

TERRELL COUNTY SCHOOLS
Homeless Education

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Introduction

Homelessness exists in our community. A combination of high housing costs and poverty causes many families to lose their housing. Many young people leave their homes due to abuse, neglect and family conflict. Children and youth who have lost their housing live in a variety of places, including motels, shelters, shared residences, transitional housing programs, cars, campgrounds and others. Their lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious physical, emotional and mental consequences. The Terrell County School System will ensure that all children and youth receive a free appropriate public education and are given meaningful opportunities to succeed in our schools. This district will also follow the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.

Under federal law, children and youth experiencing homelessness must have access to appropriate public education, including preschool, and be given a full opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards. They must be included in state-wide and district-wide assessments and accountability systems. Our schools will ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are free from discrimination, segregation and harassment.

Information regarding this policy will be: distributed to all students upon enrollment and once during the school year; provided to students who seek to withdraw from school; and posted in every school in the district, as well as other places where children, youth and families experiencing homelessness receive services, including family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels, campgrounds, drop-in centers, welfare departments, health departments and other social service agencies.

Definitions

Children and youth experiencing homelessness means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, and lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, camping

Grounds or trailer parks due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are Awaiting foster care placement children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public

Place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings

Children and youth who are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting; and migratory children and youth who are living in a situation describe above.

A child or youth shall be considered to be experiencing homelessness for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above. For further information, visit your child's school or school website at www.terrell.k12.ga.us

Unaccompanied youth means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is experiencing homelessness as defined above. The more general term youth also includes unaccompanied youth.

Enroll and **enrollment** mean attending school and participating fully in school activities.

Immediate means without delay

Parent means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

School or origin means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

Liaison is the staff person designated by our LEA and each LEA in the state as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act.

Identification

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the liaison will identify children and youth experiencing homelessness in the district, both in and out of school. The liaison will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth as experiencing homelessness, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the liaison. The liaison will also instruct school registrars and secretaries to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student, and to forward information indicating homelessness to the liaison. Community partners in identification may include: family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels campgrounds, drop-in centers, welfare departments and other social service agencies, street outreach teams, faith-based organizations, truancy and attendance officers, local homeless coalitions, and legal services.

The liaison will keep data on the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness in the district, where they are living, their academic achievement (including performance on state-wide and district-wide assessments), and the reasons for any enrolment delays, interruptions in their education or school transfers.

School Selection

Each child and youth experiencing homelessness has the right to remain at his or her schools of origin, or to attend any school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both the student and our school district. Students who change schools have been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. High mobility rates have also been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting our schools to benefit from the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity.

Therefore, in selecting a school, children and youth experiencing homelessness shall remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent or youth's wishes. Students may remain at their schools or origin the entire time they are experiencing homelessness, and until the end of any academic year in which they become

permanently housed. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing between academic years.

Feasibility shall be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent's or youth's wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

- Safety of the student
- Continuity of instruction
- Likely area of family's or youth's future housing
- Time remaining in the academic year
- Anticipate length of stay in temporary living situation
- School placement of siblings
- Whether the student has special needs that would render the commute harmful

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin (see below) and services under federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.

Enrollment

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students experiencing homelessness may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth experiencing homelessness. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:

Proof of residency

Transcripts/school records (The enrolling school must contact the student's previous school to obtain school records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the student's age and information gathered from the student, parent and previous schools or teachers.)

Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records (If necessary, the school must refer students to the liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunization and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from previous schools or state registries, and school-based or community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed.)

Proof of guardianship

Birth certificate

Any other document requirements

Unpaid school fees

Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes

Any factor related to the student's living situation

Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling or the LEA liaison.

Transportation

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent's request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth experiencing homelessness. Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes. The liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will only be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.

Schools and the liaison shall use the district transportation form to process transportation requests. Requests shall be processed and transportation arranged without delay. If the student experiencing homelessness is living and attending school in this district, this district shall arrange transportation. If the student experiencing homelessness is living in this district, but attending school in another, or attending school in this district but living in another, this district will follow the inter-district transportation agreement to determine who must arrange transportation. It is this district's policy that inter-district disputes shall not result in a student experiencing homelessness missing school. If such a dispute arises, this district will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention of the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth experiencing homelessness shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to house students.

Services

Children and youth experiencing homelessness shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected, including:

- Transportation (as described above)
- Title I (as described below)
- Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners
- Vocational and technical education programs
- Gifted and talented programs
- Before-school and after-school programs

The district recognizes that children and youth experiencing homelessness suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth experiencing homelessness suspected of having a disability shall be given priority and coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary, to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. When necessary, the district shall expeditiously designate a surrogate parent for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability. If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school shall immediately implement it. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation shall be excused. Our school district will follow state procedures to ensure that youth experiencing homelessness and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. School personnel shall refer children and youth experiencing homelessness to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

School personnel must also inform parents of all educational and related opportunities available to their children and provide parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education. All parent information required by any provision of this policy must be provided in a form, manner and language understandable to each parent.

Disputes

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth experiencing homelessness shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the rights of a student experiencing homelessness to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title 1 services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or youth to the liaison. The liaison shall ensure the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The liaison shall keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are repeatedly delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

The parent, unaccompanied youth, or school district may appeal the liaison's decision as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

Free meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are available for learning, the U.S Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day a child or youth experiencing homelessness enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the district nutrition office for immediate processing.

Title 1

Children and youth experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible for Title 1 services; regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness puts students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The district shall reserve such funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title 1 students to children and youth experiencing homelessness attending non-participating schools. The amount reserved shall be determined by a formula based upon the per-pupil Title 1 expenditure and developed

jointly by the liaison and the Title 1 director. Reserved funds will be used to provide educationally related support services to children and youth experiencing homelessness, both in school and outside of school, and to remove barriers that prevent regular attendance.

Our district's Title 1 plan will be coordinated with our McKinney-Vento services, through collaboration between the Title 1 director and the liaison. Children and youth experiencing homelessness shall be assessed, reported on and include in accountability systems, as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance.

Training

The liaison will conduct training and sensitivity/awareness activities for the following LEA and school staff at least once each year: the Assistant Superintendent, principals, assistant principals, federal program administrators, registrars, school secretaries, school counselors, school social workers, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, school nurses and teachers. The trainings and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with this policy, and increase sensitivity to children and youth experiencing homelessness.

The liaison shall also obtain from every school the name and contact information of a building liaison. Building liaisons will lead and coordinate their schools' compliance with this policy and will receive training from the district liaison annually.

Coordination

The liaison shall coordinate with and seek support from the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, public and private service providers in the community, housing and placement agencies, the pupil transportation department, liaison in neighboring districts and other organizations and agencies. Coordination will include conduction outreach and training to those agencies and participating in the local continuum of care, homeless coalition, homeless steering committee, and other relevant groups. Both public and private agencies will be encouraged to support the liaison and our schools in implementing this policy.

Preschool

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Children experiencing homelessness have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. To facilitate preschool enrollment and attendance, the provisions of this policy will apply to preschools. Our district will ensure that children experiencing homelessness receive priority enrollment in preschool programs operated by the district, including exempting children experiencing homelessness from waiting lists.

Children experiencing homelessness with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Children experiencing homelessness under age three will be referred for at-risk services under Part C of IDEA and screened to determine if referral for additional Part C services are appropriate. The liaison will collaborate with Head Start and Even Start programs and other preschool programs to ensure that children experiencing homelessness can access those programs.