

POLICY RELATING TO PUPIL SERVICES**HOMELESSNESS**

Homeless Students: Enrollment Rights and Services:

The purpose of this Policy is to comply with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act (the “McKinney-Vento Act”), which ensures that each homeless child or youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education as provided to other children and youths. To the greatest extent possible and as required by law, the District will work with homeless students and their families to provide stability in school attendance and other services.

Definition of Homeless Student:

Any individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence is considered homeless. A regular residence is one which is used on a regular, nightly basis. A fixed residence is one that is stationary, permanent, and not subject to change. An adequate residence is one that is sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments.

The definition of homeless includes the following:

- Sharing housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship or similar reason;
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- Being abandoned in hospitals;
- Living in public or private places not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings;
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, transportation stations, or similar settings;
- Unaccompanied youths not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian, and not in the custody of a state agency;
- Migratory and undocumented immigrant children living in conditions described in the previous examples.

District Homeless Education Liaison:

The McKinney-Vento Act requires every school district to designate a staff person to serve as that District’s Homeless Education Liaison. The Homeless Education Liaison’s role is to:

- Identify and track children in homeless situations;
- Ensure that homeless students immediately enroll in school and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed;

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- Inform students and parents of all available educational opportunities and educational rights;
- Ensure that they receive the educational services for which they are eligible, including preschool, special education, individualized education programs, and school nutrition assistance programs;
- Assist in resolving disputes; and
- Assist with and inform students and parents of transportation services.

The Superintendent shall annually designate a staff person employed by the District to serve as the Homeless Education Liaison for the Wachusett Regional School District.

Enrollment:

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, schools must promptly register and immediately enroll a homeless student, even if they do not have the documents usually required for enrollment, such as school records, medical records, immunization records, or other proof of residency.

Based on the homeless student's best interest, the student may:

- Continue his/her education in his/her school of origin (the school the student attended prior to becoming homeless or in which the student was last enrolled) while homeless or until the end of the academic year in which the student obtains permanent housing and is no longer deemed homeless; or
- Enroll in the public school assigned to the attendance area in which the student is actually living.
- In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the District will assist in any placement or enrollment decision, consider the views of the unaccompanied youth, and provide the youth notice of the right to appeal the decision.

Disputes Concerning Enrollment:

Although the District is free to request information concerning an applicant child's place of residence, it cannot refuse a homeless student enrollment based on the lack of such information. Homeless students must generally be immediately enrolled pursuant to Federal law. The District should, therefore, consider challenges to a student's enrollment with caution, and should only proceed with a challenge if there is reasonable basis the child's homelessness status is false.

- If there is an enrollment dispute between the student's parent/guardian and the school, or the school and the unaccompanied youth, the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute.

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- The District must provide the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth with a written statement of the school placement decision and a notice of the right to appeal the decision on a Homeless Education Advisory 2003, Form 2003-7A or similar form prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- The parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth must be provided with a Homeless Education Advisory 2003, Form 2003-7B or similar form prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and be referred to the Homeless Education Liaison who will expeditiously carry out the dispute resolution process.
- The final decision in such a situation resides with the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education.
- The District or enrolling school shall assist with obtaining records by contacting the school last attended by the student to obtain relevant academic or other records.

Transportation:

The District will ensure that transportation is provided, at the request of the parent, guardian, unaccompanied youth, or Homeless Education Liaison, to and from the school of origin. If the student is attending school in the district where he/she temporarily lives, that district is responsible for transportation. If the school of origin is in a different district, or a homeless student is living in another district but will attend his/her school of origin in the WRSD, the districts will coordinate the transportation services necessary for the student, or will divide the costs equally.

Services:

Homeless students will be provided any District services for which they are eligible, including preschool, special education, transportation services, and school nutrition programs. School officials may accept documentation that students are homeless from the Homeless Education Liaison as the determination of eligibility for free lunch.

The District's Homeless Education Liaison will ensure that unaccompanied youth and/or parents and guardians of homeless students are informed of the educational and related opportunities available, including transportation to and from the school of origin, and that parents and guardians are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in their child's education. The schools will maintain records for homeless students as are ordinarily kept for all students and the records will be made available in a timely fashion when the student enters a new school or district.

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LEGAL REFS.:

Federal Law: The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/my>

Homeless Education Advisory 2003, Form 2003-7A

Homeless Education Advisory 2003, Form 2003-7B

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