

Chapter Two: Local Educational Agency and Homeless Liaison Responsibilities



Section 2.1 Local Educational Agencies' Responsibilities Defined in the McKinney-Vento Act and Non-Regulatory Guidance

Local educational agencies (LEAs) are instrumental in ensuring the rights and services guaranteed in the McKinney-Vento Act are implemented throughout the school district. All LEAs must follow the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act, whether or not they have a McKinney-Vento subgrant.

Section 2.1.1 LEA Requirements in the McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Act provides a number of LEA requirements for serving homeless children and youth in 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3). The tasks outlined in the law are summarized below.

Universally, LEAs must

- designate a staff person to carry out the duties described in the McKinney-Vento Act as the local homeless liaison;
- continue the student's education in the school of origin or a local public school that stably housed students in the area are eligible to attend; and
- make school placement decisions based on the best interest of the child or youth.

Best interest provisions require LEAs

- to keep a homeless child or youth in the school of origin, to the extent feasible, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the student's parent or guardian;
- to provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal, to the parent or guardian of a homeless student or to an unaccompanied homeless youth, if the LEA sends the child to a school other than the one requested; and

- to ensure, in the case of an unaccompanied homeless youth, that the local liaison assists in placement or enrollment decisions and considers the views of the youth.

Regarding enrollment and records, LEAs must

- immediately enroll the child or youth, even without records that are normally required;
- contact the school last attended for relevant records;
- assist with obtaining immunizations or immunization records; and
- make records available in a timely fashion when the child or youth enrolls in a new school or LEA.

To mediate enrollment disputes, LEAs must

- enroll the child or youth in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending the resolution of the dispute;
- refer the child, youth, parent, or guardian to the local liaison to carry out the dispute resolution process; and
- ensure liaisons assist an unaccompanied youth during the dispute process.

Comparable services provisions require

- LEAs to provide services comparable to those received by non-homeless students.

Coordination provisions require LEAs

- to coordinate with local social service and housing agencies.

Section 2.1.2 LEA Requirements Mandated for Inclusion in Education for Homeless Children and Youth State Plans

States may have additional policies that LEAs are responsible for implementing related to the education of homeless children and youth. Every state educational agency (SEA) is required to have a state plan that includes further LEA responsibilities that the state enforces. State Coordinators in each state can provide information on any additional requirements.

Section 11432(g) in the McKinney-Vento Act describes state plan components that can impact LEAs, including requirements for state plans to assure that

- homeless children and youth are provided opportunities to meet the same state academic achievement standards as all other students;
- homeless students are identified and their special needs assessed;
- disputes are resolved promptly;
- activities take place to heighten the awareness of school personnel of runaway and homeless youths;
- homeless children and youth participate in nutrition programs;
- homeless children have access to the same public preschool programs as non-homeless children;
- homeless youth, both enrolled and not currently enrolled in public schools, are identified and provided equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services;
- eligible homeless children and youth have opportunities to participate in before- and after-school care programs;
- enrollment delays caused by immunization and medical records requirements, residency requirements, birth certificates or other records requirements, guardianship issues, or uniform or dress code requirements are eliminated;
- the SEA and LEAs will develop, review, and revise policies to remove barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youth;
- homeless children are not segregated or stigmatized;
- local liaisons are appointed in every school district; and
- transportation is provided, at the request of a parent or guardian (or liaison in the case of an unaccompanied homeless youth), to and from the school of origin.

In addition, LEAs are required to submit data on their homeless students to the SEA on an annual basis for the Consolidated State Performance Report.

Section 2.1.3 Standards for Quality McKinney-Vento Programs

To further clarify the responsibilities of LEAs, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) included Standards and Indicators for Quality McKinney-Vento Programs in its Non-Regulatory Guidance (2004). The Standards and Indicators were developed by a task force led by NCHE that included State Coordinators, local liaisons, federal administrators of related programs, and

representatives from national organizations that address the needs of homeless children and youth. The Standards and Indicators, grounded in the law and reflecting good practices, provide a snapshot of what an effective homeless education program should address. (See Chapter 15 Managing the Work for more information on assessing needs and evaluating the homeless education program.)

The Standards, revised in 2006 and listed below, provide liaisons with a set of targets to ensure the LEA is carrying out activities and providing the range of services offered by quality McKinney-Vento programs.

STANDARD 1	All homeless students identified and enrolled at the time of the state assessment take the state assessment required for their grade levels.
STANDARD 2	All homeless students demonstrate academic progress.
Standard 3	All children in homeless situations are identified.
STANDARD 4	Within one day of an attempt to enroll in school, homeless students are in attendance.
STANDARD 5	All homeless students experience stability in school.
Standard 6	All homeless students receive specialized and comparable services when eligible.
STANDARD 7	All preschool-aged homeless children enroll in and attend preschool programs.
STANDARD 8	All homeless unaccompanied youth enroll in and attend school.
Standard 9	All parents (or persons acting as parents) of homeless children and youth are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education.
Standard 10	LEAs help with the needs of all homeless children and youth through collaborative efforts both within and beyond the LEA.

Section 2.2 Homeless Liaison Responsibilities

The local liaison is the key to ensuring homeless children and youth receive the services they need. Required in all LEAs regardless of subgrant status, the

liaison is the primary contact between homeless families, school and LEA staff, shelter workers, and other service providers.

In 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(6)(A), the McKinney-Vento Act lists the responsibilities of the local liaison. The law states local liaisons will ensure that

- homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through coordination with other agencies;
- homeless children and youth enroll in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, school;
- homeless families, children, and youth receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start programs and preschool programs administered by the LEA, as well as referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services;
- the parents or guardians of homeless children and youth are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
- public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youth is disseminated where they receive services, such as schools, family shelters, and soup kitchens;
- enrollment disputes are mediated according to local, state, and federal policies; and
- the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin.

The Non-Regulatory Guidance (ED, 2004) lists the following activities that liaisons must conduct in carrying out their responsibilities:

- assist homeless children and youth with enrolling in school and accessing school services;
- help homeless children and youth obtain immunization or medical records;
- inform parents, school personnel, and others of the rights of homeless children and youth;
- work with school staff to make sure that homeless children and youth are immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of disputes that might arise over school enrollment or placement;

- help to coordinate transportation services for homeless children and youth; and,
- collaborate and coordinate with the State Coordinator and with community and school personnel responsible for providing education and related support services to homeless children and youth.

Section 2.3 Become Familiar with the Liaison Role

The local liaison role can be filled by a variety of personnel. This person can be an administrator, a professional development coordinator, a school social worker, or an outreach specialist. The LEA will need to shape the position based on its current needs in serving homeless children and youth. Moreover, the LEA must provide the liaison with sufficient time and capacity to carry out the required duties to ensure that the LEA is in compliance with the law. Chapter 15 Managing the Work contains good practices instrumental to helping liaisons prioritize tasks.

Over time, the liaison's responsibilities should be revised to reflect the following: the number of children and youth identified, trends in poverty and homelessness, the amount of support from community agencies and other entities serving homeless families and youth, the level of awareness in both the schools and community of homeless student needs and related legal requirements, and the level of implementation that has occurred in the LEA. This will allow the district to appoint the liaison with the skills and knowledge most likely to meet the needs of homeless children and youth.

Appendix 2.A Homeless Liaison Responsibilities summarizes the key duties of the local liaison.

Section 2.3.1 Review the McKinney-Vento Act & Non-Regulatory Guidance

Local liaisons should be familiar with the exact language of the McKinney-Vento Act. While the law may not be easy reading, having certain sections committed to memory, or at least at your fingertips, will assist you with teasing out nuances regarding implementation when questions arise. Appendix 2.B Quick Guide to Important Sections of the McKinney-Vento Act provides a compilation of key portions of the law for easy reference.

Section 2.3.2 Learn about Your LEA’s Services for Homeless Children and Youth

As a new local liaison, it is important to learn as much as possible about your LEA’s implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. Table 2.2 Understanding the Homeless Education Program in My LEA provides questions and possible sources for answers that will help you understand your LEA’s approach to serving homeless children and youth. Appendix 2.C Understanding My Homeless Education Program provides a worksheet to help you record responses to the questions.

Table 2.2 Understanding the Homeless Education Program in My LEA

Question	Source
Who is the State Coordinator for the homeless education program in my state? What technical assistance and training does the State Coordinator provide to LEAs?	NCHE Website; SEA Homeless Education Website
How much time is allocated to the local homeless liaison position? What additional staff support is in place?	Supervisor
How many homeless children and youth did the LEA identify last year?	CSPR Report, LEA Data Manager
Are the numbers identified increasing or decreasing? By how much?	CSPR Report, LEA Data Manager
Does the LEA have a McKinney-Vento subgrant? If so, what are the approved activities to serve homeless children and youth? What are my reporting responsibilities? How long will the LEA receive funds through this grant?	McKinney-Vento Subgrant Application
How much money is set aside for services for homeless children and youth through Title I, Part A? How was the amount of these funds determined? How were these funds spent last year? How may they be accessed?	Title I Coordinator, Consolidated Application
What are the challenges to implementing the McKinney-Vento program in the LEA?	Phone and Email Logs, Documentation on Disputes
What local policies and procedures are in place to support services for homeless children and youth? What policies or procedures create barriers to the education of homeless children and youth?	LEA Policy Handbook, School Board Policies, Phone and Email Logs, Documentation on Disputes, LEA Program Coordinators (Tutoring Programs, Nutrition, Special Education, English Language Learning, Migrant)

Question	Source
What data must be collected on homeless children and youth, and what procedures are in place to collect and report this data?	CSPR Report, LEA Data Coordinator
How many homeless children and youth were transported to their school of origin in the past year? What are the procedures for arranging transportation?	Pupil Transportation Director, Student Files
What McKinney-Vento compliance issues have been identified in my district?	SEA Monitoring Reports
What is the local dispute process for the McKinney-Vento program, and who is involved in the process other than the liaison?	Written Dispute Policy
What homeless education awareness activities have taken place in the LEA? What groups in the district and community have been involved? Were the activities effective?	Meeting Agendas and Notes
Which community agencies collaborate with the LEA to serve homeless children and youth?	Meeting Agendas and Notes, Phone and Email Logs
Are posters on McKinney-Vento services displayed in all schools? How long ago were posters and other awareness materials placed in each school in the LEA?	Observation in Schools, Budget or Fiscal Office

You may not be able to find answers to all these questions immediately. Nevertheless, whatever information you do find will help orient you to the role of the local liaison. Moreover, these questions will guide you in

- keeping abreast of challenges, processes, and procedures related to serving homeless children and youth in the LEA;
- fostering conversations with others involved in serving homeless children and youth in the LEA and community; and
- establishing files of information that can be passed along to a liaison who might succeed you in the position or other staff members who support the program.

Section 2.3.3 Contact Key Personnel and Agencies

Many new local liaisons feel overwhelmed by the scope of their responsibilities. However, keep in mind that many people, programs, and agencies exist to assist liaisons in serving homeless children and youth. As a new liaison, you should connect with certain key people soon after you assume your position. Chapter 11 Collaboration and Chapter 9

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth provide more details and strategies for linking homeless students to services and establishing collaborations with external agencies.

Table 2.3 Key Role Groups and Agencies to Contact provides a list of people and agencies to contact and the information and services they may provide.

Table 2.3 Key Role Groups and Agencies to Contact

Person or Agency to Contact	Information or Services Provided
State Coordinator for Homeless Education	Your State Coordinator will be able to link you to essential training for your position, add you to a distribution list for local liaisons to receive routine communication, and link you with other local liaisons for support.
LEA Title I Coordinator	The Title I Coordinator will be able to explain what Title I services are provided to homeless children and youth and how Title I, Part A set-aside funds are spent.
Coordinator for Special Education	The Coordinator for Special Education will explain how children who are homeless and highly mobile can be evaluated and provided services in a timely way even though they may move in and out of the district; also, you should ask to review IEPs for homeless children and youth and attend IEP meetings for these students.
Director of Pupil Transportation	Establishing ongoing communication with the Director of Pupil Transportation will ensure that you work together as partners to arrange transportation for homeless students expeditiously.
Director of Child Nutrition	The Director of Child Nutrition will explain procedures to ensure homeless children and youth are provided free meals. This happens as soon as the nutrition program is provided the names of students identified as homeless as well as the date they became eligible. The Director of Child Nutrition should also notify liaisons of any barriers to providing free meals immediately.
District Data Manager	The District Data Manager can explain the process for the annual collection and submission of data on homeless students. This person is also a great resource for accessing data about the needs of homeless students that can be used to create awareness among school personnel and community members.

Person or Agency to Contact	Information or Services Provided
Community Housing or Homeless Programs (Housing and Urban Development - HUD - Programs)	Programs that receive funding from HUD are mandated to coordinate with local liaisons. Contacting these agencies and cultivating relationships will help you <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the “big picture” of homelessness in your LEA • establish ongoing communication that can assist you with identifying homeless children and youth and linking them to services • explore collaborative relationships for resource sharing
Shelter Providers	Shelter providers play a key role in helping to identify homeless children and families and referring them to schools. Providing them with your contact information and awareness posters will assist in establishing ongoing communication.
Head Start	Head Start is mandated to prioritize services for young homeless children and to coordinate with local liaisons. Collaborating with the Head Start program in your LEA will assist you with identifying homeless students and exploring collaborative opportunities.

Section 2.3.4 Keep Key Documents on Hand

As the primary persons responsible for ensuring the LEA fully implements the McKinney-Vento Act, liaisons must field questions from parents, school staff, community partners, and sometimes even members of the media. They must also provide training in both the LEA and community. In order to quickly and accurately answer questions, liaisons should keep information readily available in either electronic or hard copy files. This practice also facilitates consistent answers to questions, reducing the likelihood of mistakes during extremely busy times.

The following documents and information are particularly useful to keep on hand:

- the McKinney-Vento Act,
- the 2004 *Education for Homeless Children and Youth Non-Regulatory Guidance* published by ED,
- issue briefs published by NCHE entitled *Determining Eligibility for Rights and Services Under the McKinney-Vento Act* and *Guiding the Discussion on School Selection*,

- LEA and SEA dispute resolution policies,
- LEA policies related to the enrollment and education of homeless children and youth,
- memoranda and communications from the State Coordinator,
- a copy of the LEA's McKinney-Vento subgrant proposal,
- homeless education program monitoring reports,
- barrier tracking logs (phone and e-mail),
- LEA Consolidated State Performance Report and related data, and
- community contacts for homeless families.

2.3.5 Learn about Key Issues and Best Practices

The field of homeless education is a moving target; new trends and issues are continually emerging and new laws and policies are developed by various programs and agencies on an ongoing basis. Local liaisons have a wealth of resources to assist them with keeping current in the field. Key supports include information, technical assistance, and training provided by the office of the State Coordinator for homeless education.

In addition, note the resources offered by the following two organizations:

National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE): NCHE is the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center in the area of homeless education. NCHE provides a comprehensive website, webinars and onsite trainings, and publications that are updated on a regular basis. NCHE also hosts a listserv that provides updates, announcements, and links to resources. A Helpline to assist those who serve homeless children and youth with understanding and implementing the law is available via both phone (800-308-2145) and email (homeless@serve.org).

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY): NAEHCY is a leader in advocacy and policy development regarding homeless education. NAEHCY provides publications and activities to keep members abreast of emerging issues and proposed policy changes. NAEHCY hosts an annual conference that brings State Coordinators, local liaisons, shelter and service providers, researchers, and advocates together to learn and network.

Section 2.4 Useful Links

The McKinney-Vento Act

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/legislation.html>

Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Non-Regulatory Guidance

<http://center.serve.org/nche/m-v.php>

Standards and Indicators for Quality McKinney-Vento Programs

http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/st_ind.php#2006

Issue Brief: *Local Homeless Education Liaisons*

<http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/liasons.pdf>

Issue Brief: *Determining Eligibility for Rights and Services under the McKinney-Vento Act*

http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf

Issue Brief: *Guiding the Discussion on School Selection*

http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/sch_sel_checklist.pdf

Section 2.5 Resources and Tools for Chapter Two

Appendix 2.A Homeless Liaison Responsibilities

Appendix 2.B Quick Guide to Important Sections of the McKinney-Vento Act

Appendix 2.C Understanding My Homeless Education Program