



# SchoolHouse Connection

*Overcoming Homelessness Through Education*

## **Homeless Children and Youth in the “The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015”**

On October 1, 2016, amendments to the McKinney-Vento Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth program made by the “Every Student Succeeds Act” went into effect. The new law includes many provisions designed to improve training, identification, enrollment, stability, and success, from pre-school through high school, and the transition to post-secondary education. A brief summary is provided.

**At the State Agency Level.** Every State Education Agency (SEA) must designate an Office of State Coordinator that can sufficiently carry out duties in the Act. Key duties include:

- Posting on the SEA website an annually updated list of school district liaisons, and the number of homeless children and youth.
- Responding to inquiries from homeless parents and unaccompanied youth.
- Developing and implementing professional development programs for liaisons and others.
- Conducting monitoring of local educational agencies to enforce compliance.

**At the Local Agency Level.** Every local educational agency (LEA) must designate a liaison for students experiencing homelessness who is able to carry out the duties described in the law. Key duties include:

- Ensuring that homeless children and youth are identified and enrolled in school, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in school.
- Participating in professional development and other technical assistance offered by the State.

- Ensuring school personnel receive professional development and other support.
- Ensuring that unaccompanied homeless youth are informed, and receive verification, of their status as independent students for college financial aid.
- Informing homeless parents of their children’s educational opportunities and providing meaningful opportunities to participate.
- Ensuring that homeless children, youth, and families receive referrals to health, dental, mental health, housing, substance abuse, and other appropriate services.
- Disseminating public notice of McKinney-Vento rights in locations frequented by parents and youth, in a manner and form understandable to them.
- Ensuring that parents and youth are informed of and assisted in accessing transportation.
- Ensuring access to Head Start, Early Intervention, and LEA-administered pre-school programs.
- Removing barriers that prevent homeless youth from receiving credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed at a prior school.

### **School Stability**

- LEAs must make best interest determinations about school selection that presume that staying in the school of origin is in the best interest of the child or youth; consider specific student-centered factors; prioritize the wishes of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth; and include a written explanation and right to appeal if the LEA determines that school stability is not in the best interest of the child or youth.
- The definition of school of origin now includes both the designated receiving school at the next grade level (if there is a feeder school pattern), and preschools.
- Transportation to the school of origin is required, including until the end of the academic year when a student obtains permanent housing (if it is in the student's best interest to remain in that school).

### **School Enrollment and Participation**

- Homeless children and youth must be enrolled in school immediately, even if they lack documents or have missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness.
- SEAs and LEAs must develop, review, and revise policies to remove barriers to the identification, enrollment, and retention of homeless students in school, including barriers due to fees, fines, and absences.
- If a dispute arises over eligibility, school selection or enrollment, the child or youth must be immediately enrolled in the school in which the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth seeks enrollment, pending resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals.
- States must have procedures to ensure that homeless children and youth do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities.

### **Preschool Children**

- The definition of school of origin now includes preschools.
- Liaisons must ensure homeless families and children can access early intervention services under IDEA Part C, if eligible.

### **Credit Accrual and College Readiness**

- States must have procedures to identify and remove barriers that prevent students from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with State, local, and school policies.
- State plans must describe how homeless youth will receive assistance from school counselors to advise, prepare, and improve their readiness for college.

### **Definition of Homelessness**

- The McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness includes children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.
- This definition specifically includes children and youth who are: sharing the housing of others temporarily due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons; living in shelters, transitional housing, or cars; and staying in motels or campgrounds due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations.
- The phrase "awaiting foster care placement" was deleted from the McKinney-Vento Act in most states on December 10, 2016 (it will be deleted in AR, DE, and NV on December 20, 2017). New protections for children in foster care under Title I Part A went into effect on December 10, 2016..

### **Title I, Part A**

Amendments to Title I, Part A related to homelessness go into effect in the 2017-2018 school year. These include:

- All LEAs that receive Title I Part A funds must reserve funds to support homeless students.
- Reserved funds may be used for services not ordinarily provided by Title I, including local liaisons and transportation to the school of origin. (This provision is in effect currently, due to existing appropriations bills.)
- State report cards must include disaggregated information on the graduation rates and academic achievement of homeless children and youth.