



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



## MCKINNEY-VENTO LAW INTO PRACTICE BRIEF SERIES

### Ensuring Full Participation in Extracurricular Activities for Students Experiencing Homelessness

#### This NCHE brief

- provides an overview of the importance of extracurricular activities in supporting school engagement and success,
- reviews McKinney-Vento Act requirements related to the extracurricular participation of students experiencing homelessness, and
- suggests strategies for ensuring the extracurricular participation of students experiencing homelessness.

#### INTRODUCTION

Extracurricular school activities, such as sports, music, theater, debate, and clubs, play a key role in keeping students engaged in school. They provide students with a sense of belonging, community, stability, responsibility, and accomplishment, and strengthen a student's applications for higher education admission and scholarships.

Homelessness, however, can create barriers to extracurricular participation. Due to the instability that often accompanies homelessness, students experiencing homelessness may change schools during the school year; as a result, these students may not meet residency requirements related to sports, or may enter school in the middle of the athletic or club season. They may lack birth certificates, health records or examinations, and other documents normally required for sports or other extracurricular participation, and may not be able to afford activity fees or needed equipment. The McKinney-Vento Act establishes the educational rights

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

The term “homeless children and youth”—

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and
- B. includes —
  - i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
  - ii. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings...;
  - iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
  - iv. migratory children...who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

of children and youth experiencing homelessness, including their right to participate fully in school. This brief reviews the Act's requirements for school districts to support the extracurricular participation of students experiencing homelessness, and suggests strategies for implementing these requirements. Briefs on additional homeless education topics are available for downloading at <http://nche.ed.gov/pr/briefs.php>.

## THE CASE FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

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According to the United States Census Bureau, 57 percent of young people between 6 and 17 years old participate in at least one extracurricular activity (2014), with sports being the most popular, followed by performing arts, academic clubs, honor societies, publications, and student government (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1995). Participation in extracurricular activities carries many benefits for school-age young people. A long-standing body of research associates extracurricular participation with the following positive outcomes:

- an increased sense of engagement in and attachment to school (NCES, 1995),
- better school attendance (NCES, 1995),
- lower levels of disciplinary referrals (Child Trends, 2015, p. 2) and behavioral issues (Massoni, 2011, p. 1),
- higher grades and assessment test scores (Massoni, 2011, p. 2; NCES, 1995; National Federation of State High School Associations [NFHS], n.d.),
- a decreased likelihood of school failure or dropout (Massoni, 2011, p. 3; NCES, 1995),
- increased aspirations for continuing education beyond high school (NCES, 1995),
- higher scores on college entrance exams (Everson & Millsap, 2005, p. 7), and
- greater development of life skills and values not typically taught in the classroom environment (NFHS, n.d.).

Studies also support that not only is extracurricular participation of benefit to all students, including

students from disadvantaged backgrounds and of minority status (Everson & Millsap, 2005, p. 6), but may even benefit students at-risk of school failure more than “normal achievers” (Massoni, 2011, p. 3). And yet, research also shows that students of low socioeconomic status (SES) are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities than are high SES students (NCES, 1995). In light of the myriad benefits of extracurricular participation, the McKinney-Vento Act's requirement to ensure full school participation for students experiencing homelessness is well-founded.

## SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE LAW

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The McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to enroll children and youth experiencing homelessness in school immediately, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, or has missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(C)(i)]. The Act defines *enroll* and *enrollment* as “attending classes and participating fully in school activities” [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(1)]. Therefore, students experiencing homelessness must be able to enroll in school immediately, including attending classes and participating in extracurricular school activities, such as sports, performing arts, and clubs.

In addition, the McKinney-Vento Act requires State educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs; hereafter *school districts*) to develop, review, and revise policies to remove barriers to the identification, enrollment, and retention in school of children and youth experiencing homelessness [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(I)]. Further, the Act requires schools to ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness who meet the relevant eligibility criteria do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(F)(iii)]. By proactively reviewing, revising, developing, and implementing policies to eliminate barriers to full school participation for McKinney-Vento students, States and school districts ensure that these students are able to participate in extracurricular activities, and provide these students with an added motivation for continued school engagement.

## STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING FULL PARTICIPATION

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To ensure full participation in extracurricular activities for students experiencing homelessness, school districts should consider the following strategies:

1. Educate the school community about the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of *homeless*. Local homeless education liaisons (hereafter *local liaisons*) are required by the McKinney-Vento Act to ensure that children and youth who meet the Act's definition of *homeless* are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(i)]. Other members of the school community may not be aware of the definition of *homeless*, how to apply the definition, or next steps to take when working with a student who may meet the definition. Local liaisons can share this information with athletic/activity association administrators, coaches, teachers, faculty activity advisors, principals, and other school and district personnel.
2. Build awareness about homelessness and its effects on children and youth throughout your district. Local liaisons can speak with coaches, faculty activity advisors, and teachers about homelessness, the educational and other barriers students experiencing homelessness may face, and the importance of ensuring full school participation, including in extracurricular activities, for these students.
3. Advocate for State or local policies that expedite full participation in extracurricular activities for students experiencing homelessness. This will ensure the complete and effective implementation of McKinney-Vento Act requirements related to enrollment and full school participation, and will provide students experiencing homelessness with access to the many benefits of extracurricular engagement.
4. Develop a plan to help students experiencing homelessness cover expenses related to extracurricular participation, such as paying for needed equipment or activity fees. Some ways that school districts ensure that costs do not prevent students experiencing homelessness from participating in activities include
  - using funding sources and strategies for

McKinney-Vento students comparable to those used to allow other low-income students to participate;

- waiving fees;
  - paying for equipment and fees with school district funds or appropriate Federal funds, such as McKinney-Vento subgrant funds;
  - seeking student activity sponsorships from the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), local civic organizations, and local businesses; and
  - using private donations or holding fundraisers.
5. Employ strategies to obtain needed documents, such as birth certificates and health records. Since the McKinney-Vento Act defines *enrollment* as “attending classes and participating fully in school activities” [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(1)], and mandates immediate enrollment even when students lack documentation that is normally required [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(C)(i)(I)], students experiencing homelessness must be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities while necessary documents are gathered. Various online services that house vital records securely exist, and may be the best source for obtaining needed records promptly. Also, according to the McKinney-Vento Act, enrolling schools must contact the student's previous school immediately to obtain relevant academic and other records [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(C)(ii)], which must be maintained by the previous school so that the records are available in a timely fashion when the student enrolls in a new school [(42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(D)]; as such, many needed documents will be part of the student's educational records gathered by a previous school.
  6. Establish strategies to help students experiencing homelessness obtain needed health examinations and records. Consider the following strategies:
    - Build relationships with local health care providers to help students obtain required examinations.
    - Learn more about Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) eligibility, enrollment, and covered services in your state. Most children and youth experiencing

homelessness will qualify for their State's Medicaid or CHIP, enabling them to receive free or low-cost health coverage. Visit <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/by-state/by-state.html> for more information.

- Collaborate with school nurses, who may be able to assist with administering physical examinations and coordinating necessary health services.
  - In keeping with McKinney-Vento Act mandates, refer children and youth experiencing homelessness to health care services, dental services, and other appropriate services, as needed [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(iv)].
7. Reach out to colleagues for help. Many local liaisons and State Coordinators for Homeless Education have worked successfully to ensure that students experiencing homelessness can participate fully in extracurricular activities. They may be able to share strategies, creative thinking, sample forms, and other resources.

## CONCLUSION

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In addition to meeting the legal requirements for immediate school enrollment, ensuring the full participation in extracurricular activities of students experiencing homelessness provides these students with a world of opportunity. Participation in these activities is critical to keeping youth engaged in school, opening doors to higher education, and instilling leadership and teamwork skills that carry on into adulthood. By using the strategies listed in this brief, schools can ensure that they are complying with Federal law, and are affording valuable opportunities to students especially in need of the stability and sense of belonging that full school participation provides.

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Every state is required to have a State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and every school district is required to have a local homeless education liaison. These individuals oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at [http://nche.ed.gov/states/state\\_resources.php](http://nche.ed.gov/states/state_resources.php).

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

**Local Contact Information:**

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a light pink background, intended for local contact information.