MCKINNEY-VENTO IN ACTION

A MCKINNEY-VENTO TOOLBOX: CONSTRUCTING A ROBUST AND RIGOROUS HOMELESS EDUCATION PROGRAM, IN CASE OF DISASTER AND EVERY DAY

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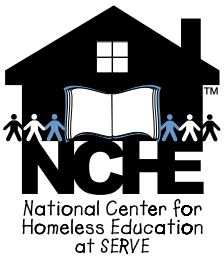

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U.S. Department of Education - Hurricane Help for Schools: Providing Assistance for Schools Serving Students Displaced by Hurricane Katrina
http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov/index.html

For more information on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Program, contact the U.S. Department of Education, Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs (SASA), Office of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Phone: 202-260-0826
Website: http://www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) is a national resource center of research and information enabling communities to address the needs of children and their families and of unaccompanied youth in homeless situations.

NCHE is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and is housed at the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.
Phone: 800-308-2145
Website: http://www.serve.org/nche

Visit the NCHE website for information on *In Their Own Words: School and Students Rising Above*. Based on interviews with school staff, relief agency staff, and students, *In Their Own Words* provides a window into the daily challenges and triumphs of schools and students affected by Hurricane Katrina and shows the crucial role that schools and McKinney-Vento programs play in the healing and recovery of individual families and entire communities following disasters.

** The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.*

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INTRODUCTION

> *"If we have it right all the time, then we don't have to worry about being unprepared for specific disaster situations."*
>
> Senior Program Coordinator, Texas Homeless Education Office*

The nation's public schools played a critical role in the response to the hurricanes of 2005, and they continue to contribute to the recovery of individual families and entire communities. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and the staff charged with implementing it form the basis for this contribution.

Following Hurricane Katrina, the Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, acted immediately to contact impacted states to see what the U.S. Department of Education could do to support the enrollment of displaced students. The Department developed a Hurricane Help for Schools website (http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov/index.html) to provide quick responses to states asking for flexibility in operating school programs, as well as guidance and resources for states, districts, and schools, to identify helping agencies, organizations, places for donations, and federal aid for displaced and homeless students. One of the first resources the website identified was information on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Children and youth who lost their housing due to the hurricanes were eligible for McKinney-Vento services. This eligibility permitted their entry into schools and allowed schools to become a key to healing and recovery by enrolling displaced children with compassion and efficiency, providing parents with information and assistance, and supporting the mental, physical, and intellectual well-being of students and families on a daily basis.

Students who lose their housing due to other disasters, such as floods, tornadoes, fires, and mudslides, are also eligible for McKinney-Vento services. Since such disasters can occur with no warning, school districts must be prepared to respond efficiently to large numbers of homeless families and youth. Having a robust and rigorous McKinney-Vento program is a key element to a successful disaster response. Responding to a disaster is easier if the school district has in place strong policies and practices to enlist community support; to enroll and place students without documents; and to support basic needs, mental and physical health, and academic achievement. Rigorous McKinney-Vento programs allow school districts to serve all children and youth experiencing homelessness quickly and effectively.

This toolbox is designed to help school districts implement the McKinney-Vento Act fully, so they can address the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness on a daily basis and in times of disaster.

* Quotes throughout this document are from interviews in school districts highly impacted by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes. The interviews are captured in the *McKinney-Vento in Action: In Their Own Words*. [Julianelle, (2006). *McKinney-Vento in Action: In Their Own Words-School and Students Rising Above.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.]

WHAT IS IN THE TOOLBOX?

This toolbox is meant to be exactly that: a package containing the basic tools necessary to construct a rigorous and robust McKinney-Vento program. It contains tools to assist in: (1) developing strong community collaborations, including disaster planning and mitigation; (2) implementing the McKinney-Vento Act, including disaster response (consisting of identification, immediate enrollment, meeting immediate academic and health needs, transportation, nutrition, and data management); and (3) promoting mental health and academic success, including disaster recovery.

The intent is not to focus on narrative or anecdotes, but to provide a collection of user-friendly tools: sample documents, templates, charts, checklists, etc. The toolbox also contains extensive lists of useful web links. Each link is accompanied by a detailed description of the information it provides.

WHO SHOULD USE THE TOOLBOX?

The toolbox should be used by school district local homeless education liaisons, district and school administrators, district federal program directors, and mental health personnel at all levels. It contains useful tools and information for personnel who are unfamiliar with the McKinney-Vento Act, as well as for the most experienced local liaisons.

The toolbox can also be used as a technical assistance and training tool by State Coordinators for Homeless Education; state administrators; state federal program directors; and mental health personnel at all levels. Appendix 21 is designed to assist State Coordinators in using this toolbox.

HOW DO WE USE IT?

It is not necessary or even advisable to read the entire toolbox from beginning to end. To help users develop their own course of study, the toolbox begins with a brief self-assessment. The substantive contents of the toolbox are modeled on the self-assessment, following the same order and offering hands-on tools to improve the school district's program in each area of the assessment. The self-assessment scores will inform users as to where they should begin in the toolbox. For example, areas where the assessment reveals a less-developed program are good places to begin work, while areas where the user's program is already functioning well may be lower priorities for improvement.

Since the goal of the exercise is to produce a robust and rigorous McKinney-Vento program, it is important for users to administer the self-assessment honestly and with a critical eye toward their programs. Each chapter of the toolbox concludes with a targeted self-assessment to assist the user in evaluating the district's implementation of the tools and strategies contained in that chapter.

Of course, users interested in particular topics are welcome to go directly to the appropriate chapter, by consulting the table of contents or the topical index in Appendix 1.

WHAT IF I AM FACING A DISASTER RIGHT NOW?

The goal of the toolbox is to encourage school districts to utilize its tools as fully as possible prior to a disaster so that districts will be prepared and able to respond efficiently and effectively. However, for districts not entirely prepared for a disaster, Appendix 20 contains a Quick-Start Disaster Response Tool which provides a basic checklist to guide immediate responses. This tool can also help new local homeless education liaisons prioritize their efforts and quickly implement the basics of a strong McKinney-Vento program.

THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT:

- guarantees the rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness to a free and appropriate public education
- requires a local homeless education liaison in every school district ensures:
- immediate enrollment
- access to needed services
- school stability
- support for academic achievement

For more on the McKinney-Vento Act, visit the NCHE website at http://www.serve.org/nche/m-v.php

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Does your district have a robust and rigorous McKinney-Vento program?

School District Name: _____

Individual(s) Conducting Assessment: _____

Date of ate 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. Developing Strong Community Collaborations, Including Disaster Planning and Mitigation

A. Public, private, and community agencies are known to each other, communicating and engaged in interdisciplinary disaster planning.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Public, private, and community services are coordinated, integrated, and delivered collaboratively.	1 2 3 4 5
TOTAL SCORE FOR SECTION I (Community Collaborations) _____/10	

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

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.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Local liaison has a full understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless. Expedited identification strategies ensure that children and youth eligible for services are identified.	1 2 3 4 5
C. Immediate enrollment strategies ensure that barriers to enrolling and remaining in school are eliminated.	1 2 3 4 5
D. Strategies are implemented for placing students in appropriate classes without academic records and for obtaining complete school records.	1 2 3 4 5

E. Aggressive and timely strategies ensure full, productive participation in educational activities and include tactics to address physical and mental health needs.	1 2 3 4 5
F. Strategies, policies, and procedures address anticipated transportation barriers.	1 2 3 4 5
G. Strategies, policies, and procedures are in place to expedite placement in school nutrition programs.	1 2 3 4 5
H. Policies and procedures are in place to manage data tracking and reporting of student outcomes effectively.	1 2 3 4 5
I. The district utilizes the media in a positive way.	1 2 3 4 5
J. Strategies, policies, and procedures are in place to deal with the coordination of donations.	1 2 3 4 5
TOTAL SCORE FOR SECTION II (Implementation of McKinney-Vento)_____/50	

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A. Strategies are in place to address the short- and long-term mental health and case management needs of students and families.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Strategies, policies, and procedures are in place to deal with staff fatigue.	1 2 3 4 5
C. Strategies are in place to address the short- and long-term academic needs of displaced students, including graduating seniors.	1 2 3 4 5
D. Funding: Needed services are available and accessible to all in a variety of settings using a combination of public, private, community, and personal resources.	1 2 3 4 5
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