

POLICY FOR MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS EDUCATION ASSISTANCE ACT

Legal Reference: Title I, Part C
No Child Left Behind Act, 2002

INTRODUCTION

River Valley Charter School serves students from five towns in Massachusetts: Amesbury, Newbury, Newburyport, Salisbury, and West Newbury. The school reports to the Massachusetts Department of Education as a district and therefore is responsible for all policies that are required of all districts in the Commonwealth, including those located in River Valley's region.

PURPOSE OF THE HOMELESS EDUCATION ASSISTANCE ACT

The purpose of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act is to ensure that each homeless child or youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths. The River Valley Charter School shall ensure that every effort is made to comply with this legislation for its students and to cooperate and collaborate with other district schools to remove barriers to enrollment of homeless students.

DEFINITION

River Valley Charter School is in compliance with the Massachusetts Department of Education which has adopted Section 725 (2) of the Act regarding the definition of homeless children and youth:

- Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or have a primary nighttime residence in a supervised, publicly or privately, operated shelter for temporary accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill), an institution providing temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

This definition shall include:

- 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, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the 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 public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;

- children and youth who are living in cars parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- unaccompanied youth—a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian; and
- migratory children living in conditions described in the previous examples.

LIAISONS

The McKinney-Vento Act requires the River Valley Charter School along with every school district to designate a staff person to serve as the Homeless Education Liaison whose role it is to assist homeless students to enroll in school and to ensure that they receive the educational services for which they are eligible. This liaison may have other duties within the school district.

The liaison for homeless students and their families shall coordinate with:

- local social service agencies that provide services to homeless children and youths and their families;
- other school districts on issues of transportation and records transfers; and
- state and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies.

This coordination includes providing public notice of the educational rights of homeless students in school, family shelters and soup kitchens. The district's liaison will also review and recommend amendments to district policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless students.

ENROLLMENT

Parents or guardians of homeless students may request enrollment in any school in the attendance area in which the student is actually living and eligible for, including River Valley Charter School, rather than remaining in the school of origin.

Homeless students wishing to enroll in River Valley Charter School and are sheltered in its five-town district shall submit an application and participate in the lottery process to acquire a position on the waitlist according to the guidelines of the school's Enrollment Policy. If the student's name is next for an enrollment position and the student does not have immediate access to the documents usually required for enrollment such as school records, immunization records or proof of residency, the student shall be admitted under a personal exception. Students and families will be encouraged to obtain current immunization records or immunizations as soon as possible.

Furthermore:

- homeless students have a right to either remain in their school of origin or to attend school where they are temporarily residing;
- students who choose to remain in their school of origin have the right to remain there until the end of the school year in which they get permanent housing;

- Homeless Education Liaisons must assist students who arrive without records by contacting the previously attended school system to obtain the required records;
- emergency contact information is required at the time of enrollment consistent with district policies, including compliance with the state's address confidentiality program when necessary.

TRANSPORTATION

Homeless students are entitled to transportation to their school of origin or to the school where they are to be enrolled. To the extent practical and as required by law, River Valley Charter School will work with homeless students and their families to provide stability in school attendance and other services.

Furthermore:

- If the homeless student continues to live in the area served by the district in which the school of origin is located, that district must provide or arrange transportation.
- If the homeless student moves to an area served by another district, though continuing his or her education at River Valley, that district and River Valley must agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation to school.
- If the districts cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs must be shared equally.

ACCESS TO COMPARABLE SERVICES

Homeless students are to be provided services and education programs comparable to those received by other students and for which they meet eligibility criteria, such as services provided under Title I or similar state or local programs; programs for students with disabilities; programs for students with limited English proficiency; and school nutrition programs.*

Note: *To expedite the delivery of nutritional benefits, River Valley may accept documentation that students are homeless from a local district educational liaison or the director of the homeless shelter where the students reside as the determination of eligibility for free lunch.

ACCESS TO PRESCHOOL

An important goal of McKinney-Vento is to afford homeless preschoolers the same opportunity to enroll, attend and succeed in preschool as non-homeless preschoolers, thereby minimizing their educational disruption due to homelessness. The River Valley Charter District Homeless Education Liaison must coordinate and collaborate with community resources to assist homeless families with students attending River Valley and who also have children of preschool age to remove barriers to the enrollment of these homeless children in child care and early education programs.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

If a dispute arises over the enrollment decision of a homeless student, River Valley Charter School must provide the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth with both

a written statement of the school enrollment policy and a notice of the right to appeal the decision. The homeless student will remain enrolled in the school pending resolution of the dispute. River Valley Charter School shall refer the student 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 or a designated representative.

UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH & CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN STATE CARE OR CUSTODY

Unaccompanied youth are youth who are homeless; not in the physical custody of a parent/guardian; and not in the custody of a state agency. This definition includes youth living on the street, in inadequate housing, denied housing by their families, those who have left home voluntarily, even when their parent/s want them to return home, and youth doubled up with friends or relatives. Also, in collaboration with the Department of Social Services, the Massachusetts Department of Education has determined that children and youth in state care or custody who have been placed out of their homes into temporary, transitional, or emergency living placements while awaiting foster care placement are therefore homeless.

Unaccompanied youth or students in state care or custody who are awaiting foster care are entitled to the same educational rights and services, including transportation, under McKinney-Vento as any homeless child or youth in the care of their parent/s or guardian/s.

Approved by the Board of Trustees on September 13, 2005