

MILDRED C WELLS ACADEMY

Student Handbook/Page

Policy: Students Experiencing Homelessness

HOMELESS STUDENTS (Role of the Local Liaison)

Duties

The Local Liaison for Homeless Children and Youth (Liaison) serves as a primary contact between homeless families and school staff, District personnel, shelter workers, and other service providers. The Liaison is responsible for safeguarding the rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness who attend school in this District. The Liaison must be notified immediately upon the enrollment or assignment of a homeless child/youth. The Liaison will coordinate District operations and services so that:

- A. homeless children/youth are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies and the Liaison may ensure that special attention should also be given to identifying, locating and enrolling homeless children/youth who are not currently attending school;
- B. homeless children/youth are enrolled in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in schools of that District;
- C. homeless children/youth receive credit for full or partial schoolwork;
- D. homeless families and children/youth have access to and receive all educational services for which they are eligible, including services through Head Start programs (including Early Head Start programs), early intervention services, including IDEA Part C (birth-age three (3), and any District preschool programs;
- E. homeless families and children/youth receive referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, substance abuse services, housing services, and other appropriate services;
- F. parents or guardians of homeless students are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education;
- G. public notice of the educational rights of homeless children/youth is disseminated at locations frequented by parents or guardians of such children, and unaccompanied youth, such as schools, shelters, soup kitchens, and public libraries in a manner and form understandable to the parents

and guardians and unaccompanied youth;

H. enrollment/assignment disputes are mediated/handled in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Act and any other governing applicable laws, regulations, rules or policies, including but not limited to Board policies, District guidelines, applicable laws, and the State Consolidated Plan; I. the parents or guardians of any homeless child and any unaccompanied homeless minor are fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing transportation to the school that is appropriately selected;

J. school personnel receive professional development and other support; and

K. unaccompanied youths are enrolled in school, have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as the State establishes for other children and youths, are informed of their status as independent students under Section 480 of the Higher Education Act (HEA), and their right to receive verification of this status from the Liaison.

As part of the Liaison's duties, the Liaison will coordinate and collaborate with the State Coordinator for Homeless Children, other community, District and social service agencies, and school personnel responsible for providing education and other services to homeless children and youth and their families. This includes coordinating and collaborating with 1) other school districts on inter- district issues, such as transportation or the transfer of school records; and 2) the necessary entities and individuals when collecting and providing the State Coordinator with reliable, valid, and comprehensive required data.

Such coordination should be designed to: 1) facilitate homeless children/youth having access and reasonable proximity to available education and related support services; and 2) raise the awareness of school personnel and service providers of the effects of short- term stays in a shelter and other challenges associated with homelessness.

Early Childhood Homeless

Homeless preschool age children have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including public preschool education, as provided to other children and youth. To the extent that the District offers a public education to preschool children, including District Head Start programs, the District must meet Federal requirements for homeless preschool children.

The Liaison can identify homeless children who are five (5) years old or younger (i.e., preschool-age) by working closely with shelters in the area. Additionally, the Liaison should work with Federally-qualified health centers and social service agencies, such as agencies that administer the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and other public benefits. The Liaison can also collaborate with early childhood education providers and programs to identify preschool-age children, and work with school personnel who can ask whether the family has any preschool-age children when enrolling homeless children and youth in school. The Liaison should also work with the District's early intervention and special education programs to assist with the "child find" process required by IDEA, Parts B and C.

In addition, the Liaison can assist with enrolling homeless pre-school age children in preschool. According to Federal guidance, the Liaison should remind preschool program staff of the importance of preschool services for homeless children and how waiting lists can create barriers for homeless families who wish to enroll their children. The Liaison may also be aware of preschool programs that keep slots open specifically for homeless children

Liaison's Role Following a Natural Disaster or Catastrophic Event

Due to a natural disaster or other catastrophic event, many families may lose their homes and the Liaison should conduct outreach and identification following these events. When such a disaster occurs, the Liaison should be proactive by preparing schools to enroll large numbers of displaced students and arranging for additional staff to help with the identification and enrollment process. Liaisons should also notify agencies working with such families of how schools will enroll and serve eligible students. Liaisons should publicize the rights and services of homeless students directly to the affected families and those who are helping

those families. Liaisons can display posters or distribute brochures on the rights of such students and families where displaced people assemble.

Enrollment:

Immediate Enrollment: Homeless students must be enrolled in school immediately, even if they do not have the required documents such as a birth certificate, proof of residence, or immunization records.

Record Collection of Homeless Students

Upon enrollment of a child or youth experiencing homelessness, the Liaison will coordinate with appropriate administrative staff to assure that the school last attended by the child/youth is immediately contacted to provide relevant academic or other relevant records. If upon enrollment the student does not have any immunization required for enrollment by State law or any other medical records, the Liaison will assist the family or student in obtaining the immunizations, screenings, or other necessary medical records.

Transportation for Homeless Students

The Liaison should work with the District's Director of Transportation and other District-key figures to assure transportation of the homeless student, including a homeless child attending preschool, is provided.

Dispute Resolution

Homeless families and youths have the right to challenge placement and enrollment decisions. The District will provide the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of decisions related to the school selection or enrollment made by the school, District or State involved, along with a written explanation of appeal rights.

The District will refer the unaccompanied youth, parent, or guardian to the Liaison who will expeditiously carry out the dispute resolution process. The Liaison should assist the child and family, prepare the appeal and make the school's resources, such as copying, mailing, or obtaining records, available to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth should be informed that they can provide written or oral documentation to support their views. Written documentation initiated at the building level or by the Liaison should be complete, as brief as possible, simply stated, and provided in a language the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth can understand.

When a dispute arises over eligibility, school selection or enrollment, the homeless student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals. The homeless student will be provided with all services for which s/he is eligible while the dispute is being resolved.

The Liaison, FERPA and Personally-Identifiable Information (PII)

Failure to protect personal information, including personally identifiable information (PII), can result in an inappropriate release of information that endangers students, their caregivers, and possibly school personnel and a violation of the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The Liaison works with other school personnel to secure the PII contained in student databases and records. Further, conversations about homeless students must be held in private locations to prevent information from being overheard. Many homeless students are survivors of domestic violence or other safety issues that must be addressed in student records and information release procedures. It is paramount that this personal information be protected to secure the safety of students, their caregivers and school personnel.

Training on Eligibility for Other Federal Programs

In order to facilitate coordination with other Federal programs serving homeless children and youths, a State Coordinator must provide training on the definitions of terms related to homelessness and eligibility requirements for Federal programs that serve homeless individuals. Such Federal programs include the Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions Grant programs administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Liaison who has received this training may submit an affirmation that students meet the HUD definition of homelessness so that these students may qualify for the HUD homeless assistance programs if additional eligibility requirements are met.

Notice of Duties

As part of his/her assigned duties, the Liaison for Homeless Children and Youth will inform school personnel, services providers and advocates working with homeless families about his/her duties.

TRANSPORTATION:

Students meeting the Federal definition of "homeless" will be transported from their temporary place of residence to their school of assignment, at the request of the parent, guardian or unaccompanied minor, to the same extent as all other students of the district and consistent with this policy. If the homeless

student's temporary residence is located outside the boundaries of the district, the Liaison for Homeless Children will coordinate with the Director of Transportation to contact the district in which the student temporarily resides to arrange for joint transportation of the student and to seek inter-district agreement on a method for apportioning the cost of such joint transportation.

In no event will a homeless student be denied enrollment based on issues related to student transportation.

The district will work with appropriate State and local agencies to address such placement and transportation issues that arise. The district shall provide or arrange for adequate and appropriate transportation to and from the school of origin while any disputes are being resolved.