

The Wendell School District #232 recognizes that students who are homeless or in transition face unique educational barriers and challenges. The district endeavors to create a safe and stable learning environment where all students have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education.

The district will ensure that all children and youths who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence are provided with equal access to the same free, appropriate public education (FAPE), including a public preschool education, as is provided to other children and youths.

EQUAL ACCESS

The district will ensure that all homeless students are provided with equal access to all education programs and services needed to meet the same challenging state and district academic achievement standards to which all students are held, and are not segregated or discriminated against on the basis of their status as homeless. The district will undertake steps to eliminate barriers to the enrollment, attendance, or success of homeless children and youths in school. These steps will include identifying homeless and unaccompanied youth and according them equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services, including by identifying and removing barriers that prevent such youths from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school. In addition, the district will ensure that unaccompanied youth as defined herein, are informed of their status as independent students for purposes of submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid ("FAFSA"), obtain assistance to receive verification of that status, and are provided with college and career counseling.

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 who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

1. 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, campgrounds, or trailer parks due to a lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals.
2. Children and youths 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.
3. Children and youths who are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting.
4. Migratory children and youths who are living in circumstances described above.

A child or youth will be considered to be in transition for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above.

“Enroll” and “enrollment” means attending classes and participating fully in all school activities.

“Immediate” means without delay.

“Local attendance area school” means any public school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.

“Local or district liaison” is the staff person designated by the district who is responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the local homeless education liaison by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

“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. The term includes the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools.

“Unaccompanied youth” means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who meets the definition of homeless as defined above. Unaccompanied youths include young people who have been denied housing by their families, run away from home, and/or been abandoned by parents or guardians.

IDENTIFICATION

Children and youth in transition in the district, both in and out of school will be identified. Data will be collected on the number of children and youth in transition in the district; where they are living; their academic achievement (including state and local assessments); and the reasons for any enrollment delays, interruption in their education, or school transfers.

SCHOOL SELECTION

Each child or youth identified as homeless has the right to remain at his or her school of origin or enroll in any public school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.

School selection for students experiencing homelessness will be made on a case-by-case basis and according to the best interest of the child or youth. In making the best interest determination, the district will, to the extent feasible, and presume a homeless student in the school of origin is in the child’s best interest, unless doing so is contrary to the wishes of the student’s parent or guardian or the unaccompanied youth.

Students may remain at their school of origin the entire time they are homeless and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a student loses his or her housing during the summer.

The school selection determination will be based on a student-centered, individualized analysis of factors related to the child's safety and educational well-being. Factors to be considered in determining the best interest of the student and feasibility of school of origin placement include, but are not limited to: age of the child or youth; commute distance and the impact it may have on the student's education; personal safety issues; the student's need for special instruction or programming; length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location; and time remaining in the school year. Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin, will not be considered in determining feasibility.

ENROLLMENT

A school that has been selected based on the best interest determination must immediately enroll the homeless child or youth, even if the child or youth is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment. Unaccompanied youth may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or local liaison.

Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document or condition normally required for enrollment including:

- Proof of residency
- Transcripts or school records
- Immunization or other medical records
- Proof of guardianship
- Birth certificate
- Unpaid school fees
- Lack of school supplies
- Lack of clothing that conforms to dress code
- Any factor related to the student's living situation

The enrolling school will immediately contact the school last attended by the student to obtain relevant academic or other records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available will be made based on information gathered from the student, parent or guardian, and previous schools or teachers. If a child or youth needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the local homeless liaison will assist in obtaining the immunizations or records. Any student record ordinarily kept by a school will be maintained so that it is available in a timely fashion when the student enters a new school or school district.

TRANSPORTATION

Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youths will be informed of the right to transportation before they select a school for attendance. At the request of a parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, transportation will be provided to and from the school of origin. Transportation will be provided for the entire time the student has a right to attend that school, including during pending disputes.

It is this district's policy that inter-district disputes will not result in a homeless student missing school. If such a dispute arises, the district will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention of the State Coordinator for Homeless Education. In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition will also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to housed students.

SERVICES

Students experiencing homelessness will be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the selected school. A student who ceases to be homeless may continue to receive services until the end of the period of time for which the service was originally intended, which may be the end of the school year or the end of a program cycle.

Services provided to homeless students include:

- Public preschool programs; e.g., Head Start
- Title IA services – children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I, Part A services, regardless of what school they attend.
- Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria; e.g., special education and related services and programs for English language learners
- Programs in career and technical education
- Gifted and talented programs
- Before- and after-school programs
- Free Meals
- Transportation

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation will be excused.

Free Meals

Any child identified as homeless by the local liaison automatically qualifies for free school meals in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. They do not have to complete an application. The local liaison or shelter director will create a list of students who are eligible for free meals, note the effective eligibility dates, sign the form, and give it to the school nutrition program office for immediate processing.

If a school administrator knows that a child is in transition but is concerned that there may be a delay in obtaining documentation from the local liaison, the administrator may complete an application on behalf of the child so that the child can begin receiving free meals immediately and then follow up with the local liaison to obtain the needed documentation.

A student in transition who is declared eligible for free meals remains eligible for the rest of the school year, even if the student's transition status changes.

Preschool

The district will ensure that children identified as homeless receive priority enrollment in preschool programs operated by the district, including exempting children and youths in transition from waiting lists. Children and youths in transition with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ("IDEA").

LOCAL HOMELESS EDUCATION LIAISON

The superintendent or designee will designate a local liaison for children and youths in transition and their families. The local liaison will serve as one of the primary contacts between homeless families and school staff, district personnel, and other service providers.

The responsibilities of the liaison include, but are not limited to, ensuring:

1. Children and youths in transition are identified by school personnel and through coordination with other entities and agencies.
2. Children and youths in transition enroll in and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in schools in the district.
3. Families, children, and youths in transition receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, Even Start, and other public preschool programs; and referrals to health, dental, mental health and other appropriate services.
4. Parents and guardians are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in that education.

5. Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youths are informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin or to the selected school.
6. Compliance with all policies and procedures and mediation of enrollment disputes.
7. Public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youths is disseminated in such public places such as schools, meal sites, shelters and other locations frequented by low income families.
8. School personnel providing services to homeless children and youths receive professional development and other support.
9. Unaccompanied youths (i) are enrolled in school; have opportunities to meet the same challenging academic standards as the Idaho State Department of Education establishes for other children and youth, including through implementation of procedures to remove barriers that prevent such youths from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed with attending a prior school or transferring to a new school; and (iii) are informed of their status as independent students and receive assistance in obtaining verification of that status, and are provided with college/career counseling.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth in transition will be immediately enrolled in the requested school until the dispute is resolved. The student will also have the right to continue all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I, Part A services while the dispute is pending.

A written explanation of the decision to deny enrollment and notice of the right to appeal will be promptly provided to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. Such notice will be in language the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth can understand and will include an appeal form and a summary of the dispute resolution process (*see 679.50F1: Notification of Enrollment Decision Form and 679.50F2: Appeal of Enrollment Decision Form*).

In addition, the district will promptly refer the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth to the local homeless liaison who will carry out the dispute resolution process within ten (10) business days. The local liaison will ensure that the student is enrolled in the requested school and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled while the dispute is pending. The local liaison will advise the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth of the student's rights, assist in and carry out the dispute resolution process, and ensure that unaccompanied youths are provided every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the dispute resolution process. The local liaison will keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are delaying or denying the enrollment of homeless children repeatedly.

If an agreement cannot be reached between the parties regarding the educational placement or enrollment status of the student, the district will promptly seek further assistance from the State Coordinator for Homeless Education who will review and determine within ten (10) business days how the student's best interests will be served. All parties will be expeditiously informed of the State's determination in writing and such decision will constitute final resolution of the dispute.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The local liaison will provide guidance and training for all district and school personnel on the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and this policy *at least once a year*. Training will be designed to assist staff in identifying signs of homelessness, increase staff awareness of homelessness and capacity to respond to specific problems in the education of homeless children and youths, heighten the understanding and sensitivity of personnel to the needs of homeless children and youths and the rights of such children and youths under the Act, facilitate immediate enrollment, and ensure compliance with this policy.

Training will incorporate field specific components. For example, school enrollment staff, secretaries, and principals will understand the immediate enrollment requirements; and cafeteria managers will understand the categorical eligibility for free school meals for homeless students.

The liaison will also obtain from every school the name and contact information of a building liaison. Building liaisons will receive training from the local liaison and will lead and coordinate their school's compliance with this policy.

COORDINATION

The local liaison will coordinate and collaborate with the Idaho State Coordinator for Homeless Education, public and private service providers in the community, housing and placement agencies, the district transportation department, local liaisons in neighboring districts, and other organizations and agencies as needed and appropriate to provide more effective and comprehensive services to homeless children and youth and their families. Both public and private agencies will be encouraged to support the liaison and our schools in implementing this policy.

POLICY REVIEW

The district will review and revise any policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youths in schools. In reviewing and revising such policies, consideration will be given to issues concerning transportation, immunization, residency, birth certificates, school records and other documentation, guardianship. And accepting/granting partial credit for completed coursework. Special attention will be given to ensuring the enrollment and attendance of homeless children and youths who are not currently attending school.

NOTICE

Information regarding this policy will be distributed to all students upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year in the student handbook. Public notice regarding the educational rights of children and youths identified as homeless will be posted in the district office and in every school in the district, as well as disseminated in other places where children, youths, and families who are in transition receive services, including family and youth shelters, motels, campgrounds, welfare departments, health departments, and other social service agencies.

**LEGAL REFERENCES:**

Idaho Code Section 33-1404

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§11431 -11436

Title IX, Part A. Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (20 U.S.C. §6301 *et seq.*)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et seq.* (2004)

Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, P.L 105-265 (2004)

June 5, 1992 Policy of the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

ADOPTED: October 20, 2009

AMENDED: February 17, 2015, October 15, 2019, December 2019, March 10, 2020

The Idaho State Department of Education – Homeless Education website offers a variety of reference tools to assist in the effective implementation of homeless education policies and procedures including guidance materials, liaison information, and professional development resources.