



National Center for Homeless Education  
Supporting the Education of Children and  
Youth Experiencing Homelessness  
<http://nche.ed.gov>



## BEST PRACTICES IN HOMELESS EDUCATION BRIEF SERIES

# Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Important Information for New Local Liaisons

### This NCHE brief assists new local liaisons with:

- understanding the responsibilities of the local liaison position,
- becoming familiar with procedures and resources for serving homeless students in their LEA,
- determining where to target their time and effort, and
- identifying resources and support for becoming an effective local liaison.

## INTRODUCTION

Children and youth experiencing homelessness encounter many challenges in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized in 2015 by Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.), is a Federal law that addresses the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Under the Act (*hereafter the McKinney-Vento Act*), local educational agencies (LEAs, commonly known as school districts) must designate an appropriate staff person, known as the local liaison, who is able to carry out the duties of the position as described in the law [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)]. A local liaison who has the skills and capacity to carry out the duties of the position is key to ensuring that students experiencing homelessness receive all rights and services to which they are entitled. This brief provides an orientation to the position of the local liaison, including exploring local liaison duties and suggesting strategies for their implementation. Briefs on additional homeless

## MCKINNEY-VENTO DEFINITION OF HOMELESS 42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)

The term “homeless children and youth”—

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and
- B. includes —
  - i. 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;
  - ii. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings...;
  - iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
  - iv. migratory children...who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

education topics are available at <https://nche.ed.gov/briefs.php>.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL LIAISON

Every LEA, whether or not it receives dedicated McKinney-Vento subgrant funding<sup>1</sup>, is required to carry out the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act. Therefore, the local liaison in every school district is required to carry out the duties of the position as listed in the law [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)]. The McKinney-Vento Act requires local liaisons to ensure that:

- children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies.
- children and youth experiencing homelessness are enrolled in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, schools within the LEA.
- families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible, including services through Head Start and Early Head Start programs, early intervention services under Part C of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, and other preschool programs administered by the LEA.
- families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness receive referrals to health care, dental, mental health and substance abuse, housing, and other appropriate services.
- the parents or guardians of children and youth experiencing homelessness are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children, and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
- public notice of the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness is disseminated in locations frequented by families and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup

<sup>1</sup> State educational agencies (SEAs) are required to distribute McKinney-Vento funding to local educational agencies (LEAs) within the state through a competitive subgrant process. LEAs that wish to receive subgrant funding must submit an application to the SEA that addresses the educational and related needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness within the LEA (42 U.S.C. § 11433).

kitchens; information must be disseminated in a manner and form understandable to parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth.

- enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act.
- parents or guardians of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and unaccompanied youth, are fully informed of all available transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and is assisted in accessing transportation services.
- school personnel providing services to children and youth experiencing homelessness receive professional development and other support.
- unaccompanied youth
  - are enrolled in school;
  - have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as the State establishes for other children and youth; and
  - are informed of their status as independent students on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and receive assistance from the local liaison to verify this status.

The McKinney-Vento Act also includes the following requirements regarding the local liaison:

- Local liaisons must coordinate and collaborate with State Coordinators for Homeless Education (hereafter *State Coordinators*) and community and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to children and youth experiencing homelessness. This coordination includes collecting the homeless education data required annually by the U.S. Department of Education, and providing this data to the State Coordinator [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(C)].
- Local liaisons who receive training on the definition of *homeless* used by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) programs may affirm, without further agency action by HUD, that a child or youth receiving LEA services, or the immediate family of the child or youth, meets this definition [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(D)]. For more information, see questions L-4 and L-5 of the *Education for Homeless*

*Children and Youths Program: Non-Regulatory Guidance* at

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/160240ehcyguidance072716updated0317.pdf>.

- State Coordinators and LEAs must inform school personnel, service providers, advocates working with homeless families, parents and guardians of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and children and youth experiencing homelessness themselves of the duties of the local liaison [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(B)].
- State Coordinators must publish an annually updated list of local liaisons on the State educational agency (SEA) website [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(B)].

## FIRST STEPS FOR BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE LOCAL LIAISON

### 1. CONTACT THE STATE COORDINATOR.

Every SEA has a State Coordinator for Homeless Education. The State Coordinator provides training and technical assistance to LEAs, and is a key figure in orienting new local liaisons to their position. Upon designation, the local liaison should contact the State Coordinator to ensure that his or her name is added to the local liaison email distribution list in order to be informed of professional development opportunities and homeless education program updates. The State Coordinator also can inform new liaisons of state-specific policies related to serving children and youth experiencing homelessness, and assist with unique challenges and situations that may arise within the LEA. State Coordinator contact information is available at [https://nche.ed.gov/states/state\\_resources.php](https://nche.ed.gov/states/state_resources.php).

### 2. LEARN ABOUT THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT AND BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTATION.

Local liaisons should familiarize themselves with the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act and best practices for its implementation.

Under the Act, children and youth experiencing homelessness have the right to:

- receive a free, appropriate public education;
- enroll in school immediately, even if lacking documents normally required for enrollment, or having missed application or enrollment deadlines

during any period of homelessness;

- enroll in school and attend classes while the school gathers needed documents;
- continue attending the school of origin<sup>2</sup>, or enroll in the local attendance area school if attending the school of origin is not in the best interest of the student or is contrary to the request of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth<sup>3</sup>;
- receive transportation to and from the school of origin, if requested by the parent or guardian, or by the local liaison on behalf of an unaccompanied youth; and
- receive educational services comparable to those provided to other students, according to each student's need.

To support local liaisons in understanding and implementing the McKinney-Vento Act, the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), which operates the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, provides a variety of informative and practical resources. See the [NCHE Local Liaison Resources](#) section below for more information

### 3. BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE LEA'S HOMELESS EDUCATION PROGRAM.

Local liaisons should learn as much as possible about supports for homeless students in their LEA and about homelessness in the broader community. Sources of information include records and documents related to students experiencing homelessness and the services they receive, including memos, phone and email logs, data on McKinney-Vento students submitted to the SEA, monitoring reports, Title IA expense reports for the homeless set-aside<sup>4</sup>, and McKinney-Vento subgrant

<sup>2</sup> The term *school of origin* means the school that a child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled, including a preschool. [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(I)(i)].

<sup>3</sup> If the school district believes the school selected is not in the student's best interest, the district must provide a written explanation of its position and information on appeal rights to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. For more information, download NCHC's *Dispute Resolution* brief at <http://center.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.

<sup>4</sup> Under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, LEAs must reserve such funds as are necessary to provide educationally related support services to children and youth experiencing homelessness [20 U.S.C. § 6313(c)(3)(A)(i)]. For more information on the homeless set-aside, including acceptable usages of set-aside funds, see question M-4 of the *Education for Homeless Children and*

applications (if the LEA has a subgrant or has applied for one in the past). LEA program administrators and specialized instructional support personnel, such as school psychologists, counselors, and social workers, who have worked with students experiencing homelessness also are an important source of information.

Questions to explore include:

- How much time is allocated to the local liaison position? What additional staff support is in place?
- How many children and youth experiencing homelessness did the LEA identify during the previous school year? What is the level of poverty in the school district? Does the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness identified seem appropriate for the level of poverty?
- Does the LEA receive a McKinney-Vento subgrant? If so, what activities to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness did the LEA propose in its subgrant application? What are the subgrant reporting responsibilities? How much time is left in the current subgrant cycle? When will the LEA need to reapply for subgrant funds, if desired?
- How much money is set aside for services for homeless children and youth through Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act? How was the amount of these funds determined? On what were these funds spent last year? How can these funds be accessed?
- What are the challenges to implementing the McKinney-Vento Act in the LEA? What implementation barriers are noted by parents, unaccompanied youth, school staff, teachers, and program administrators?
- How many McKinney-Vento disputes between parents/guardians/unaccompanied youth and the LEA have taken place in recent years? What was the nature of the disputes? How were the disputes resolved? Were any practices put in place to prevent similar disputes in the future?

## NEW LOCAL LIAISON SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Appendix A provides a self-assessment checklist tool for new local liaisons to determine their level of preparedness to serve as the local liaison, and to identify areas in which they need to build expertise. New local liaisons are encouraged to review the checklist and discuss professional development needs with their supervisor or State Coordinator.

- Who are contacts in key programs, such as Title I, special education, pupil transportation, child nutrition, and pupil services?
- Who are the local liaisons in neighboring LEAs, including charter schools that are their own LEAs?
- What are the key community agencies with which the LEA collaborates to provide services for families and youth experiencing homelessness?

Additionally, new local liaisons should become familiar with existing LEA policies, procedures, and protocols related to the following:

- Conducting targeted outreach to families and unaccompanied youth in homeless situations
- Ensuring the identification of McKinney-Vento eligible children and youth
- Ensuring immediate enrollment and full participation in school, including for unaccompanied youth
- Guiding the discussion on school selection with parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth
- Arranging transportation to and from the school of origin
- Ensuring the prompt resolution of McKinney-Vento disputes
- Ensuring that children and youth experiencing homelessness receive free school meals immediately through direct certification
- Linking McKinney-Vento students to supports provided under Title I, Part A
- Providing school supplies, basic clothing, and hygiene items, as needed

- Coordinating with community service providers to improve the provision of comprehensive education and related services
- Collecting homeless education data, as required annually by the U.S. Department of Education

Helpful sources of information about LEA policies, procedures, and protocols include LEA program coordinators, school enrollment staff, the prior local liaison, and written documentation such as records and handbooks.

#### 4. PLAN THE WORK.

**Keep organized.** Effective local liaisons report a number of organizational strategies that enable them to provide timely responses to situations that arise. Consider the following suggested strategies:

- Keep documents such as handbooks, NCHE's *Homeless Liaison Toolkit*, memos from the State Coordinator, the full text of the McKinney-Vento Act, the State's McKinney-Vento dispute resolution process, and key NCHE issue briefs readily available.
- Store frequently used documents on your computer's desktop for quick reference.
- Keep records of phone calls and emails in order to be able to identify persistent barriers and note trends to guide you in planning training and technical assistance.
- Keep contact information for school district program administrators and community partners on hand, and schedule periodic check-in phone calls and/or meetings with them.
- Create a calendar that notes important dates and deadlines, such as State trainings, deadlines for data submission, and monitoring visits. Also note busy times of the year, including the beginning and end of the school year, when it is important to reserve additional time or have additional staff support available.
- Designate a school-level point of contact at each school in your LEA to assist with homeless education responsibilities. Arrange communication protocols with these contacts and be sure to invite them to homeless education trainings.

**Address urgent needs.** Oftentimes, local liaisons find that their days are filled with situations that require immediate attention, leaving new local liaisons feeling overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of issues to be addressed. Issues may include complicated eligibility determinations, school selection decisions, cross-program coordination, and compliance issues. Reaching out to supervisors, local liaisons from other LEAs, the State Coordinator, and NCHE will enable local liaisons to draw upon good practice and alleviate feelings of isolation.

**Plan for improvement.** Review LEA data on children and youth experiencing homelessness, and conduct a needs assessment to identify areas of program strength and needed improvement. (See *Appendix 15.D Needs Assessment Worksheet and Summary* of NCHE's *Homeless Liaison Toolkit* at

[https://nche.ed.gov/pr/liaison\\_toolkit.php](https://nche.ed.gov/pr/liaison_toolkit.php) for more information on conducting a needs assessment.) Based on the needs assessment, set a few realistic goals in key areas where improvement is needed during the year. Learn from experienced colleagues in the field, including other local liaisons, the State Coordinator, and NCHE staff. Some local liaisons also expand their capacity by convening ad hoc committees or task forces to address challenges for serving children and youth in homeless situations.

**Maintain cross-program collaborations and community partnerships.** Cross-program and interagency collaboration are key to ensuring a coordinated approach to providing services for families and youth experiencing homelessness, and linking them to resources. Local liaisons should establish and maintain regular contact with administrators of programs throughout the district that can provide valuable supports to McKinney-Vento students. Programs to contact include Title I, child nutrition, transportation, special education, and public preschool. Community, business, and faith-based partners will enable local liaisons to address the broader needs of McKinney-Vento families and youth, including access to health, mental health, dental, and housing supports. Local liaisons also should identify local task forces and advisory boards on which to serve, such as homeless coalitions, [HUD Continuum of Care program](#) boards, and youth shelter boards.

## 5. PARTICIPATE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES.

A wealth of knowledge exists for creating an effective homeless education program. Whenever possible, new local liaisons should participate in trainings offered by the State Coordinator, NCHE webinars, and the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY). The NAEHCY conference is the only national conference that focuses specifically on the educational needs of children and youth in homeless situations. Visit <http://www.naehcy.org/conference/conference> for more information. Regular participation in professional development activities will help new local liaisons learn effective practices, but also will them to a strong and supportive network of experts and advocates.

### SUMMARY

Becoming an effective local liaison takes time; and yet, if new local liaisons invest time and energy in learning the law, identifying and addressing challenges within their school district, and learning from and partnering with colleagues, they will be able to build upon and improve their LEA's homeless education program. This will ensure the provision of the most comprehensive array of educational and related support services to students experiencing homelessness.

### NCHE LOCAL LIAISON RESOURCES

- *Homeless Liaison Toolkit:*  
Visit [https://nche.ed.gov/pr/liaison\\_toolkit.php](https://nche.ed.gov/pr/liaison_toolkit.php).
- NCHE Homeless Education Helpline:  
Contact 800-308-2145 or [homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org).
- NCHE Homeless Education Issue Briefs:  
Visit <https://nche.ed.gov/pr/briefs.php>.  
(Note: Of particular use to new local liaisons are NCHE's *Determining Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Rights and Services* and *Guiding the Discussion on School Selection* briefs.)
- NCHE Online Training:  
Visit [https://nche.ed.gov/web/online\\_tr.php](https://nche.ed.gov/web/online_tr.php).  
(Note: Includes access to registration for NCHE webinars.)
- The McKinney-Vento Act:  
Visit <https://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv.php>.

## REFERENCES

- Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, 42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq. Retrieved from <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>
- Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 et seq. Retrieved from <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-114s1177enr/pdf/BILLS-114s1177enr.pdf>

## APPENDIX A. LOCAL HOMELESS LIAISON SELF-ASSESSMENT

Rate your experience, knowledge, skills, and values for the position of local liaison on each of the following items from 5-0, with 5 being well qualified and 0 needing significant assistance to be prepared for the position. Note areas for needed improvement, and discuss these with your supervisor or State Coordinator so he or she can connect you with professional development opportunities.

EXPERIENCE	
	Working with at-risk students
	Working in the school system as a teacher, counselor, social worker, or administrator
	Working with parents
	Cross-program and cross-agency coordination and collaboration
KNOWLEDGE	
	Homelessness and the hardships it creates for families, children, and youth
	The McKinney-Vento Act and other federal laws that impact children and youth experiencing homelessness
	State laws and policies that impact children and youth experiencing homelessness
	LEA, state, and federal education programs that serve children and youth experiencing homelessness
	Responsibilities of the local liaison and LEA to support the education of students experiencing homelessness
	Contacts in other LEAs
	LEA budgeting system
	SEA and LEA data collection systems
	Community resources for families and youth experiencing homelessness
SKILLS	
	Communicating clearly verbally and in writing
	Developing clear procedures and protocols, related to school enrollment, transportation, and referrals to services for children and youth experiencing homelessness
	Establishing trust and communication with families and youth experiencing homelessness
	Demonstrating leadership in ensuring the full implementation of the law, and communicating clear expectations for school and LEA staff and administrators
	Diffusing or resolving conflict
	Organizing and managing multiple tasks
	Record keeping
	Delivering training and professional development
	Initiating and maintaining collaborative relationships with LEA and community programs
VALUES	
	Children in at-risk situations need and deserve support to succeed
	Decisions should be child-centered, focusing on the best interest of each student
	Services for the most vulnerable students should go above and beyond those provided to other students when necessary
	Children and youth experiencing homelessness should receive the rights and services offered through the McKinney-Vento Act

**Total possible points: 135**

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Updated August 2017

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) operates the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. NCHE is supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students. The contents of this brief were developed under a grant from the Department; however, these contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department.



Every state is required to have a State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and every school district is required to have a local homeless education liaison. These individuals oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at [http://ncche.ed.gov/states/state\\_resources.php](http://ncche.ed.gov/states/state_resources.php).

For more information on issues related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, contact the NCHE helpline at 800-308-2145 (toll-free) or [homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org).

**Local Contact Information:**

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a light pink background and a red border, intended for local contact information.