

Policy 420 – Rule 2
Children and Youth in Transition (Homeless)
Procedures to Implement the McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Act requires all state and local educational agencies to develop, review and revise their policies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention in school of children and youth experiencing homelessness. These procedures will follow the requirements of the reauthorized McKinney-Vento Act and Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction bulletin directives.

The School District of Lodi will ensure that all children and youth, including those in transition, receive a free appropriate public education and are given full and meaningful opportunities to succeed in District schools. Children and youth in transition must have access to appropriate public education and be given a full and equal opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards. They must be included in state- and district-wide assessments and accountability systems. The District will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation and harassment.

Information regarding this policy will be made available to students, who may be considered homeless, upon enrollment; provided to students who seek to withdraw from school and who are youth in transition; and will be posted or made available in school buildings in the district, as well as other community locations.

Definitions

- **Children and youth in transition** means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, and lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:
 - children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, camping grounds or trailer parks due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
 - children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
 - children and youth who are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting; and
 - migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.
 - A child or youth shall be considered to be in transition for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above.

Note: Students from a temporarily homeless family (e.g., house fire or other disaster) may or may not be eligible for assistance under the McKinney-Vento Act. Economic factors and the permanence of the living arrangements are considerations determining if these students meet the criteria.

- **Unaccompanied youth** means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is in transition as defined above. The more general term **youth** also includes unaccompanied youth.
- **Enroll and enrollment** mean attending school and participating fully in school activities.
- **Immediate** means without delay.
- **Parent** means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.
- **School of origin** means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.
- **Liaison** is the staff person designated by our LEA and each LEA in the state as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act.

Identification

The School District of Lodi in coordination with other community, county, and state agencies and entities will identify children in transition in the district, both in and out of school. The liaison will inform school personnel of possible indicators of homelessness, foster sensitivity in identifying families and youth as in transition, and develop procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the liaison. The liaison will also instruct school guidance counselors, principals, assistant principals, and secretaries to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student, and to forward information indicating homelessness to the liaison. Community, county, and state partners in identification may include other school districts, food pantries, motels, campgrounds, social service agencies, medical clinics, churches, faith-based organizations, and truancy and attendance officers.

The liaison with assistance of other school personnel will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the district, where they are living, their academic achievement (including performance on state- and district-wide assessments), and the reasons for any enrollment delays, interruptions in their education or school transfers. Parents and unaccompanied youth, who do not want to be identified as being homeless, are not designated as such and will not receive services under this policy. Information regarding children, youth and families in transition is confidential.

If children or youth under 18 years of age is without a parent or guardian, the District will report this to the county human services department, as required under Wisconsin s. 118.75 and s. 46.22 or 46.23.

School Selection and Enrollment Duration

Each child and youth in transition has the right to remain at his or her school of origin or to attend a school in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both the student and the District. Students who change schools have been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. High mobility rates have also been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting our schools to benefit from the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity.

If a child becomes homeless during an academic year or between academic years, the youth or child may remain at his/her school of origin during the duration of homelessness, unless the parent or student chooses otherwise. Or the child or youth may enroll in any public school that non-homeless students, who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living, are eligible to attend. The choice regarding placement shall be made regardless of whether the child or youth lives with the homeless parents or has been temporarily placed elsewhere. If the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year, s/he may remain in the school of origin for the remainder of that academic year. (See also Transportation)

The District shall consider the best interest of the child or youth being served. In making this determination, the District, to the extent feasible, will keep the student in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the child's or youth's parent or guardian. If the District sends the child or youth to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian, the District will provide a written explanation to the parent or guardian, including a statement regarding the right to an appeal (see Disputes and Appeals below). For unaccompanied youth, the homeless liaison will assist in placement or enrollment decisions, consider the views of the student, and provide notice to the student of the right of appeal.

Feasibility shall be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent or youth's wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

- Safety of the student;
- Continuity of instruction;
- Likely area of family's or youth's future housing;
- Time remaining in the academic year;
- Anticipated length of stay in temporary living situation;
- School placement of siblings; and
- Whether the student has special needs that would render the commute harmful.

Costs and services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin, (see below) and services under federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.

Enrollment

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students in transition may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth in transition. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:

- Proof of residency
- Transcripts/school records (The enrolling school must contact the student's previous school to obtain school records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the student's age and information gathered from the student, parent and previous schools or teachers.)
- Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records (If necessary, the school must refer students to the liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunization and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from

previous schools or state registries, and school- or community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed.)

- Proof of guardianship
- Birth certificate
- Any other document requirements
- Unpaid school fees
- Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes and
- Any factor related to the student's living situation.

Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling or liaison.

School fees shall be waived. If the student needs school supplies, the District will supply the basics (notebooks, paper, pens, pencils, etc.).

Transportation

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent's request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition. Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during the pendency of disputes. The liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The district, in which the child's school of origin is located, shall make the arrangements and provide the transportation. The length of the commute, and not the cost or number of miles, will only be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. **Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.**

Schools and the liaison shall use the district transportation form to process transportation requests. Requests shall be processed and transportation arranged without delay. If the student in transition is living and attending school in this district, this district shall arrange transportation. If the student in transition is living in this district but attending school in another, or attending school in this district but living in another, this district will follow the inter-district transportation agreement to determine who must arrange transportation. It is this district's policy that inter-district disputes shall not result in a student in transition missing school. If such a dispute arises, this district will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention of the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

If the child or youth chooses to continue to attend his or her school of origin, the local educational agency of origin and the local education agency in which the homeless child or youth is living shall agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing the child with transportation to and from the school of origin. If the local educational agencies are unable to agree upon such method, the responsibility and costs for transportation shall be shared equally”.

In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to non-homeless students.

When a student who was once homeless becomes permanently housed, the District will no longer provide transportation for that child or youth to the school of origin, unless it is within four weeks to the end of the semester. Then transportation will be provided until the end of that semester. The student has the right to continue at the student's school of origin but at parental expense. The parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth will be notified of this provision at the time of enrollment.

Services

Children and youth in transition shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected, including:

- Transportation (as described above)
- Title I (as described below)
- Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services, programs for English language learners, etc.
- Vocational and technical education programs
- Gifted and talented programs
- School nutrition programs, and
- Before and after school programs run by the district

School personnel must inform parents of all educational and related opportunities available to their children and provide parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education. All parent information required by any provision of this policy must be provided in a form, manner and language understandable to each parent.

Free meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day a child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the District's Food Service for immediate processing.

Title I

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness puts students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The district shall reserve such funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title I students to children and youth in transition attending Title I schools. The amount reserved shall be determined by a formula based upon the per-pupil Title I expenditure and developed jointly by the liaison and the Title I director. Reserved funds will be used to provide educationally related support services to children and youth in transition, both in school and outside of school, and to remove barriers that prevent regular attendance.

The Title I Plan will be coordinated with District's McKinney-Vento services, through collaboration between the Title I director and the liaison. Children and youth in transition shall

be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance.

Special Education

The School District of Lodi recognizes that children and youth in transition suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability shall be given priority and coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary, to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. When necessary, the district shall expeditiously designate a surrogate parent for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability.

If a student in transition has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school shall immediately implement it. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

Preschool

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Children in transition have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. Children in transition with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Children in transition under age three will be referred to the counties for services under Part C of IDEA and screened to determine if referrals for additional Part C services are appropriate. The liaison will collaborate with Head Start programs and other preschool programs to ensure that children in transition can access those programs.

Community and County Services

Families in transition will be referred to agencies, when the need arises. The homeless liaison will ensure that youth and children in transition are referred for services, such as health care, dental, mental health, food pantry, Head Start, and other appropriate services.

Tardiness and Absences

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child's or youth's living situation shall be excused. District schools will follow state procedures to ensure that youth in transition and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. School personnel shall refer children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

Disputes and Appeals

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth in transition or unaccompanied youth shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall have the rights of a student in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, Title I and other services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or youth to the liaison. The liaison shall ensure the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The liaison shall keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are repeatedly delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth in transition.

The parent, unaccompanied youth or school district may appeal the liaison's decision to the State Superintendent of WI Department of Public Instruction as provided in the state's dispute resolution process (PI 1).

Information Dissemination and Coordination

The liaison will inform District staff at least once each year about homelessness in order to increase staff awareness of children and youth in transition, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with this policy, and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition. Information will be shared with community organizations, e.g., churches, laundromats, etc.

The liaison shall coordinate with and seek support from the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, public and private service providers in the counties, housing and placement agencies, the pupil transportation company, liaisons in neighboring districts and other organizations and agencies. Public and private agencies will be encouraged to support the liaison and the District schools in implementing this policy. Posters will be placed in each school building and brochures explaining parent and unaccompanied youth's rights will be readily available.

References:

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§11431 – 11436.
Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§6311 – 6315.
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
Policy of the Child Nutrition Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. April 6, 2002
Policy of the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. June 5, 1992
WI Department of Public Instruction Homeless Bulletin Series: 01, 02, and 03 and 03.06.
Wisconsin State Statutes 115; 118.75; 46.22 and 46.23 and PI 1