

**NO PLACE LIKE SCHOOL:**

**ADVOCATING FOR THE EDUCATION OF  
HOMELESS STUDENTS**

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# Barriers to Education

- High mobility resulting in frequent transfers
  - 41% attend 2+ schools in a year
  - Each transfer sets students back 4-6 months, and affects housed peers
- Enrollment requirements
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of school supplies, clothing, etc.
- Difficulty earning credits
- Concerns about reporting to authorities
- Stigma/embarrassment

# Education Can Be a Remedy

Schools provide:

- Structure and routine
- Free meals
- Caring adults
- Friends
- Referrals for community-based services: health, mental health, housing
- A path to a career

# **Legal Tools to Support School Stability and Success**

# McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act

- Each homeless child or youth must have “equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education,” as other children and youth
- School system must proactively review and remove barriers’ to homeless children’s enrollment, attendance, and academic success

(42 U.S.C. 11431;  
COMAR 13A.05.09)

# McKinney-Vento Definition of Homelessness

- Children who **lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence—**
  - Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason
  - Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations
  - Living in emergency or transitional shelters



# McKinney Vento Protections at a Glance

- School Stability – Keep child in SOO unless not in best interest or not desired by parent/youth.
- Transportation – To SOO
- Immediate Enrollment – Even if missing records
- Supportive Services – To ensure full participation
- Dispute process – Right to appeal
- Collaboration – With homeless-serving partners
- School district liaisons - To strategize & troubleshoot

# School Stability

- Child can stay in SOO or transfer to local school, depending on his or her best interests
- **“School of origin”** – Last school child attended or attended before becoming homeless (incl. feeders, pre-K, spec. ed. sch.)
- **“Local school”** – School where other children living in same area as child’s current residence
- Best interest considerations: Continuity; Length of stay; Anticipated return to area; Time remaining in school year; Age; Safety; Length of commute/student-centered factors



# Transportation

- All homeless children should get transportation to SOO if outside walk zone
- Transportation must be set up promptly
- Transportation must be on time, safe, and reliable
- Transportation protections apply even when students are crossing school district lines

# Immediate Enrollment

- Enrollment – In class and participating fully
- Immediate – 1 school day
- Lack of records cannot delay enrollment; enroll first, and handle paperwork afterwards
- Proof of residency cannot be required
- Unaccompanied homeless youth can enroll without a parent or legal guardian
- Must help students recover missing credits
- Guaranteed enrollment in public pre-K for homeless 4 year olds

# Supportive Services

- School system must identify, remove barriers to homeless students' success
- Automatic eligibility for free school meals
- Uniforms for students attending schools with uniform codes
- Fee waivers for field trips, graduation, school activities
- Materials for school activities – e.g. graphing calculators, musical instruments
- Targeted college counseling and preparation

# Dispute Process

- Each school system has a process for resolving disputes involving homeless students' rights
- The process includes
  - Written decision
  - Appeal to superintendent → school board → state board of education
  - Right to stay in selected school with transportation until final resolution of dispute

# Collaboration

- School system must refer homeless students to outside services:
  - Housing
  - Healthcare
  - Dental care
  - Mental health
  - Substance abuse
- School system can confirm homeless status so that student/family can qualify for HUD homeless assistance

# School District Liaison

- Responsible for making sure the school system follows the law, and troubleshooting problems that come up
- May delegate front line responsibilities to PPWs, school-based liaisons or others
- List of liaisons:  
<http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/homeless/>



# College Cost Reduction Act

- Treats unaccompanied homeless youth, and youth in foster care after age 13, as independent when applying for federal financial aid (via FAFSA)
- Need not report parents' income/assets or get parents' consent
- For UHY - 4 mechanisms for establishing eligibility:
  - Verification by McKinney-Vento Liaison
  - Verification by HUD shelter
  - Verification by RHYA shelter
  - Verification by Financial Aid Officer at applicable institution

# MD Tuition Waiver

- Foster Youth Tuition Waiver
  - You were in foster care after age 13
  - You were the younger sibling of someone in foster care after age 13 and adopted or placed in guardianship together
- UHY Tuition Waiver
  - Not in the physical custody of a parent/legal guardian, and
  - Homeless, as defined in McKinney-Vento, and
  - MD resident for 1 year, and
- In addition, all youth must:
  - Have a high school diploma or GED
  - Complete and file FAFSA
  - Be enrolled on or before 25.
  - Be enrolled full time or part time at a Maryland public institution of higher education

# **From the Frontlines: Baltimore City Public Schools**

# Students Identified as Homeless in City Schools

School Year	# Identified Homeless Students	Percentage of Increase
2013-14	2534	-6.7%
2014-15	2068	-18.4%
2015-16	1981	-4.2%
2016-17	2654	34.0%
2017-18	3513	32.3%

- These numbers only reflect students identified in City Schools, not an actual count of homeless youth in Baltimore City

# Students Service Provided for Homeless in City Schools

School Year	Homeless Students	Students Transportation	% of Student Transport	Uniform Vouchers	% of Uniform Vouchers
14-15	2068	1271	61%	856	41.1%
15-16	1981	1423	72%	563	28.4%
16-17	2654	1433*	53.9%	2095	78.9%
17-18	3513	1468	47.7%	999	28.4%

# Students Service Provided for Homeless in City Schools

Costs Associated with Homeless Services		
Service	Cost	Source of Funding
Transportation	\$10 million	COO General Funds
School Uniform/School Clothes Closets	\$124,000	Title I
School Supplies	\$4,000	Title I
Summer Program	\$175,000	Title I
Technology	\$5,000	Title I
Tutors/Temporary Employees	\$80,000	Title I



# Best Practices

- **Assess signs of potential homelessness**
  - Red flags: Recent/frequent change in address, remarks indicating housing is temporary, issues with hunger or hygiene, frequent absences/tardiness, lost assignments/supplies
- **Inform students/families of rights and options**
  - Disseminate brochures, posters, particularly at frontline locations – e.g. enrollment office, social work etc.
- **Communicate in a sensitive, confidential manner**
  - Use terminology other than “homeless,” ensure opportunity for private conversation, share info on “need to know” basis
- **Explore school of origin as an enrollment option**
  - Even if student has been out of school for some time, the last school s/he attended should be considered as an option

# Best Practices

- **Develop procedures for enrollment w/o records**
  - Including informal and formal assessments, contacting prior school for records after enrollment
  - Unaccompanied minors should be able to enroll themselves, or with assistance from a non-guardian caretaker
- **Avoid calling CPS based on homelessness alone**
- **Integrate homeless students into mainstream school setting**
  - Re-Engagement Center can help ease transition, but student should return to mainstream school as soon as possible
- **Ensure prompt access to reliable transportation**
  - School bus/cab should be in place for elementary students in 5-7 days, and schools should immediately provide students/parents with an S-Pass or bus tokens to use in the interim

# Best Practices

- **Locate services where families can access them**
  - Clothing closet in every school
  - \$150 uniform vouchers, which parents can also use to make purchases online
- **Raise awareness about supports for homeless students**
  - Conducting outreach about the tuition waiver and SAT/ACT fee waivers may improve identification of high school-age homeless youth
- **Collaborate with community partners to identify and serve homeless youth**
  - Engage community members to conduct outreach, attend homeless coalition meetings, partner with homeless-serving agencies, non-profits, and philanthropists
- **Provide academic and social/emotional support to homeless students**
  - 12 tutors for in shelters and libraries; they also do mindfulness exercises
- **Connect families to outside advocates**
  - For assistance with dispute resolution – often, advocates pushing from the outside can amplify the liaison’s efforts to advocate for homeless students from the inside

# Continuing Challenges

# Resources

- MSDE and Local Liaisons:  
<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/msde/programs/homeless/>
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children & Youth: [www.naehcy.org](http://www.naehcy.org)
- SchoolHouse Connection:  
[www.schoolhouseconnection.org](http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org)
- National Center for Homeless Education:  
<http://center.serve.org/nche/>
- Public Justice Center: [www.publicjustice.org](http://www.publicjustice.org) (Monisha Cherayil, 410-625-9409 x. 234)