

Early Care and Education Advocacy: A Tip Sheet for Housing and Homeless Assistance Providers

This short document provides basic information to help housing and homeless assistance providers advocate with their families and youth for appropriate educational services, from birth through higher education. The rights and protections outlined here apply to all children and youth experiencing homelessness, as defined by the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act.ⁱ

Why is education advocacy important for housing and homeless assistance providers?

1. Lack of a high school diploma or GED is the number one risk factor for young adult homelessness, increasing the likelihood of homelessness by 346%.ⁱⁱ
2. Children who participate in quality early childhood programs do better in school, are more likely to attend college, and are less likely to have children as teenagers.ⁱⁱⁱ (Having a child is the second greatest risk factor for youth homelessness.^{iv})
3. Obtaining a college degree leads to significantly higher salaries, better health, and home ownership, all of which protect against homelessness.^v
4. The families and youth in your programs are unlikely to know all of their educational rights or be able to advocate for themselves without support.

Requirements for HUD Homeless Assistance Providers

The HEARTH Act includes requirements for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Homeless Assistance providers to support children, youth, and families:

- Continuums of Care must collaborate with local education agencies to assist in identifying homeless families and informing them of their McKinney-Vento education rights, and, to the maximum extent practicable, place families as close as possible to their children's school of origin in order not to disrupt education.^{vi}
- Project applicants must designate a staff person to ensure children are enrolled in school and early childhood programs (if they serve families), and align their policies and practices with the McKinney-Vento Act's education provisions and other education laws.^{vii}

Babies, Toddlers and Young Children

- **Child care subsidies:** Under federal regulations, states must prioritize children experiencing homelessness for child care services. Families can start receiving services while working to assemble immunization, health and safety, and eligibility documents. Child care subsidy agencies must do specific outreach to homeless families and improve their access to child care (for example, by collaborating with service providers).
→ Find [more information](#) and your [state contact](#).
- **Early Head Start and Head Start:** Children experiencing homelessness are categorically eligible for Head Start, and a letter from a service provider is sufficient to establish homelessness. Head Start programs must work to locate and recruit homeless children; for example, by collaborating with service providers and reserving slots for homeless children. Homeless children can start attending without proof of age or immunizations.
→ Find [more information](#) and your [state contact](#).

- **Support for Children with Disabilities:** Early Intervention programs are available for children birth to three with development delays.
→ Find [more information](#) and your [state contact](#).
For children four and older, school districts must identify and evaluate children with disabilities experiencing homelessness.
→ Find [more information](#) and your [state contact](#).
- **PreK:** The McKinney-Vento Act applies to public preschools. This means children experiencing homelessness can enroll immediately in preschools without typically required documents (if space is available); continue attending their preschool even if they move out of the attendance area; and receive transportation to preschool in many cases.
→ Find [more information](#) and contact your local school district to ask about preK.

School-Aged Children and Youth

The McKinney-Vento Act provides many rights to children and youth experiencing homelessness, including the rights to:

- Enroll and participate fully in school and extra-curricular activities immediately, even if they don't have school records, immunization records, proof of guardianship, and other typically required documents.
- Remain in the same school even if they move to another attendance zone or school district, as long as it's in their best interest, and to receive transportation.
- Receive assistance and support from a homeless liaison, which every school district must have.
- Dispute school district decisions to the state and to court.
- Receive free school meals.
- Receive partial credit for partial coursework completed.

→ [Learn more](#)

Transition into Postsecondary

In high school:

- School counselors must advise youth experiencing homelessness to improve their college readiness.
- Unaccompanied youth must be informed of their status as independent students for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and obtain assistance to verify that status.
- Fees for the SAT and ACT should be waived for all youth experiencing homelessness. Many colleges also will waive application fees.

In higher education:

- Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness do not have to provide parental income information or signatures on the FAFSA. RHYA-funded service providers, HUD-funded service providers, school district homeless liaisons and financial aid administrators can verify a student's unaccompanied and homeless status.
- Many colleges and universities have designated Homeless Liaisons to provide a central contact for students to seek assistance.
- Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, campus food pantries, campus housing offices, and other offices should work together to provide supports to students experiencing homelessness.

→ [Learn more](#)

ⁱ This definition 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; or are abandoned in hospitals’;

(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 (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings....” 42 USC 11434A(2).

ⁱⁱ M. Morton, A. Dworsky & G.M. Samuels (2017). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National estimates*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

ⁱⁱⁱ F. Campbell, C. Ramey, E. Pungello, J. Sparling & S. Miller-Johnson (2002). “Early Childhood Education: Young Adult Outcomes from the Abecedarian Project.” *Applied Developmental Science*, vol. 6, no. 1, 42-57.

^{iv} M. Morton (2017).

^v See, e.g., Federal Reserve Bank of New York (2017). Press Briefing on Household Debt, with Focus on Student Debt.

Accessed June 3, 2018 at <https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/press/PressBriefing-Household-Student-Debt-April32017.pdf>; A. Carnevale, N, Smith & J. Strohl (2014). *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020*. Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce. Accessed June 3, 2018 at: https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES_.Web_.pdf.

^{vi} The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009, Section 427(B)(iii).

^{vii} HEARTH Act Section 426(b)(4)(C)&(D).