

**STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTION**  
**INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM**  
POLICY AND PROCEDURES  
HOMELESS STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

**6000**  
**6300**  
6320

**Overview**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized in December 2001 as part of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, ensures educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The goal of the McKinney-Vento Act is to ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education as provided to other children and youth. The following policy is intended to provide guidance in implementing the requirements of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act in the Chelmsford Public Schools.

**Definitions**

The Massachusetts Department of Education has adopted Section 752(2) of the McKinney-Vento Act regarding the definition of homeless children and youth:

- Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or have a primary nighttime residence in a supervised, publicly or privately, operated shelter for temporary accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill), an institution providing temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

This definition includes:

- 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, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to that 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 public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
- Migratory children (such term is defined in section 1409 of the elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.
- Unaccompanied youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

In addition, according to McKinney-Vento, a fixed residence is one that is stationary, permanent, and not subject to change. A regular residence is one which is used on a regular (i.e. nightly) basis. An adequate residence is one that is sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments. Therefore, children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate residence will be considered homeless.

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### **Designation of a Homeless Education Liaison**

As required by the McKinney-Vento Act, Chelmsford Public Schools has designated a staff person as a liaison for student in homeless situations who will serve as the contact person with the Massachusetts Department of Education for education-related issues regarding homeless students in the school district.

The responsibilities of the Homeless Education Liaison are to ensure the following:

- Homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through the coordination with other agencies.
- Homeless children and youth enroll in, and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school and receive educational services for which they are eligible.
- Parents or guardians are informed of educational and related opportunities, such as access to school nutrition programs, available to their children, and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
- Enrollment disputes are mediated and resolved.
- Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth are fully informed of all transportation services, including to the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing needed transportation services.

### **Enrollment of Homeless Students and School Records**

The Chelmsford Public Schools enrolls homeless students in school, even if they do not have the documents usually required for enrollment, such as school records, medical records or proof of residency.

- Homeless students have a right to either remain in their school or origin or to attend school where they are temporarily residing.
- Students who choose to remain in their school of origin have the right to remain there until the end of the school year in which they get permanent housing.
- If a homeless student arrives without records, the school district's designated Homeless Education Liaison must assist the family and contact the previously attended school system to obtain the required records.

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### **Immunizations**

According to the Department of Education's Advisory 2002-2: Enrollment of Homeless Students and School Records, the D.O.E. is aware that "the immunization statute", GL c.76 section 15, generally requires students to provide proof of immunization prior to enrollment. Since McKinney-Vento is a federal law, its requirements override the state immunization law. However, it should be noted that the immunization law allows, in the absence of a Department of Health declared epidemic or emergency, the enrollment of students who have not been immunized if they have religious objections to immunization. Moreover, the Department has consulted with the Department of Public Health (D.P.H.) regarding this issue and the D.P.H. agrees that, "in the absence of an emergency or epidemic of disease, the health risk of enrolling homeless students prior to receiving proof of immunization is minimal."

### **School Selection and Transportation**

McKinney-Vento permits homeless students to remain in their school of origin despite their residential instability and to receive the transportation services that will help provide educational stability. In following the D.O.E.'s advisories, in the homeless student's best interest, the Chelmsford Public Schools allows a homeless student to:

- continue education in the school of origin until the end of the year in which the student obtains permanent housing;
- enroll in a public school those non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.

The Chelmsford Public Schools ensures that transportation is provided, at the request of the parent or guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the liaison), to and from the school of origin. In addition:

- If the homeless student continues to live in Chelmsford, Chelmsford will provide or arrange transportation, if provided to other children.
- If the homeless student moves to an area served by another district, though continuing his or her education in Chelmsford; likewise if a homeless student moves into Chelmsford but continues to be educated in the previous school district, Chelmsford and the other district must agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation to and from Chelmsford.
- If Chelmsford and the other district cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs must be shared equally.

The Homeless Education Liaison must ensure that the parent or guardian of a homeless student, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed in the language of the home, of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and is assisted in accessing transportation to the school selected.

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### **Access to Child Nutrition Programs**

Chelmsford Public Schools ensures that homeless students and youth are able to participate in federal and state food programs as outlined in D.O.E. Advisory 2002-4: Homeless Students' Access to Child Nutrition Programs. These guidelines include the following:

- To expedite the delivery of nutritional benefits, documentation that the student is homeless from the Homeless Education Liaison or the director of the homeless shelter where the student resides is accepted.
- Further, documentation to substantiate free meal eligibility that is acceptable in lieu of a free and reduced price meal application may consist of the student's name, effective date, and the signature of the Homeless Education Liaison or the director of the homeless shelter.
- Food Service is promptly notified when children leave the school or are no longer considered homeless. If the student is no longer homeless, Food Services provide an application for free and reduced price meals.
- If the student or family temporarily resides with another household (host family), they are still considered homeless and considered eligible for free meal status.
- The host family's application may include the homeless family along with any income received by the homeless family.

### **Title I and Homeless Students**

Chelmsford Public Schools ensures that homeless students have access to their needed education services to have an equal opportunity to meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards to which all students are held.

As required, the school district's Title I Grant has a plan that is coordinated with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act that includes:

- a description of how Chelmsford will integrate services provided under Title I with other educational services for homeless students;
- a description of how Chelmsford will reserve Title I funds for homeless students who may not be attending a Title I participating school; and
- Title I funds are not used to pay for transportation of homeless students to their school of origin.

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### **Homeless Preschool Children**

Each homeless child and youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including public preschool education, as other children and youth. Therefore, the Homeless Education Liaison will identify preschool-aged homeless children by:

- working closely with shelters, emergency assistance motels, and social service agencies in Chelmsford, and by inquiring when enrolling homeless students in school, whether the family also has younger children;
- collaborating with Early Intervention to locate, identify and evaluate preschoolers for early identification of special education needs;
- working with preschool staff to review practices such as assigning childcare slots.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that homeless preschoolers and all homeless children are included in the Child find process for early identification of special education needs. When possible, the eligibility process for identifying special needs is expedited to avoid delays in providing services to eligible children.

### **Unaccompanied Youth**

In addition to the benefits outlined above, the Chelmsford Public Schools reviews its practices covering class scheduling, tardiness, absenteeism, flexible school hours, credit for work programs, vocational education, MCAS remediation, and course credit to eliminate barriers to unaccompanied youth succeeding in school.

### **Dispute Resolution Process**

The Chelmsford Public Schools has developed procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding the educational placement of homeless children and youth. The process is attached to this Policy.

### **Implementation**

Specific procedures regarding implementation of this Policy by the Homeless Education Liaison are Policy 6320.01 and Policy 6320.02.