



## MCKINNEY-VENTO LAW INTO PRACTICE BRIEF SERIES

### Transporting Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

#### This NCHE brief

- summarizes the key provisions related to the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness (CYEH) included in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act;
- suggests transportation implementation strategies at the state and local levels; and
- recommends resources for funding transportation costs.

## INTRODUCTION

Homelessness among children and youth in the United States (U.S.) is on the rise. During school year (SY) 2022-23, U.S. public schools reported that 1,374,537 students experienced homelessness at some point—2.8% of all students enrolled in U.S. public schools during that school year. Changing schools may greatly impede the academic achievement and social development of students experiencing homelessness. Research studies have demonstrated a link between high mobility due to homelessness and poor school performance (Cunningham et al., 2010; Obradovic et al., 2009). Students who transfer to a new school often experience educational discontinuity and, as a result, lose academic credits. Moreover, the mobility experienced by these students separates them from their social network,



#### THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT DEFINITION OF HOMELESS

(McKinney-Vento Act section 725(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).

and from teachers and school staff who know their academic strengths and weaknesses. Coupled with the distress caused by the loss of housing and the economic strain that often accompanies this, changing schools puts students in homeless situations at risk of academic failure.

[Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#) (McKinney-Vento Act) is a federal law that guarantees educational rights and supports to remove educational barriers for CYEH. This brief explains the McKinney-Vento Act's provisions related to the transportation of CYEH and suggests strategies for implementation. Briefs on additional homeless education topics are available on the [resources page of the NCHE website](#). For further information on the transportation of CYEH, including transportation strategies for local educational agencies (LEAs), consult the [Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance](#) (U.S. Department of Education (ED), 2018, pp. 27-31).

## KEY TRANSPORTATION PROVISIONS UNDER THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT

### SCHOOL OF ORIGIN TRANSPORTATION

To counteract the educational disruption caused by mobility, the McKinney-Vento Act provides CYEH with the right to continue attending the school of origin or enroll in any public school that non-homeless students who live in the same attendance area are eligible to attend, according to the student's best interest<sup>1</sup> (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(3)(A)). The term "school of origin" means the school that a child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled, including a preschool (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(3)(l)(i)). When a child or youth experiencing homelessness completes the final grade level served by the school of origin, the term "school of origin" includes the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(3)(l)(ii)).

If a child or youth experiencing homelessness continues to live in an area served by the LEA in which the school of origin is located, the child's or youth's transportation to and from the school of origin must be provided or arranged by the LEA in which the school of origin is located (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(J)(iii)(I)). If the homeless child's or youth's living arrangements in the area served by the LEA of origin terminate and the child or youth, though continuing his or her education in the school of origin, begins living in an area served by another LEA, the LEA of origin and the LEA in which the homeless child or youth is living must agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing the

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<sup>1</sup> When determining a child's or youth's best interest, a LEA must consider student-centered factors, including factors related to the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless children and youths, giving priority to the request of the child's or youth's parent or guardian or (in the case of an unaccompanied youth) the youth.

child with transportation to and from the school of origin. If the LEAs are unable to agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs for transportation must be shared equally (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(J)(iii)(II)).

Please note that state educational agencies (SEAs) may have a specific policy regarding which LEA is responsible for school of origin transportation costs. NCHE encourages you to review your individual SEA's policy to ensure proper compliance.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, all protections apply equally to students with and without disabilities, including transportation to and from the school of origin when required by their Individualized Education Program (IEP) (ED, 2018, p. 30). When such a student moves to a new LEA, whether in the same or a different state, and it is determined to be in their best interest to remain in the school of origin, both LEAs must agree on how to share transportation responsibilities and costs. If no agreement is reached, the costs must be split equally. State policies may further clarify cost responsibilities within that state, but such state policies must align with federal law and do not apply across state lines. LEAs are encouraged to explore all available funding sources, including SEA reimbursements, EHCY subgrants, and Title I, Part A set-asides, to support transportation needs.

## **SUMMARY OF KEY MCKINNEY-VENTO TRANSPORTATION PROVISIONS**

- Local liaisons<sup>2</sup> must ensure that the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to and from the school of origin, and is assisted in accessing transportation to the school selected in accordance with the best interest determination (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(6)(A)(viii)).
- Local educational agencies must provide CYEH with transportation to and from the school of origin at the request of a parent or guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the local liaison) (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(J)(iii)).
- If the child's or youth's living arrangements in the area served by the LEA of origin terminate and the child or youth, though continuing the child's or youth's education in the school of origin, begins living in an area served by another LEA, the LEA of origin and the LEA in which the homeless child or youth is living shall agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing the child or youth with transportation to and from the school of origin. If the LEAs are unable to agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs for transportation shall be shared equally (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(J)(iii)(II)).
- In addition to providing transportation to the school of origin, LEAs must provide CYEH with transportation services comparable to those provided to other students in the school (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(4)(A)).

<sup>2</sup> Every LEA is required to designate a local homeless education liaison who oversees the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in schools throughout the LEA (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(J)(ii)).

Children and youth experiencing homelessness have the right to remain in their school of origin for the duration of homelessness in any case in which a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year, and for the remainder of the academic year, if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(3)(A)). Further, LEAs must continue to provide transportation to and from the school of origin to formerly homeless students who have become permanently housed for the remainder of the academic year during which the child or youth becomes permanently housed (ED, 2018, p. 28). The law requires the SEAs and the LEAs in the state to adopt policies and practices to ensure that transportation to and from the school of origin is provided upon request.

If the LEA determines that it is in the student's best interest to continue his or her education in the school of origin, then the LEA must provide or arrange transportation to and from the school of origin, at the request of the parent or guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied homeless youth, at the request of the local liaison) (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(J)(iii)). For more information about school selection and determining a student's best interest, download NCHE's brief [School Selection and Best Interest Determination](#).

## COMPARABLE SERVICES

The McKinney-Vento Act also requires that CYEH be provided services comparable to those offered to other students in the school, including transportation (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(4)(A)).

## REMOVAL OF BARRIERS

The intent of the McKinney-Vento Act is to remove barriers to educational access and success for children and youth experiencing homelessness. According to the Act, SEAs must review and take steps to revise any law, regulation, practice, or policy that may act as a barrier to the identification of, or the enrollment, attendance, or success in school of, CYEH (McKinney-Vento Act section 721(2)). In reviewing and revising such policies, consideration must be given to issues concerning transportation. Because students in homeless situations often experience challenges not faced by housed students, the provision of services to CYEH may need to extend beyond what is provided to housed students when extraordinary barriers exist.

The McKinney-Vento Act specifically states that CYEH have the right to fully participate in school, including extracurricular activities (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(F)(iii)). When lack of transportation creates a barrier to participation in school-administered extracurricular activities, LEAs must provide transportation to and from those activities to ensure equal access (ED, 2018, p. 29). For more information, consult NCHE's briefs [Ensuring Full Participation in Extracurricular Activities for Students Experiencing Homelessness](#) and [Extracurricular Activities and Transportation for Students Experiencing Homelessness](#).

## PROMPT PROVISION OF TRANSPORTATION

The McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to immediately enroll<sup>3</sup> CYEH (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(3)(C)). Therefore, LEAs must arrange transportation without delay. Transportation arrangements should ensure that CYEH are able to participate for the full school day, neither arriving late nor leaving before the school day has ended. The law also requires LEAs to coordinate transportation services with other LEAs (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(5)(A)(ii)). Such coordination ensures that each LEA understands its responsibility in minimizing educational disruption for CYEH that may be caused by the lack of transportation. Prompt and coordinated transportation is critical, as delays can impede immediate enrollment. Providing a flexible range of transportation options—such as mileage reimbursement, pre-screened rideshare services, or other supports—can significantly reduce mobility-related barriers and promote educational stability.

## DETERMINING THE MODE OF TRANSPORTATION

According to the [Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance](#), based on the best interest of the student and in consultation with the parent, the LEA ultimately determines the mode of transportation. While many options exist for transporting CYEH, the mode the LEA selects must align with SEA and LEA transportation policies and safety standards and must not create a barrier to the student arriving to school on time or cause an undue burden on the parents or student.



The mode of transportation should also not stigmatize CYEH or betray the confidentiality of their living arrangement. Bus routes, for example, should be arranged so that students staying in homeless shelters can be picked up and dropped off in a manner that does not reveal their place of temporary residence.

When selecting a school transportation model, LEAs typically consider several service options, each with unique operational and funding implications:

- **District-Provided Transportation:** This is the most common model, where the LEA manages all aspects of school transportation. This model may include busing students as well as other forms of district-provided transportation services. To implement this model, LEAs must hire drivers, maintain vehicles, plan transportation routes, and ensure compliance with safety standards.

<sup>3</sup> Enrollment is defined as “attending classes and participating fully in school activities” (McKinney-Vento Act section 725(1)).

- **Private Contracting:** This is the second most common model, which operates similarly to LEA-run systems but is managed by a private provider. The LEA contracts with a transportation company that oversees operations, staffing, and maintenance.
- **Public Transit:** This model is typically used in large urban areas where students rely on existing city transit systems. This model may involve coordination with local transit authorities and often includes subsidized fares or student-specific routes.
- **Parent/Caregiver-Provided Transportation:** In this emerging model, parents or caregivers provide transportation for students and may be reimbursed for mileage, fuel, or even car repairs on a necessary and reasonable basis. While this approach can be cost-effective and particularly beneficial for CYEH, it is not universally accepted. Many SEAs and LEAs prohibit this model to mitigate risks of fraud, waste, and abuse. However, it remains a potentially viable and flexible option, especially when supported by federal and state special transportation funds.

## RESOURCES FOR FUNDING TRANSPORTATION

### LEA TRANSPORTATION OR GENERAL FUNDS

Providing transportation to and from the school of origin for CYEH when requested is a LEA responsibility mandated in the McKinney-Vento Act. This responsibility exists for all LEAs, even if the LEA does not provide transportation for other students and/or does not receive McKinney-Vento subgrant funding. As such, using LEA transportation or general funds to provide transportation for CYEH is an acceptable, and often necessary, option.

### MCKINNEY-VENTO SUBGRANT FUNDS

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, SEAs must distribute a portion of their SEA McKinney-Vento allocation to LEAs through a competitive subgrant process. LEAs that receive a subgrant may use these funds to “defray the excess cost” of providing transportation to CYEH (McKinney-Vento Act section 723(d)(5)). While the law does not define this phrase, the expectation is that the LEA covers the same level of cost for transporting CYEH as is covered for other students before relying on subgrant funds.

The excess cost is the difference between what an LEA normally spends to transport a student to school and the cost of transporting CYEH to school. If the LEA provides transportation to CYEH through a regular bus route, there is no excess cost to providing transportation. If the LEA provides special transportation only for the CYEH (e.g., through a private vehicle or transportation company), the entire cost can be considered excess. If the LEA must reroute buses to transport a CYEH enrolled in one of its schools, the additional cost of this rerouting can be considered excess cost (ED, 2018, p. 28).

NCHE's [Use-of-Funds Tip Sheet for Serving Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness with Education for Homeless Children & Youth \(EHCY\) Program Funds](#) provides educational administrators in LEAs with information and guiding questions to assist them in determining how to spend subgrant funds. When making funding decisions, including those related to transportation, practitioners should consider six decision points to determine whether a proposed use of EHCY funds is allowable.



As a best practice, SEA McKinney-Vento subgrant applications should require LEAs to state what portion of the grant, if received, would be allocated for transportation. It is important to remember that subgrants are intended to meet a range of needs for CYEH, not just transportation needs. For questions about the McKinney-Vento subgrant application process in your state and allowable uses of subgrant funds, contact your [State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program](#).<sup>4</sup>

## TITLE I, PART A FUNDS

Funds reserved for CYEH under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (ESEA section 1111 *et seq.*) may be used to provide CYEH with services not ordinarily provided to other students, including transportation to and from the school of origin (ESEA section 1113(c)(3)(C)(ii)). It is important to understand that two key principles guide the use of these funds.

First, any services provided must be both reasonable and necessary to help CYEH access educational opportunities. Second, the funds should only be used as a last resort—after all other public or private funding sources have been explored and found to be unavailable. For more information about using Title I funds to support the education of CYEH, download NCHE's brief [Serving Students Experiencing Homelessness under Title I, Part A](#).

<sup>4</sup> Every SEA is required to designate a state coordinator for homeless education who oversees the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in LEAs throughout the state (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(d)(3)).

## COLLABORATING TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION

Collaboration is key to creating an efficient system of providing transportation for CYEH. Ideally, collaborative relationships are formed prior to the arising of an issue involving transportation.

## COLLABORATION AMONG LEA PROGRAMS AND DEPARTMENTS

Collaboration between the LEA's homeless education and transportation programs is critical to ensuring that transportation for CYEH is provided in a prompt and efficient manner. The LEA's transportation director should work with the local liaison, LEA leadership, neighboring LEAs, and homeless service providers to develop effective transportation policies and procedures. In addition, school bus drivers should be trained on the McKinney-Vento Act's requirements concerning CYEH. Because bus drivers are often the first and last school personnel to encounter CYEH over the course of the day, they may develop supportive relationships with the students. Drivers also may assist with identifying CYEH as they observe changes in when and where students are picked up or dropped off. For additional guidance on recognizing potential signs of homelessness and identifying CYEH, please refer to NCHE's resources: the [Common Signs of Homelessness](#) handout and the [Identifying Children and Youth in Homeless Situations](#) brief.

Many LEAs utilize special education buses for transporting CYEH. ED's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) allows the use of special education buses for CYEH if the transportation needs of all special education students have been met. For further information, consult the OSERS' [Questions and Answers on Special Education and Homelessness](#).

## INTER-DISTRICT COLLABORATION

Many CYEH cross LEA, county, and even state lines when traveling between temporary living arrangements and school. As such, coordination between LEAs is required in cases of inter-district transportation (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(5)(A)(ii)). As noted previously, in cases where it is determined to be in a student's best interest to attend the school of origin, but the student is living in another LEA, the LEA of origin and the LEA in which the student is living must agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing transportation to and from the school of origin.

If the LEAs are unable to reach an agreement, the responsibility and costs for transportation must be shared equally (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(J)(iii)(II)). Inter-district transportation disputes should be resolved at the SEA level (ED, 2018, p. 28). In cases where LEAs are finding it difficult to agree on a transportation arrangement, the SEA should try to help the two LEAs come to an agreement; if the LEAs are in different states, both SEAs should try to arrange an agreement (ED, 2018, pp. 28-29). LEAs should consult with their state coordinator to be informed about any policies or practices related to inter-district transportation that may be in place within the state.

Local liaisons and transportation directors from different LEAs that share CYEH should meet regularly to plan efficient ways to provide transportation. It is best to have a plan in place before the need for transportation arises so that barriers that might delay inter-district transportation may be addressed. These plans could take the form of informal agreements or formal memoranda of understanding.

## **COMMUNITY COLLABORATION**

Local liaisons should establish cooperative relationships with community agencies that serve families, youth, and children experiencing homelessness. A community-wide commitment to support homeless families with children and unaccompanied homeless youths can result in resource sharing, including sharing transportation resources. Many LEAs have been able to arrange transportation using shelter or other service vans. Some public transportation systems donate bus passes or other transportation services to LEAs to support CYEH. Community foundations often are willing to contribute to meeting the needs of vulnerable students, including the transportation needs of CYEH.

## **COLLABORATION WITH PARENTS**

Parents who are experiencing homelessness appreciate being included in decisions involving the education of their children and should be part of the conversation on developing any plans for transporting their children to and from the school of origin. Moreover, parents should be provided with clear expectations for their role in carrying out the plan, such as committing to getting their children to a bus stop on time, notifying the transportation department when a child will not be attending school to prevent unnecessary trips, or following procedures for utilizing gas vouchers. In some instances, LEAs will develop a written transportation agreement with the parent that is helpful in holding all parties accountable and responsible.

## **STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

In the [\*Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance\*](#), ED recommends the following strategies for the efficient provision of transportation for CYEH:

- Convene a meeting of local area liaisons and transportation directors to establish a plan that may be implemented immediately when transportation is needed for a homeless child. Addressing issues of cost, responsibility, and logistics, including when providing inter-district transportation, before the need occurs will prevent delays in the student's school attendance.
- Utilize technology, such as a transportation database, to make electronic transportation requests, maintain current records of CYEH receiving transportation, and determine what specialized bus routes have been established.
- Develop forms, such as transportation requests for CYEH, parent agreements, and inter-district transportation agreements that may be accessed easily at any school or online.

- Explore flexible bus routes that can be implemented easily. Maintain a list of shelters, hotels, motels, campgrounds, and other areas where homeless families may live so that these locations can be included in bus routes on short notice.
- Be aware that families and youth experiencing homelessness often move frequently, and transportation plans must be adjusted accordingly. Encourage families and youth to inform the local liaison when they are moving.
- Identify a LEA transportation staff member who will serve as the point person to arrange transportation for CYEH.
- Be mindful of state and local policies for pupil transportation safety. The McKinney-Vento Act does not override safety policies.
- If utilizing public transportation, ensure that assistance is provided for parents to accompany young children to and from school.
- Develop a system of providing gas vouchers/cards or reimbursements to parents or youth who are able and willing to drive to school.
- Explore possibilities for volunteers, such as retirees, to provide transportation for CYEH. This option should be considered only if pupil transportation safety policies allow it, and if sufficient driver background checks are conducted.
- Explore economical approaches to providing transportation. Brainstorm cost-saving solutions with LEA and community stakeholders (ED, 2018, pp. 30-31).

In addition, the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS) provides assistance to the nation's school transportation community and industry. The NASDPTS works to ensure safe, secure, environmentally responsible, and cost-effective transportation to school children and to ensure their continued access to school and school-related activities. Each state has an appointed "[State Director](#)" for pupil transportation, who may be a resource for local liaisons or state coordinators to collaborate with.

## NCHE Transportation Resources



For more information about providing transportation for CYEH, including sample transportation agreements, please visit the following NCHE resources:

- Resources by Topic webpage, [Transportation](#)
- NCHE's *Homeless Liaison Toolkit*, [Chapter 7: Transportation](#) and [Appendix 7.A: Memorandum of Understanding](#)
- NCHE's *Rural Transportation for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness* brief
- National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS) [2000 Resolution to Support the Transportation of Homeless Children and Youth](#)

## CONCLUSION

Providing transportation for CYEH eliminates the most often cited barrier to their school enrollment and regular attendance. By establishing transportation plans and collaborative agreements prior to the need for transportation, LEAs ensure that transportation for CYEH is provided in a prompt and effective manner.

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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](http://nche.ed.gov).

For more information on issues related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, contact the NCHE helpline at 305-306-8495 or NCHE. [helpline@safalpartners.com](mailto:helpline@safalpartners.com).

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