

# CHECKLIST FOR SUPPORTING SCHOOL SELECTION FOR MCKINNEY-VENTO ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

*\*Adapted from NCHE's Guiding the Discussion on School Selection.*

The McKinney-Vento Act provides a child or youth identified as homeless the right to attend either the school of origin or the local school of residence, according to the child or youth's best interest. The school of origin is the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child was last enrolled. The local school is 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 educational agencies (LEAs) must make best interest determinations about school selection that:

- presume that staying in the school of origin is in the best interest of the child or youth;
- consider specific student-centered factors;
- prioritize the wishes of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth; and
- include a written explanation and notice of the right to appeal if the LEA determines that remaining in the school of origin is not in the best interest of the child or youth.

School district homeless liaisons and other school personnel play a critical role in helping parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness evaluate best interest. This document provides a guide for school selection conversations with parents and guardians. Involving parents and guardians fully in the school selection process can reduce the likelihood of disputes or unnecessary school changes and respects the role of parents and guardians in their child's education. Liaisons are encouraged to contact their Regional Coordinator for any needed assistance with this process or to facilitate communication between school districts.

## **Step One: Explain the rights and significance of school selection**

Thank the parents/guardians for speaking with you and let them know that while it is the LEA's responsibility to determine the best school placement for their child, the LEA must prioritize school stability and the parents'/guardians' wishes, and you are here to support them in this process. As appropriate, acknowledge the challenges of the family's living circumstances and the importance of making sure that their child is in a school setting that supports his or her academic success and overall well-being during this difficult time.

## **Step Two: Help the parents/guardians consider their options**

Explain to the parents/guardians that you can help them consider whether the school of origin or local school would best meet their child's current needs by asking them a few important questions. Remind the parents/guardians that they may change their wishes about school placement later if their housing circumstances or priorities change or if their child's needs change.

## **Considerations**

**Overall continuity**

- Has your child attended the school of origin for a long time?
- Has your child attended the school of origin for only a brief time?

**Length of anticipated stay at current residence**

- Do you expect that you and your child will have to move again very soon, or are you unsure how long you can stay?
- Do you expect that you and your child will be able to stay where you are staying now for a while?

**Time of year**

- Is it late in the academic year?
- Is it early in the academic year?

**Personal safety of the student**

- Does the school of origin have advantages for the safety of your child?
- Does the local school have advantages for the safety of your child?

**Interaction with peers**

- Is maintaining school friends important to your child's emotional well-being, meaningful school experience, and participation?
- Would your child benefit from developing relationships with school peers who live closer to his/her new community?

**Academic strength**

- Is your child likely to fall far behind if he/she transfers to another school?
- Is your child likely to recover academically from a school transfer?

**Social and emotional state**

- Has your child developed strong ties to the current school, and does not want to leave the school? Do changes in the environment or routine provoke anxiety or other difficulties for your child?
- Has your child experienced challenges at the current school, and/or does not mind transferring to a new school?

**Impact of the commute on the student's education**

- Do the advantages of continuing to attend the school of origin outweigh any potential disadvantages presented by the commute?
- Would a shorter commute help your child's concentration in, attitude toward, or readiness for school?

**Student's need for special instruction**

- Does your child receive, or is he/she currently being evaluated for, special education or other special services at school? Is it best for your child to continue receiving those services or complete the evaluation at the school of origin?
- If your child receives, or is currently being evaluated for, special education or other special services at school, can the local school better meet your child's needs?

**Participation in extracurricular activities**

- Is your child active in extracurricular activities that are meaningful and important to him/her at the school of origin, and will your child be able to continue those activities while living in your current living situation?
- Would your child be better able to take advantage of extracurricular activities, if he/she so desired, at the local school?

**Other Considerations not included above.**

Do other factors exist that may influence school selection. Assure that all relevant factors have been considered prior to final school determination.

Review the responses and their significance in determining the school placement. If the LEA determines that the appropriate school is DIFFERENT from that selected by the parents/guardians, explain to the parents/guardians that the LEA will provide them with a written explanation of the LEA's determination—including a statement regarding their right to appeal. Please note: During the process of determining school placement and/or dispute, the student has the legal right to remain in the school of origin or begin in the new school of residence, based on the choice of the student and/or family. If a dispute occurs, immediately notify the Regional Coordinator for assistance.

**Step Three: Ensure continuity of instruction in the current school or a smooth transition to the new school****Staying in the school of origin:**

Explain to the parents/guardians that, if remaining in the school of origin is in the best interest of their child, transportation will be provided to the student upon their request.

With sensitivity, encourage the parents to inform the school promptly of any changes in residence and to communicate openly about their circumstances and unique needs so that teachers and staff can do their best to support the student's academic success and overall well-being.

**Transferring to a new school:**

If enrolling in the local school is the best option for their child, explain to the parents/guardians

that the homeless liaison in the district of origin will contact the liaison in the district in which their child is now living (if these are two different districts) to facilitate immediate enrollment. Explain that the local school must remove any barriers to enrollment that are created by homelessness, including transportation barriers.

Work with parents/guardians to make the transition at a time when disruption can be minimized, such as at the end of a grading period or over a holiday break. With sensitivity, encourage the parents/guardians to communicate openly with the new school about their circumstances and unique needs so that teachers and staff can do their best to support the student's academic success and overall well-being.