

HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Families may lose their housing for a variety of reasons, including high housing costs and economic circumstances. Young people also may 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 locations. Their lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious physical, emotional, and mental consequences. The Catskill Central School District will ensure that all children and youth, including those that are homeless, receive a free appropriate public education and are given meaningful opportunities to succeed in our schools, according to the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.

Pursuant to Commissioner's Regulations, a "homeless child" means a child or youth who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including a child or youth who:

- is sharing the housing of other persons temporarily due to a loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- is living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- is abandoned in a hospital;
- is awaiting foster care placement;
- is a migratory child who qualifies as homeless in accordance with Commissioner's Regulations;
- has a primary nighttime location that is:
 1. a supervised, publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations including, but not limited to, shelters operated or approved by the state or local department of social services and residential programs for runaway and homeless youth; or
 2. a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a child or youth who is living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station or similar setting.
- is considered an unaccompanied youth, i.e. a homeless child (for whom no parent or person in parental relation is available) or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian, and not a child or youth who is residing with someone other than a parent or legal guardian for the sole reason of taking advantage of the schools of the district.

A "homeless child" shall not include a child in foster care or receiving educational services pursuant to Sections 3202(4), (5), (6), (6a), or (7) or Articles 81, 85, 87, or 88 of the Education Law.

Under federal law, homeless children and youth must have access to an appropriate public education and be given full opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards. They must be included in state- and district-wide assessments and accountability systems and will be free from discrimination, segregation, and harassment.

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Enrollment of homeless children shall not be delayed and their ability to continue or participate in the educational program shall not be restricted due to issues such as transportation; immunization requirements; residency requirements; birth certificates, medical records, individualized education programs, school records and other documentation; guardianship issues; comprehensive assessment and advocacy referral processes; resolution of disputes regarding school selection; proof of social security numbers; attendance requirements; sports participation rules; inability to pay fees associated with extracurricular activities such as club dues and sports uniforms; or other enrollment issues.

The District will immediately enroll homeless children and youth, even if the records normally required for enrollment (including medical examinations and immunizations) are not available at the time of enrollment. After the student is enrolled, the Homeless Liaison will immediately make a written request to the school district where the homeless student's records are maintained for a copy of such records and, if needed, will also assist the homeless student to obtain immunizations. The school district shall provide homeless children and youth with access to all of its programs, activities, and services to the same extent that they are provided to resident students. Homeless children and youth shall be educated as part of the school's regular academic program. Services must be provided to homeless children and youth through programs and mechanisms that integrate homeless children and youth with their non-homeless counterparts.

All children identified as homeless are eligible for free meals if offered in the School District without the necessity of completing an application.

Upon enrollment, a student residency questionnaire and information regarding the McKinney-Vento Act will be distributed to the appropriate persons. Pupil personnel staff will be sensitive to the possible needs of students who might seek to withdraw from school, and information will be posted in each school. The Department of Social Services will be contacted to determine if they have contact with homeless families who live in the district so that they can be given opportunities as afforded by the McKinney-Vento Act.

Transportation Responsibilities

A social services agency is responsible for providing transportation to homeless children who are eligible for benefits under Social Services Law §350-j and placed in temporary housing arrangements outside their designated districts.

The Office of Children and Family Services ("OCFS") must provide transportation for each homeless child who lives in a residential program for runaway youth and homeless youth located outside of the designated school district. The social services district or OCFS may contract with a school district or board of cooperative educational services ("BOCES") to provide such transportation. Any homeless child not entitled to receive transportation from the Department of Social Services or OCFS must be transported by the designated school district.

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When the school district of the student's current location is designated as the school district the homeless child will attend, that school district must provide transportation to the homeless child on the same basis as it is provided to resident students. If the homeless child attends the school district of origin or a school district participating in a regional placement plan, then that school district must provide transportation to and from the homeless child's temporary housing and school.

Homeless children are entitled to transportation even if a school district does not provide transportation to non-homeless students, even if traveling across district boundaries, and during any disputes regarding school selection and enrollment. Parents may be also entitled to transportation if the student is unable to travel alone. A designated school district that must provide transportation to a homeless child may not provide transportation in excess of 50 miles one way, unless the Commissioner determines that it is in the best interest of the child.

Dispute Resolution

The District will implement the following procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding school selection or enrollment of a homeless child or youth:

- Provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal to the homeless child's or youth's parent or guardian, if the school district declines to either enroll and/or transport such child or youth to the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian.
- Delay for 30 days the implementation of a final determination to decline to either enroll in and/or transport the homeless child or youth or unaccompanied youth to the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth or unaccompanied youth if the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth or unaccompanied youth commences an appeal to the Commissioner with a stay application within 30 days of such final determination.
- Permit the homeless child or youth to continue to attend the school he or she is enrolled in at the time of the appeal until the Commissioner renders a decision on the stay application.
- If the Commissioner grants the stay request and issues a stay order, the homeless child or youth or unaccompanied youth can continue attending the school until the Commissioner issues an appeal decision. However, if the Commissioner denies the stay request, the homeless child or youth or unaccompanied youth can be asked to leave the school immediately. If the Commissioner sustains the appeal, the homeless child or youth or unaccompanied youth can continue attending the school at issue. However, if the Commissioner dismisses the appeal, the homeless child or youth or unaccompanied youth can be asked to leave the school immediately.

School District Liaison for Homeless Children and Youth

The School District shall designate an appropriate staff person as the liaison for homeless children and youth ("homeless liaison") to carry out the duties set forth in law, Commissioner's Regulations and applicable federal and state guidance documents. The homeless liaison shall

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serve as one of the primary contacts between homeless families and school staff, local service providers, shelter workers and advocates and shall coordinate services to ensure that homeless children and youth enroll in school and have the opportunity to succeed academically.

Records and Reporting Requirements

If the School District, as the school district of origin, receives a request to forward student records to a receiving district, the records must be forwarded within five days.

The School District shall maintain documentation regarding all aspects of the School District's contact with and services provided to homeless students and youth and provide such documents to the State Education Department upon request.

Adopted: 3/13/13