provides tools to assist McKinney-Vento programs with the collection and reporting of outcome data. *The Guidebook* and 2006 Revisions can be downloaded at <http://www.serve.org/nche/products.php>

To receive supplemental funding after disasters, school districts may be called upon to prove that displaced students were, in fact, displaced by the disaster. Of course, students must be enrolled immediately without documentation. However, after enrollment, the local homeless education liaison may wish to coordinate with disaster relief agencies, school counselors, and registrars to collect and compile such proof. Such proof might include:

- Identification showing an address from an affected community
- A lease, mortgage bill, utility bill, insurance statement, or other official document showing an address from an affected community
- A piece of official mail from an affected community
- Proof of receiving benefits or other documents from relief agencies;
- School records from an affected area
- A letter or certificate of attendance from the previous school in an affected area.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Guide for Federally Required State Data Collection. NCHE (2005). Guide to reporting the data required by the U.S. Department of Education.
http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/data_coll_full.pdf

Sample tracking form to assist school districts in tracking and reporting the number of displaced students enrolled in the district. From the Missouri Department of Education.
<http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/fedprog/discretionarygrants/homeless/hurricanekatrinanumbers.pdf>

Memo to assist school districts in entering information about and tracking students affected by Hurricane Katrina in the state database. From the Alabama Department of Education.
http://www.serve.org/nche/katrina/al_tracking.doc

Self-Assessment II.H

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in managing data.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence	In existence but not effective	Moderately successful	Successful but needs improvement	Strength of the program

H. Policies and procedures are in place to manage data tracking and reporting of student outcomes effectively.

The district has adequate policies and procedures to identify large groups of homeless children and youth and track them by individual identifiers in student information systems.	1	2	3	4	5
Data management systems have generator back-up systems in place.	1	2	3	4	5
Data management systems have robust reporting capabilities that are available to multiple persons.	1	2	3	4	5
Data management systems include a wide variety of indicators, including, but not limited to, the ability to track individual students by all of the required state and federal data reporting elements.	1	2	3	4	5
The data management system has the ability to track individual barriers to enrollment, eligibility, program placement, and continued participation.	1	2	3	4	5
The data management system has the ability to track indicators that can be used in program evaluation and improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has developed a system to record the required indicators for documenting loss during disasters for FEMA and other potential federal and state funding sources.	1	2	3	4	5
The local liaison and financial staff have a mechanism in place for documenting all expenses incurred as a result of increased enrollment of homeless children and youth.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

30-40 Points	This is a strength of the program.
20-29 Points	The program is moderately successful in this area.
<20 Points	This area is weak. Needs program improvement.

I. THE DISTRICT UTILIZES THE MEDIA IN A POSITIVE WAY.

“The local radio stations ran an Undie Monday, with bins in front of the WalMart and other stores. We got thousands of pairs of underwear from that.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

“Our local cable company has done PSAs [public service announcements] for me and done fundraisers to set up a summer camp.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

The media can be an invaluable tool for McKinney-Vento programs before, during, and after a disaster. They can be utilized to request donations, seek community support, and convey important information to parents. As usual, it is important to establish positive relationships with the media prior to a disaster.



TIPS TO HELP SCHOOL DISTRICTS ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE MEDIA PLANS AND PROCEDURES

How can we manage the media?

- Establish positive relationships with local media.
- Select and train a media spokesperson for each building or district.
- Write a media policy that clarifies what the media will and will not be allowed to do; the policy should be a cooperative one that sets limits such as no roaming halls or filming grieving students.
- Avoid refusing to cooperate with the media, but be prepared to use your authority to ban them from campus if it becomes necessary. The excessive numbers of media personnel sent to Jonesboro, Arkansas, for instance, necessitated banning the media from school grounds.
- Recognize that you can utilize the media to dispense important information regarding community assistance.

- Emphasize preparatory actions taken by your district and the support being provided to staff and students.
- Grant reasonable interview requests.
- Clarify media procedures to all school staff.
- Designate a certain room to receive media representatives. The central office may be the best location.
- If necessary, have central office personnel manage media requests so that the building principal can attend to other duties.
- Provide a written statement supporting and clarifying verbal statements.
- Obtain parent permission prior to releasing any student photographs.
- Prior to releasing student's name to media, notify his/her family.¹¹

Before sharing information with the media, schools should make sure they are aware of their legal limitations regarding privacy and confidentiality. They should also be mindful of the dignity and mental health of students and families.

Appendix 16 contains a list of tips and strategies to help prepare school staff who are charged to speak with the press.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Public Information Release form. Page E-13 of Sample Forms for Disaster Planning. Arizona Department of Education, available at <http://www.ade.az.gov/schooleffectiveness/health//schoolsafety/safetyplans/response.asp> (Under “Guidelines, Checklists, and Sample Forms” near the bottom of the page)

Revisiting Your PR Policy. Iowa Association of School Boards. Tip sheet to assist schools in developing and revising an effective public relations policy. <http://www.ia-sb.org/communityrelations/prpolicy.asp>

Talking About Disasters: Guide for Standard Messages. American Red Cross (2004). A handbook to assist those who provide disaster safety information to the general public. <http://www.redcross.org/disaster/disasterguide/>

Suggestions For Dealing With The Media. Bullet points for establishing a media procedure and dealing with the media during an emergency. http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/neat_media.html

¹¹ Note From “School Crisis Planning: Questions Answered”. By S. Poland, 1999, Spring, Communique. Copyright 1999 by National Association of School Psychologist. Reprinted with permission. Retrieved August 14, 2006, from: <http://www.teachersfirst.com/crisis/commun.htm>

A Media Training Guide for Affordable Housing Advocates. Campaign for Affordable Housing. General principles and tools that can also support schools' media outreach. http://www.cacities.org/resource_files/24396.Media_Training_Guide.pdf

Homeless Education Awareness Folder. NCHE. Sturdy, laminated folder that can be customized with local information to inform the media about issues central to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Order online at: http://www.serve.org/nche/online_order.php#hard_copy or call 800-308-2145.

Self-Assessment II.I

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in using media.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence	In existence but not effective	Moderately successful	Successful but needs improvement	Strength of the program

I. The district utilizes the media in a positive way.

The district has a standard media plan and one for use during emergencies.	1	2	3	4	5
The local liaison utilizes all media resources to improve awareness about program eligibility and the rights of homeless children and youth.	1	2	3	4	5
The local liaison/school district has a system in place to update the local media continually on the impact of events on homeless children and youth and their families.	1	2	3	4	5
The local liaison utilizes the media as a communication tool to deliver information to homeless children and youth and their families.	1	2	3	4	5
The local liaison utilizes the media to help raise funds and request and direct donations.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

20-25 Points	This is a strength of the program.
15-19 Points	The program is moderately successful in this area.
<15 Points	This area is weak. Needs program improvement.

J. STRATEGIES, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE TO DEAL WITH THE COORDINATION OF DONATIONS.

“We also asked our United Way to coordinate cash donations, because we didn’t want to take in cash. They were just amazing.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

“We have a Partnership Department in the district who handled our donations.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

Donations of funds and goods are critical tools for homeless education programs, particularly in times of disasters. However, managing donations can be a challenge. To coordinate and manage donations, school districts may consider the following strategies:

- Use the media. Local radio and television stations can help mobilize the public and can convey messages about the specific items needed and the best ways to help. See Section II.I for strategies and tools.
- Ask for gift cards. Gift cards to local clothing and school supply stores in small denominations can streamline the donation process. They can be given directly to parents to purchase items for their children, or McKinney-Vento program staff can use them to purchase the specific items needed. They eliminate the need to store items, and they can be a good purchase if the program finds that it needs to spend a sum of money quickly at the end of the fiscal year.

“School districts are not used to coordinating donations. They are a blessing and a curse, because sorting and distributing can be nothing less than a nightmare, and we just don’t have space to store them.”

Local Homeless Education Liaison

- Partner with a local nonprofit organization who can receive, organize, store, and disburse donations for you.
- Make agreements with other groups that have the capacity to accept donations. If the school district is offered donations that it can’t use, refer people there.
- Partner with a local nonprofit organization to help manage financial donations. McKinney-Vento programs have created such partnerships with homeless coalitions, the United Way, and other nonprofit organizations. The local liaison refers cash donations to the nonprofit organization, which then uses the donations to purchase clothes, coats, backpacks, school supplies, and other needed items and delivers them to the school as needed. In this way, the school district gets the

materials it needs without having to manage the funds, do the shopping, store the materials, or coordinate delivery.

- Set up a nonprofit extension of the McKinney-Vento program or a local fund account to receive and process cash donations. If the school district has a separate education foundation, use that organization to receive cash donations.
- Set up a system to track the source and estimated value of donations, and send thank you notes with tax receipts (donations to public schools are generally tax-deductible). If the school district is not willing or able to provide receipts, partner with a nonprofit organization who can.
- Ask for what the children and families most need, and don't be afraid to turn away donated goods. Receiving large quantities of goods that are unusable or unneeded only complicates the school district's efforts.

Good Example: Following Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. Department of Education set up a website where schools could submit requests of specific supplies and materials needed, and schools able to contribute could match their donations to those needs. See <http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov/index.html>.

- Invite donors to volunteer; this can help build and maintain their commitment to the schools and increase hands-on assistance.
- Establish a disaster volunteer program. Recruit and train community members in advance to assist in times of disaster. Have them register, provide them with necessary IDs, and inform them of any necessary background checks to be conducted.

Good Example: A *Sample Disaster Volunteer Program Notice* is available from the Arizona Department of Education, at page E-21 of “Sample Forms for Disaster Planning.” <http://www.ade.az.gov/schooleffectiveness/health/schoolsafety/safetyplans/response.asp> (Under “Guidelines, Checklists, and Sample Forms” near the bottom of the page)

- Prepare a brief volunteer handbook and orientation to the McKinney-Vento program and the school district.

Good Example: A volunteer training manual is available from the Region 13 Education Service Center. <http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/pdf/VolunteerManual.pdf>

- Prioritize the most important and appropriate tasks for volunteers. With appropriate training and considerations of confidentiality, volunteers can help in many ways, including: providing academic support and tutoring; serving as mentors; doing data entry or filing; referring families to appropriate community services; and providing direct services in their areas of expertise (lawyers, dentists, teachers, doctors, social workers, counselors, nurses, psychologists, etc.).

- Make sure the program has the resources to train and supervise volunteers appropriately.

MANAGING DONATIONS FROM THE NATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER

The following additional ideas also may help in managing donations:

Preparing to Solicit Donated Materials, Funds and Personnel.

The most effective guidelines for soliciting donations are:

- Identify immediate needs and project future needs so solicitations will enable materials to arrive when they are best used.
- Determine exactly what is needed and the circumstances under which donations will be received; communicate this information clearly and concisely to the public.
- Educate the media, churches and civic groups as to the exact nature of materials, funds or skills needed.
- If necessary or helpful, identify an organization to manage receipt, warehousing, and distribution of material or professional service donations.

Contributions of Cash – Often The Best Donation

Feel confident in requesting monetary contributions if that is an identified need.

- Allows the LTR (Long Term Recovery) Group to purchase exactly what is most urgently needed
- Allows the supplies to be purchased in locations near the disaster site for timely delivery
- May stimulate the local economy with local purchases.¹²

¹² National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (2004). Long-Term Recovery Manual (Appendix II Solicitation and Utilization of Donations for Long-Term Recovery). Retrieved August 14, 2006, from: <http://www.nvoad.org/articles/LTRManualFinalApr232004a.pdf>

Self-Assessment II. J

II. Implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, Including Disaster Response

The following, targeted self-assessment is designed to evaluate the school district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in this chapter. It includes several of the most important indicators of success in coordinating donations.

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Date of Review: _____

Rank the following in order of their effectiveness within your McKinney-Vento Program:

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence	In existence but not effective	Moderately successful	Successful but needs improvement	Strength of the program

J. Strategies, policies, and procedures are in place to deal with the coordination of donations.

The district appoints one or more person(s) specifically to deal with donations.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has a financial mechanism in place to accept and account for cash donations.	1	2	3	4	5
The program coordinates with other community-based organizations to connect individual students and families with resources in the community.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has guidelines for fund-raising events at schools.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has guidelines for donation events at schools (collecting clothing, food, toilet articles, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
The local liaison has a way of gathering and communicating the needs of homeless children and youth.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has guidelines for cash donations received at school board meetings from private individuals, companies, or corporations.	1	2	3	4	5
When appropriate, the local liaison has guidelines for disseminating assistance to individual families (purchase cards, gasoline cards, rental assistance checks, payments for medical bills, etc.). If the district decides not to disseminate funding, there is a contractual relationship with a community-based organization (i.e. United Way, American Red Cross, Salvation Army, faith-based organization, etc.) to assess family needs and disseminate funding.	1	2	3	4	5
The district has guidelines for accounting and tracking donations, sending thank you notes, and providing tax receipts.	1	2	3	4	5
Organizations involved with donations have confidentiality and tracking mechanisms in place to assure that a) intended beneficiaries of donations of funds or goods actually receive the donations, and b) there is no duplication of services.	1	2	3	4	5
The local liaison understands the role of community involvement and partnerships in generating additional resources (i.e., training, special events, support groups, academic program supplies, access to legal resources, insurance information, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

How did you score?

45-55 Points This is a strength of the program.
35-44 Points The program is moderately successful in this area.
<35 Points This area is weak. Needs program improvement.