

CHECKLIST FOR IDENTIFYING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act) provides educational rights and services for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The Act requires every school district to designate a homeless liaison.¹ The liaison's duties include implementing the McKinney-Vento Act in the district, starting with identifying the children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Have you tried these identification strategies in your district?

- Provide training and awareness activities on the definition and signs of homelessness for school and district staff, including administrators, bus drivers, counselors, nurses, registrars, secretaries, social workers, teachers, and truancy/attendance officers. Training and outreach materials are free for download and ready to use at:
<http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/resources/index.php>
- Use a Student Residency Questionnaire (SRQ) as part of the standard enrollment packet (a sample that can be customized is available at http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/downloads/factsheets/RP14_SRQ.doc). This form can be very effective in identifying homeless students upon enrollment. Train registrars and secretaries in how to use the SRQ with families and youth.
- Provide outreach materials and posters where there is a frequent influx of families and youth in high-risk situations, including: low-cost motels; campgrounds; Laundromats; libraries; social service agencies; and youth centers.
- Ask the community for help. Contact local agencies to seek their collaboration in identifying and serving homeless children and youth, including: faith-based organizations; food banks; homeless continuum of care; Community Resource Coordination Groups (CRCGs); housing and public health departments and programs; homeless coalitions; shelters; and soup kitchens.
- Ask students for help. Youth can share information by word of mouth, using web-based social networking, and posting outreach materials where their peers will see them.
- Reach out to unaccompanied youth by collaborating with street outreach teams, drop-in centers, and youth shelters, and by working to build trust with young people.
- Ask early childhood and preschool providers for help. Head Start programs are required to do outreach to homeless families and have been excellent partners in identification. IDEA also requires early childhood special education and early intervention providers to identify and serve homeless children.
- Avoid using the word "homeless." Exercise sensitivity when talking with parents and youth, who often are afraid to identify themselves as homeless due to fears of stigma or negative repercussions.

Why is Identification Important?

1. ***It's the law.*** The McKinney-Vento Act requires liaisons to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies.ⁱⁱ In addition, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires child find activities specifically targeted to ensure that all homeless children and youth with disabilities are identified and served.ⁱⁱⁱ

2. ***It affects the funding available to your state and district.*** McKinney-Vento stimulus funds provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) were allocated to states based on the number of students identified as homeless in the state. Homeless Education Disaster grants were allocated directly to districts, based on the number of homeless students they identified. Districts with higher percentages of homeless students are more competitive for McKinney-Vento subgrants, and the number of homeless children served may be considered in other grant awards, including TRIO and 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

3. ***We cannot serve children and youth if we don't know who they are.*** Homeless children and youth receive rights and services not only through the McKinney-Vento Act, but also through Title I, IDEA, Child Nutrition, Head Start, federal financial aid for college, and other programs. To ensure our students receive appropriate services, we must identify them as eligible.

McKinney-Vento Act Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program Definition of "Homeless"

(A) 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; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- (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).^{iv}

ⁱ 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(J)(ii).

ⁱⁱ 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)(i).

ⁱⁱⁱ 20 U.S.C. §1401(3)(A); 20 U.S.C. §§1434(1) and 1435(a)(2).

^{iv} 42 U.S.C. §11434A(2).