

## **How Teachers Can Help Students Who Are Homeless**

Students experiencing homelessness may find regular school attendance difficult. Yet school may be the only place of stability in a child's life. Every time children change schools, they may lose between four to six months of academic progress. Children who continually change schools may feel different and have adjustment difficulties. Below are strategies teachers and school staff can use to help new students adjust more easily into their new school settings.

### **1. Stabilize the child's basic needs.**

**Have food, clothing, shelter, medical care, basic hygiene, and transportation needs resolved. Provide a community resource list to the family or youth. If necessary, find a place for students to shower. Keep nutritious snacks available. Don't ask students with insecure housing to bring food items or treats to school.**

### **2. Administer a brief educational assessment to the child to determine their level of academic**

**ability. A brief assessment in reading, math, and writing will avoid teaching above or below a student's ability while previous school records are obtained. Do an oral interview to find out the child's school history and share this information with other teachers.**

### **3. Find time each week for new students to "check-in" with their teacher.**

**Assign an adult to check-in daily with new children during the first month of school. Have an adult watch new students during recess for the first few weeks since play time may be difficult for new students. Assign new students a "job" or have them become involved in extra-curricular activities.**

### **4. Pair a new student with a "buddy" in the classroom on the first day of school.**

Having a buddy will keep new students in contact with someone who knows their way around the school. A buddy can also make sure new students have all their books and supplies to do work at home at the end of the day. Other welcoming activities include:

- Lunch with different staff members and the student's buddy during the first week of school;
- Play get acquainted games, or have the student fill out an "All About Me" sheet; and

**Have a current student give the new student a tour of the building, and introduce him/her to faculty.**

### **5. Provide structure and adhere to a consistent daily routine and clear, concise**

**rules.**

**Don't assume the child knows the classroom's behavior expectations, regardless of the student's age. Be patient and persistent in trying to help the child adjust to the new environment. Learn the unwritten rules of the poverty, middle class, and wealthy classes.**

*(Dr. Ruby Payne, A Framework for Understanding Poverty).*

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## **6. Facilitate successful experiences for new students.**

Many students who have not had a stable school experience have low self-esteem and lack positive feelings about school. Provide 10 to 20 times the normal amount of reassurance to children in transition.

## **7. Plan assignments so children can keep up without having to take work home.**

Schedule the school day to allow teachers to help with school assignments before the end of the day.

- Provide school supplies and books. Provide "special occasion" supplies in private; . Don't withdraw privileges if a new student doesn't return school materials;

- **Don't take possessions away as a disciplinary measure; and**

If a new student falls asleep in class, let her/him sleep. It may be needed rest from living in a car or shelter.

## **8. If tutoring is required, be proactive in obtaining it through school or community programs.**

## **9. If counseling is necessary, refer the child to the school counselor or outside community**

**agency. The child may have many and varied emotional needs that require attention.**

## **10. Reach out to parents.**

Send a "welcome" letter or videotape home to the parents. Create a special invitation inviting parents to a getting acquainted time. Provide transportation to home and school conferences. Above all, don't let the student "slip through the cracks" of the system.

**Teachers must remember that they cannot possibly meet all the needs of a child who is homeless. However, if they can remove just one frustration, it can make a tremendous**

**difference for that child.**

## **Ways Teachers Can Help Students Who Are Homeless**

Having students who are homeless in the classroom can admittedly be challenging, necessitating ingenuity, creativity, and patience. Yet it is important to remember that the school can be a vitally important part of the homeless student's life, for it can present the student with a sense of stability. Teachers play a major role. Listed are some of the

common frustrations experienced by students who are homeless and their teachers.

### **Frustrations:**

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For Students Ashamed of where they live (especially if at a shelter). Teased by other students about homelessness, hygiene, and inabilities. Misunderstood by parents. Difficulty adjusting to new school, magnified by situation. No place to do homework (or quiet place for themselves). Developmental delay augments feelings of failure.

**For Teachers Students may have lived in many places, attending different schools with different teaching methods. No school records. Need to assess educational needs without prior records. Need to do a quick assessment of student as formal measures are too time consuming. Knowledge that the student may move soon. Other students may react negatively. Students may have difficulty trusting. Inability to contact parents in an emergency. Parents often emotionally unavailable. Homework completion can be difficult.**

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### **Suggestions for Teachers Helping Students Who Are Homeless**

- Make the child feel welcome.

- Make the new student a file that includes things to send home to parents (i.e., school rules,

**classroom rules, lunchroom rules, class schedule, and a list of special classes).**

**Provide well-defined transition procedures from one activity to another. Plan**

**ahead whenever possible, inform students ahead of time about substitute**

**teachers and changes in activities. This will foster a sense of safety and security.**

**Coordinate any educational plan with the school counselor.**

**Expect and unobtrusively monitor regressions.**

- **Offer encouragement and understanding and recognize the child's talents and**

**accomplishments. Give students the opportunity to see some of their experiences as**

**positive (e.g., places they have traveled). Allow personal possessions and keep in mind that any possession may be the child's only one.**

**Give choices when appropriate to counter the loss of control experienced in their lives.**

- Don't penalize students who are homeless for being late before finding out if they have reliable

**transportation and an alarm clock. Assign projects that can be broken into small**

**components to ensure students have at least some success. The experience of mastery**

**is critical to their self-image. Maintain the child's privacy and discuss homework situations away from other classmates. Give the student a clipboard to take home as a portable desk to work on.**

**Avoid TV assignments (students living in shelters may not be able to make the channel choices for their group). Show sensitivity when asking children to bring food, photographs, favorite toys, or other items from home. Children who are homeless are often embarrassed to admit that they do not have these things. Avoid taking away recess/gym class as a disciplinary consequence. (This may be the only time students who are homeless have space to run.) Children are often without an adequate play area at shelters or in the streets. Don't assume younger students know how to play. They may have to be taught how to do so. Help the child participate in field trips, school activities, and class projects through understanding of her/his living environment and access to resources. Arrange school picture fees so children who are homeless may have pictures too. Ensure that children in homeless situations have easy access to assistance in case of personal difficulties (i.e., counselors). Allow students to express fears and frustrations and allow opportunities to do so in other ways in addition to verbalizing (i.e., drawing). Help children find positive outlets for anger. Help children take an active role in their life. A sense of empowerment is critical to overcoming helplessness (i.e., make child a helper in class, have the child tutor a younger**

child, promote activities they are good at).

- Offer parent suggestions for spending time with their children, helping with school work, etc.

**For additional information, please contact Mary Maronek, Coordinator, Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program, [mary.maronek@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:mary.maronek@dpi.wi.gov) or (608) 261-6322.**

**Appreciation is extended to Fran Anderson, Kenosha Unified School District, Shalom Center After School Program for use of her materials; Community Chest, P.O. Box 980, Virginia City, NV 98440; Opening Doors, Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth, Illinois State Board of Education, and to the staff of Emerson Elementary School, Madison, Wisconsin.**

## IDENTIFYING HOMELESS STUDENTS

**The district identifies homeless students in the following manner:**

1. During the enrollment and residency verification process (Every student

**must complete residency verification each and every school year)**

**2. Notification by student or parent during the school year**

3. If an employee of the school district suspects that a student becomes **homeless at some point during the school year, then the district takes ONE of the following actions:**

**a. The parent is interviewed using the parent interview sheet b. The parent completes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance**

**Act Survey C. The student completes the Student Residency Questionnaire**



**Parent Interview Sheet**

This form is intended to address the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act (Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act). The question below is to assist in determining if the student meets the eligibility criteria for services provided under the McKinney-Vento Act. In the event that the child is not staying with his/her parent(s) or guardian(s), use the caregiver authorization form to address guardianship issues.

Where does the student stay at night?

in a shelter

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in a motel/hotel

in another location that is not appropriate for people (e.g., an abandoned building)

temporarily with more than one family in a house, mobile home, or apartment (because the family does not have a place of its own)

other in an arrangement that is not fixed, regular, and adequate and is not described by the other choices)

in a car

at a campsite

Name of school:

Name of student:

Student's date of birth:

I, (name) declare as follows:

I am the parent/legal guardian of (name of student)

who is of school age and is seeking enrollment in (name of school district)

Since (date)

, our family has not had a permanent residence.

Under penalty of perjury under the laws of this state, I declare that the information provided here is true and correct and of my own personal knowledge and that, if called upon to testify, I would be competent to do so.

Name of person completing the form: \_

Signature:

Date:

Address:

Phone number:

e-mail address

I can be reached for emergencies at:

*Adapted from materials from the California Department of Education and the San Antonio independent School*

*District. As with any legal document, the local educational agency's legal counsel should be consulted*



August: 2006

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE INSIDER

## SENATOBIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

# MCKINNEY-VENTO (TITLE I, PART A) HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT SURVEY

## QUESTIONNAIRE

By completing this questionnaire, you will help the district comply with the McKinney-Vento Act, Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act. Your truthful and accurate answers will help the district identify services that the student may be eligible to receive.

SCHOOL

STUDENT'S NAME

MALE

FEMALE

DATE OF BIRTH (MONTH/DAY/YEAR)

\_\_ AGE \_\_

AGE

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PARENT(S)/LEGAL GUARDIAN(S) NAME

ADDRESS

CITY/STATE/ZIP

TEL.#/PAGER #CELL #

1. Where is the student living now? (check one box)

in a shelter  in a motel or hotel

with more than one family in a house or apartment

in a car

in a trailer park or campsite

[with friends or family members (other than parent guardian)]

None of the above

If you checked the box marked "none of the above," you do not have to complete the remainder of this form. Please sign

below and return a copy of this form to 2. Does the living arrangement checked in Question 1 result from a loss of housing or economic hardship?

Yes

No

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3. The student lives with

1 parent

2 parents

1 parent & another adult

A relative, friend(s), or other adults

Alone with no adults

An adult who is not the parent or the legal guardian

**PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN'S SIGNATURE**

www

DATE

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-- DATE \_\_\_\_

me

Please return a copy of this form to

M

-AVTOR W

**FOR SCHOOL USE ONLY**

Student not covered by McKinney-Vento Act - Student covered by McKinney-Vento Act

Follow-up required

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M

. Principal

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www.

Date Received

For Further information, please



# Student Residency Questionnaire

NOTE: PLEASE REMOVE ALL INFORMATION IN THIS BOX BEFORE USING THIS FORM: UPDATE THIS FORM TO REFLECT THE NEEDS AND SPECIFICS PERTAINING TO YOUR DISTRICT. This form is an example of what most districts in Texas have found useful to include in their student enrollment packets to help identify students in homeless situations as required by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Improvements Act, 42 U.S.C.11435. Answers to this residency information help determine the services the student may be eligible to receive. This form is adapted from one developed by Cypress Fairbanks ISD.

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Name of School

vrt

Name of Student

Sex:  Male

Female

Last

First

Middle

Age:

Social Security :

Birth Date

*Month*

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*Day*

*Year*

*(or student identification numbers)*

This questionnaire is intended to address the McKinney-Vento Act 42 U.S.C. 11435. The answers to this residency information help determine the services the student may be eligible to receive.

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Is your current address a temporary living arrangement?

Yes

No

Is this temporary living arrangement due to loss of housing or economic hardship?

Yes

No

**If you answered YES to the above questions, please complete the remainder of this form, If you answered NO, you may stop here.**

Where is the student presently living? (Check one box.)

in a motel In a shelter With more than one family in a house or apartment  
Moving from place to place In a place not designed for ordinary sleeping  
accommodations such as a car, park, or campsite

Name of Parent(s)/Legal Guardian(s)

Address

\_ Zip \_

Phone

*Presenting a false record or falsifying records is an offense under Section 37.10. Penal code, and enrollment of the child under false documents subjects the person to liability for tuition or other costs. TEC Sec. 25.002(3)(d).*

Signature of Parent Legal Guardian

Date

Please send a copy to

at the Central Office,

Fax: XXX-XXI-XXXX

I certify the above named student qualifies for the Child Nutrition Program under the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act.

www

Date

McKinney-Vento Liaison Signature

*Resource Packet page 4*





## **PROCEDURES FOR ASSISTING HOMELESS UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH**

The McKinney-Vento Act requires immediate enrollment of homeless children and youth. Lack of a parent/guardian and/or enrollment documents cannot delay or prevent enrollment for unaccompanied youth. In enrolling these students there are additional decisions to consider in making sure that we are addressing ALL of the student's educational needs and consider what barriers to education can be removed by applying the McKinney-Vento Act and what is in the best interest of each student. Please use the following procedures to enroll and identify which services are appropriate for the student.

### **immediate Enrollment**

**Do not allow lack of proof of residency to be a barrier to enrollment DO NOT call Police or law enforcement Gather existing information by asking students the following questions: 1. Speak with youth about classes he/she was taking, previous coursework and special needs 2. What information can you give me about your previous school? 3. What was the name of your math/history/science or language class? Assist youth with obtaining necessary records or documents such as immunization records, birth certificates, etc. Request all records from previous school immediately – Parent signature is not required for transfer students (FERPA) Assist with fees associated with obtaining records or documents Since many unaccompanied youth do not have academic records, have counselor or principal perform a quick assessment for student placement using grade appropriate diagnostic test. Expedited evaluations for educational programs (Title 1, Head Start, SPED, etc.) Free School Meals/Food - immediate enrollment in free school meals program (use the Free Meals form) Transportation - arrange for bus pick-up**

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### **Academic Needs**

**Make sure youth understand school rules and procedures, realizing that they might be quite different from his/her previous school. Early-bird or after-school tutoring, summer classes, approved correspondence courses,**

**on-line classes GED testing for school age students**

**Time, place/space for homework completion**

**Clothing/Personal Hygiene**

**Uniform, school appropriate clothing with personal garments such as socks, underwear, etc. Weather appropriate clothing Personal hygiene/health and beauty items**

**School Supplies and Fees**

**Notebooks, pens, folders, etc. Testing fees (AP exams, PSAT, Act, SAT, etc.)**

**Graduation expenses (cap, gown, senior pictures, yearbook, etc.)**

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**Mental Health and Community Resources**

**Educate school staff on sensitive and discrete communication with children and youth who are homeless Counseling for when anxiety/depression due to inomelessness is impending learning Talk to youth about their goals, interests and strengths, and welcome them into classes and extracurricular activities. Work to build trust with them and understand that their life experiences with adults thus far likely give them no reason to trust you, Provide family/student with Self-sufficiency Skills and Strategies through Parenting Center, Work with local child welfare and law enforcement agencies to ensure that my requirements to report suspected abuse or neglect do not prevent youth from enrolling in school due to fears that they will be taken into custody.**