

*STUDENTS IN TRANSITION-FOSTER CARE
PARENT/GUARDIAN/STUDENT MANUAL
2023-2024*



RIVERVIEW GARDENS SCHOOL DISTRICT

INTRODUCTION

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is a federal law that is designed to address the challenges that children and youths experiencing homelessness have faced in enrolling, attending and succeeding in school. Under McKinney-Vento, school districts must ensure that each child and youth in transition has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as other children and youths. Children and youth in transition (including foster care student) must have access to the educational and related services that they need to enable them to meet the same challenging State academic standards to which all students are held. The Riverview Gardens School District is committed to ensuring that District scholars have uninterrupted school access and resources that will assist with academic success.

The purpose of the Students In Transition-Foster Care Parent/Guardian/Student Manual is to inform students and their parents of their rights and the procedures that are used by the District to ensure every student and their family are provided with opportunities that will eliminate barriers to education.

STUDENTS IN TRANSITION DEPARTMENT

The Students in Transition (“SIT”) Department is responsible for overseeing the District’s compliance with McKinney-Vento and Foster Care, including providing assistance to staff as they provide support to students in transition, as well as providing direct support to students in transition.

SIT Staff

Stephanie Shumpert, SIT Coordinator 314-868-9829 Ext. 32139

Vanessa Mallory, SIT Social Worker 314-868-9829 Ext. 32138

Karen Graham, Administrative Assistant 314-868-9829 Ext. 32151

You may also contact Dr. Tanya Patton, Assistant Superintendent of Support Services, at 314-869-2505 with questions or concerns.

When the SIT Department Will Be Contacted by District Staff

- Any time a guardian/caregiver/student marks “yes” on a McKinney-Vento Survey question or check Foster Care on the Enrollment Packet
- Any time you have a question during the enrollment process about whether a student may qualify under McKinney-Vento of Foster Care
- Any time you receive a communication, whether written or oral, from a guardian/caregiver of a student in transition, or from the student, regarding enrollment,

attendance, transportation or related issues

- Any time placement in an alternative program is being considered for a student in transition. The SIT Department must be contacted before a referral being made
- Any time a student in transition is involved in any level of official discipline at the school
- Prior to the suspension of a student in transition
- Any time there is an attendance concern regarding a student in transition.

When You Should Contact the SIT Department

- Whenever your current residence changes
- Whenever you have a question or concern regarding transportation
- Whenever you have a question or concern about your student's ability to be successful in the school environment for any reason
- Whenever you have a foster care student placed in your care

ELIGIBILITY & IDENTIFICATION

The Riverview Gardens School District Board of Education recognizes that students in transition are particularly vulnerable and need special assistance to access and benefit from the education environment. Therefore, the district, in accordance with state and federal law, will give special attention to ensure that students in transition in the district are promptly identified and have access to free and appropriate public education and related support services.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility Determination

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, eligible students are students who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

- 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.
- Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designated for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
- Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations or similar settings.
- Migratory children who meet one of the above-described circumstances.

Duration of Eligibility

Once a student is identified under McKinney-Vento as a student in transition, that student remains eligible for the entire time that the student is in a living arrangement that meets the definition above. There is no limit on the length of time that a student may be identified as a student in transition.

If a student obtains permanent housing during the school year, the student remains identified as a student in transition for the remainder of that school year and may continue to attend the same school and receive transportation services for the remainder of that school year.

At the end of each school year, families and/or youth will receive correspondence regarding providing updated information for the next school year. If families do not respond, an attempt will be made to contact the family with alternative numbers listed in the database system. If there is no contact with the family, the student will not be listed as active for the next school year. If the student subsequently enrolls and continues to meet eligibility under McKinney-Vento, the student will be immediately enrolled, provided transportation, and permitted to attend school.

IDENTIFICATION

Outreach Activities

The SIT Coordinator is responsible for engaging in community outreach activities, including:

- Placing McKinney-Vento posters in schools, daycares, family shelters, government buildings, police departments, laundromats, libraries, etc.
- Posting McKinney-Vento information on the District's website, to be reviewed at least annually between June 30 and August 1.
- Including McKinney-Vento Act information in materials that are distributed to District families and/or community members.

Enrollment

Students who indicate that they may be eligible as students in transition under McKinney-Vento are entitled to **immediate** enrollment. The selected school shall immediately enroll the student even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment (such as previous academic records, immunization or other health records, proof of residency, or other documentation). The student must be immediately enrolled even if the student missed any application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness. Outstanding fines, fees, or absences shall not present a barrier to the enrollment of the student. However, the district may require a parent/guardian of a homeless student to submit contact information.

Immediately upon identifying the student as being eligible for homeless services or foster care services, the selected school shall ensure that the student is attending class and participating fully in school activities.

To facilitate immediate enrollment, the following procedures will be used:

- When, during the enrollment process, a guardian/caregiver or unaccompanied youth marks “yes” to any of the McKinney-Vento survey questions in the Enrollment Packet or otherwise indicates that the student may be a student in transition, the student should be permitted to enroll **without providing any documentation**.
- Please note that initial **enrollment information may be provided by telephone, email, or in person**.
- Please note that a student seeking to enroll without a parent, guardian, or caregiver will be permitted to enroll as an **unaccompanied youth**. That student may complete his or her paperwork. The SIT office will assist.
- If there is a question about a student’s eligibility, the student should be **immediately enrolled** while a determination is made.

School Responsibilities:

- The school will assist the guardian/caregiver or unaccompanied youth in completing the enrollment packet to the extent possible
- The school will also complete a Student in Transition Packet for the student.
- The school should make copies of any documents the parent/guardian/caregiver or unaccompanied youth may have at the time of enrollment
- If, however, there are no documents, **the school will proceed with enrollment**
- Upon completion of the Enrollment Packet, the registrar/secretary/SIT Office will enroll the student in the Student Information System (SIS) and arrange bus transportation, if the student is currently living within the attendance area of the student’s assigned school
- The completed Student in Transition packet will be transferred to the SIT department via email or interoffice mail
- The guardian/caregiver or unaccompanied youth should be provided with the contact information for the SIT office.

SIT Department Responsibilities:

- Upon receiving the SIT packet, the SIT Coordinator will review the packet to ensure application is complete and to review eligibility
 - If the student’s eligibility under McKinney-Vento is not clear, the SIT Coordinator will seek additional information from the parent/guardian/caregiver or unaccompanied youth
 - If the student is determined to be not eligible under McKinney-Vento for foster care services, the SIT Coordinator will notify the parent/guardian/caregiver or unaccompanied youth in writing of the decision and provide an explanation, along with a copy of the District’s Dispute Resolution Process

- The student will continue to be enrolled and transportation provided during any dispute resolution process.
- The SIT Coordinator will ensure transportation is arranged for students residing outside their assigned school attendance area or outside the district.
 - If a request for transportation is made by a parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth before 11:00 a.m. on a school day, the transportation shall be provided no later than the next school day
 - If a request for transportation is made by a parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth after 11:00 a.m., transportation shall be provided no later than the second school day
- The SIT Coordinator will provide the parent/guardian/caregiver or unaccompanied youth a copy of the SIT/Foster Care Parent/Guardian/Student Manual
- The SIT Coordinator will provide the SIT social worker with the uniform request and intake assessment form
- The SIT social worker will follow up with the enrollee to complete the requests and make the necessary referrals
- The SIT Coordinator will enter the data in the Student Information Systems both under programs, services, and the student grid
- The SIT Coordinator will document in the SIT database the date the parent/guardian/caregiver or unaccompanied youth first sought enrollment, the date enrollment was completed, the date of first attendance, and the date transportation, if requested, was first provided

TRANSPORTATION

If the student in transition's school of origin, including a public preschool, and temporary housing are located in the Riverview Gardens School District, the district will provide transportation to and from the school of origin at the request of the parent/guardian/unaccompanied youth or district liaison, provided it is in the best interest of the student.

If the student's school of origin and temporary housing are located in two different school districts, the districts may agree on a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing transportation to the school of origin. If no agreement is reached, the districts will equally share the responsibility and costs for transporting the student. If a McKinney-Vento eligible student becomes permanently housed in the middle of the school year, the district will continue to provide transportation to the school of origin for the remainder of that school year.

Procedure

Below is the procedure used by the District for transportation arrangements for Students in Transition. Please contact the SIT Department at any time regarding transportation requests, updates to existing transportation arrangements, or concerns for you or your child. You can contact the SIT Coordinator at 314-868-9829 Ext. 32139.

In District Enrollment

- The Registrar or School Secretary will arrange transportation with the bus services and will provide the parent with the information once received from the bus company. If the request for transportation from the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth is made before 11:00 a.m. on a school day, transportation services will be provided no later than the next school day. If the request from the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth is made after 11:00 a.m., transportation services will be provided no later than the second school day after the District receives the request. When arranging transportation with District bus services, the registrar or school secretary will notify bus services in writing that the request is for a McKinney-Vento eligible student and will include the time that the request for transportation was made by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied student.
- If the temporary location is in the district but outside of the area of the assigned school, transportation will be arranged by the Student in Transition Department.
- If a currently enrolled student is in need of transportation modifications due to a relocation, **this change can be made over the phone or via email.** If the notification from the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth that the transportation pick-up or drop off location needs to change is made prior to 11:00 a.m. on a school day, transportation services will be provided to the new pick-up or drop-off location no later than the next school day after the District has been notified of the change. If the notification to the District by the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth is made after 11:00 a.m., transportation services will be provided to the new pick-up or drop-off location no later than the second school day after the District has been notified of the change in pick up or drop off location.
- After three no shows, the SIT department will contact the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth to determine or identify if there are any barriers to attendance that can be addressed by the District. If the student continues to not use the provided transportation after any barriers have been addressed, the District may notify the parent/guardian or unaccompanied student in writing that transportation services will be suspended. A Best Interest Determination may also be conducted, and the Dispute Resolution Form may be provided.

Out of District Enrollment

- If the student is temporarily living outside the district, the Student In Transition department will arrange transportation. If the request for transportation from the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth is made before 11:00 a.m. on a school day, transportation services will be provided no later than the next school day. If the request from the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth is made after 11:00 a.m., transportation services will be provided no later than the second school day after the District receives the request. When arranging transportation with District bus services, the registrar or school secretary will notify bus services in writing that the request is for a McKinney-Vento eligible student and will include the time that the request for transportation was made by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied student.
- To ensure immediacy, transportation services may be arranged initially with Express Medical Transporters (EMT) if all of the required information is received by the school and/or parent/guardian or the student. Students will transition to First Student Bus services within the next week and will continue bus services throughout their transition. Students living in a shelter or located in areas outside the bus transportation zone will continue to utilize the EMT services throughout their transition.
- If a currently enrolled student needs transportation modifications due to a relocation, **this change can be made over the phone or via email.**
- After three no-shows, the SIT department will contact the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth to determine if any barriers to attendance can be addressed by the District. If the student continues to not use the provided transportation after any barriers have been addressed, the District may notify the parent/guardian or unaccompanied student in writing that transportation services will be suspended. A Best Interest Determination may also be conducted. The Dispute Resolution Form may be provided.
- School districts the students are temporarily residing in will receive a shared cost notification. Upon receiving the transportation invoices, the Student In Transition Department will invoice the districts for split cost reimbursement.

SIT FOLLOW UP FOR RESOURCES/SERVICES

The District requests that parents or unaccompanied youth complete the Intake Assessment. This assists the District in identifying any additional areas of support which may be needed. A member of the SIT Department will contact you regarding any needs you identified, including the need for school uniforms. Please contact the SIT Department to let them know your needs.

BEST INTEREST DETERMINATION

When Required

The SIT Coordinator is responsible for making a Best Interest Determination when making a decision regarding school selection for a student. When making a Best Interest Determination, the SIT Coordinator must (1) presume that staying in the school of origin is in the best interest of the child or youth; (2) consider specific student-centered factors; (3) prioritize the wishes of the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth; and (4) include a written explanation and notice of the right to appeal if the District determines that remaining in the school of origin or enrolling in the school requested by the parent, guardian or youth is not in the best interest of the child or youth.

A Best Interest Determination will be made upon enrollment of a student identified as a student in transition, when a student's living circumstance changes to a new attendance or district, and when a student is recommended for placement at an alternative program. Once the Best Interest Determination is made, the SIT Coordinator will provide written notice of the District's decision, including information regarding the Dispute Resolution Process.

Alternative Programs

Prior to placing an SIT student in an alternative program, such as ACE, the building administrator and/or counselor must notify the SIT office, providing a written explanation of the reasons assignment to an alternative program is recommended.

If the SIT office accepts the recommendation from the building, the SIT office will notify the parent, guardian, or youth that assignment to an alternative program is recommended. The notification will be in writing and will include information about the alternative program, as well as the reasons for the recommendation.

After getting input from the parent, guardian, or youth regarding the alternative education placement, the SIT Coordinator will conduct a Best Interest Determination, taking into consideration the reasons for the recommended placement, whether meals are provided, and the availability of transportation, instructional support and other services. The parent, guardian or youth will receive written notice of the District's decision, including information regarding the Dispute Resolution Process.

Form

Best Interest Determination School Selection Checklist

(From <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/school-selection-checklist>)

School of Origin Considerations	Local Attendance Area School Considerations
<input type="checkbox"/> Continuity of instruction <i>Student is best served due to circumstances that look to his or her past.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Continuity of instruction <i>Student is best served due to circumstances that look to his or her future.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Age and grade placement of the student <i>Maintaining friends and contacts with peers is critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation. The student has been in this environment for an extended period.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Age and grade placement of the student <i>Maintaining friends and contact with peers in the school of origin is not particularly critical to the student's meaningful school experience and participation. The student has attended the school of origin for only a brief period.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic strength <i>The child's academic performance is weak, and the child would fall further behind if he/she transferred to another school.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Academic strength <i>The child's academic performance is strong and at grade level, and the child would recover academically from a school transfer.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Social and emotional state <i>The child is suffering from the effects of mobility, has developed strong ties to the current school, and does not want to leave.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Social and emotional state <i>The child seems to be coping adequately with mobility, does not feel strong ties to the current school, and does not mind transferring.</i>

<input type="checkbox"/> Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/or special needs <i>The advantages of remaining in the school of origin outweigh any potential disadvantages presented by the length of the commute.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education and/or special needs <i>A shorter commute may help the student's concentration, attitude, or readiness for school. The local attendance area school can meet all of the necessary educational and special needs of the student.</i>
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<input type="checkbox"/> Personal safety of the student <i>The school of origin has advantages for the safety of the students.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal safety of the student <i>The local attendance area school has advantages for the safety of the student.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Student's need for special instruction <i>The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the school of origin.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Student's need for special instruction <i>The student's need for special instruction, such as Section 504 or special education and related services, can be met better at the local attendance area school.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location <i>The student's current living situation is outside of the school-of-origin attendance zone, but his/her living situation or location continues to be uncertain. The student will benefit from the continuity offered by remaining in the school of origin.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location <i>The student's current living situation appears stable and unlikely to change suddenly; the student will benefit from developing relationships with peers in school who live in his/her local community.</i>

DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS

When to Provide Dispute Resolution Form

The dispute resolution process is available for disputes regarding eligibility, enrollment, transportation, and full participation in school.

The Dispute Resolution Form is included in this SIT Parent-Foster Care/Guardian/Youth SIT Manual, as well as on the District's website. Additionally, the SIT Office will notify a parent/guardian or youth of the Dispute Resolution process by providing a copy of the form whenever the SIT Office becomes aware of a dispute regarding McKinney-Vento eligibility, school selection, or enrollment.

- The Dispute Resolution form will be included with the SIT Office's written explanations of eligibility determinations under McKinney-Vento.
- The Dispute Resolution form will be included with the SIT Office's written explanations of its decisions regarding Best Interest Determinations, including for placements in alternative programs.

The Dispute Resolution form will be included with any written notification from the SIT Office that a student's transportation is being discontinued.

Procedures

The SIT Coordinator will assist any parent/guardian or youth who wishes to submit an appeal of a District decision through the Dispute Resolution process. Information may be provided by a parent/guardian or youth directly to the SIT Office or a school-level counselor. Information may be provided in person, by telephone, or in writing.

The student will be permitted to enroll in or remain enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute.

Appeals to the Board of Education may be submitted by a parent/guardian or youth to the SIT Coordinator. The SIT Coordinator will assist the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth in submitting a complaint with the Board of Education.

Form

STUDENT IN TRANSITION DISPUTE RESOLUTION REGARDING THE EDUCATION OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH Dispute Resolution (722(g)(1)(C) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

The Students in Transition Coordinator will handle disputes concerning eligibility, school selection, or enrollment in school for students or youth who are homeless (in transition) and who are foster care students. During the dispute, the children or youth must be enrolled and fully participating in school activities as well as receive transportation, if requested, to the school in which the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth seeks enrollment during the dispute. The SIT Coordinator will carry out the dispute resolution procedures as quickly as possible after receiving notice of a dispute.

Every effort must be made to resolve the complaint or dispute at the School District level before it is brought to MO-DESE. It is the responsibility of the School District to inform the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth of the District's Complaint Resolution Procedure when a question arises concerning the education of a homeless child or youth.

The District will use the following complaint resolution process when a dispute arises regarding the education of a homeless child or youth:

School District Level

The parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth notifies the SIT Coordinator in writing of their complaint. The SIT Coordinator serves as the intermediary between the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth and the school where the student is seeking enrollment.

- The SIT Coordinator will provide the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth a copy of the District's policies addressing the education of Students in Transition.
- The SIT Coordinator will provide a written resolution of the dispute or a plan of action within five school days of the date the written complaint was received.

If the dispute is not resolved with the SIT Coordinator, the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth can notify the SIT Coordinator or Assistant Superintendent of Student Services in writing that they wish to file a complaint with the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services for further review. If the complaint is filed with the SIT Coordinator, the SIT Coordinator will ensure the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services receives the complaint.

- The Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services will provide a written resolution of the dispute or a plan of action within five school days of the date the written complaint was received by the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services.

If the dispute is not resolved at the Assistant Superintendent level, the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth may file the written complaint before the District's Board of Education for resolution. To file a complaint with the Board of Education, the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth should notify the SIT Coordinator or the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services in writing that they wish to file the complaint with the Board of Education.

- The Board of Education will review the complaint and provide a written resolution of the dispute or a plan of action within thirty days of the date the written complaint was received by the Board of Education.

State Level

If the dispute is not resolved satisfactorily at the District level, the complaint may be brought to MO-DESE. Complaints made under this process must be made in writing and signed by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth. The SIT Coordinator will assist the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth in submitting a complaint to DESE. The following steps are to be taken:

- Address the complaint to: State Homeless Coordinator, Federal Programs, P.O. Box 480, 205 Jefferson Street, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102-0480
- The complaint must include:
 - a detailed description of the dispute;
 - the name(s) and age(s) of the children involved;
 - the name(s) of involved School District personnel and the School District(s) they represent; and
 - copies of the unresolved written resolutions from the School District
- The Director of Federal Programs (director) will inform the involved School Districts (LEA(s)) of the complaint.
- The director or the director's designee will gather needed information including documentation and statements of the parties and may conduct an independent investigation through an on-site visit if necessary.
- Within 30 days of receipt of the complaint, the director will inform the parties, in writing, of the decision. **

- If a parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth disagrees with the director's decision, the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth may, within 10 business days, appeal the decision to the Deputy Commissioner of Learning Services. This appeal must be in writing and indicate why the complainant disagrees with the decision.
- Within 30 days of receiving the appeal, the Deputy Commissioner of Learning Services will render a final administrative decision and notify the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth and all other interested parties in writing. **
- During the dispute, the child(ren) or unaccompanied homeless youth must be enrolled and fully participating in school activities as well as receive transportation, if requested, to the school in which the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth seeks enrollment.

*The parties may mutually agree to an extension; however, every effort should be made to resolve the complaint in the shortest possible time.

**Although the standard procedure allows 30 days for a response, every effort will be made to resolve the complaint in the shortest time possible.

ATTENDANCE MONITORING

The SIT Department will monitor the attendance of students in transition on a weekly basis. When a student in transition is absent more than three (3) consecutive days or a student's attendance rate falls below 90%, the SIT social worker or the assigned school social worker will contact the parent/guardian/caregiver or student to identify if any barriers to attendance can be addressed by the District. If the SIT social worker and/or school social worker are unable to contact the parent/guardian/caregiver or student, the SIT social worker will use an alternative method of communication, including a letter or email from the SIT office.

Any concerns regarding the attendance of a student in transition at the building level **must be referred to the SIT office**. Similarly, if a parent/guardian or youth shares any information with a building counselor or administrator regarding reasons for absences or barriers to attendance, the counselor or administrator must notify the SIT Office immediately. The SIT Office is the only office that should send letters or emails regarding the attendance of a student in transition.

Before sending any attendance-related letters at the school level, the school counselor/building secretary is responsible for removing any letters directed to families identified as SIT. Students in Transition and unaccompanied youth are not to receive form letters from the District regarding attendance issues.

