

Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

In compliance with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Pittsburgh Public Schools strives to identify all children within the district that may be experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied homeless youth.

The term homeless children and youth is defined as individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. This includes individuals:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason;
- Living in a motel, hotel, trailer park or campground due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations or similar settings;
- Living in substandard housing (no running water or working utilities, infestations, etc.).

If you or someone you know needs assistance, please reach out to the school counselor or social worker at your child's school, as these individuals serve as the Homeless Liaison.

Liaison Responsibilities:

The district's liaison or their designee shall coordinate with:

1. Local service agencies that provide services to homeless children, youth, and families.
2. Other school districts on issues of records transfer and transportation.
3. District staff responsible for the provision of services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Individuals with Disabilities Act.
4. State and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies.

The district's liaison or their designee shall provide public notice of the educational rights of homeless students in schools, family shelters, soup kitchens, public libraries, and locations frequented by parents/guardians of homeless children.

The district's liaison or their designee shall provide reliable, valid, and comprehensive data to the coordinator of Pennsylvania's Education for Children/Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program in accordance with federal and state law regulations.

Definition of Homelessness:

Homeless students are defined as individuals lacking a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence, which include the following conditions:

1. Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship
2. Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations
3. Living in emergency, transitional, or domestic violence shelters
4. Abandoned in hospitals

5. Whose primary nighttime residence is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings
6. Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, transportation stations or similar settings
7. Living as migratory children in conditions described in previous examples
8. Living as run-away children
9. Abandoned or forced out of homes by parents/guardians or caretakers
10. Living as school-aged parents in houses for parents if they have no other living accommodations

School of origin is defined as the school the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled, including pre-school. When the student completes the final grade level served by the school of origin, the school of origin shall include the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools.

Unaccompanied youth is defined as a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Enrollment/Placement:

To the extent feasible and, in accordance with the student's best interest, a homeless student shall continue to be enrolled in his or her school of origin while he or she remains homeless or until the end of the academic year in which he or she obtains permanent housing.

Parents/Guardians of a homeless student may request enrollment in the school in the attendance area where the student is actually living or other schools. If a student is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, the district liaison will assist the student with placement and enrollment decisions and give priority to the views of the student in determining where he or she will be enrolled.

If after such consideration, the district determines that it is not in the student's best interest to attend the school of origin or the school requested by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth, the district shall provide the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of the reasons for its determination. The explanation shall be in a manner and form understandable to the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth and shall include information regarding the right to appeal.

The selected school shall immediately enroll the student and begin instruction, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment pursuant to district policies. However, the district may require a parent/guardian to submit contact information. The district liaison may contact the previous school for oral confirmation of immunizations, and the school shall request records from the previous district, pursuant to Board policy. Homeless families are not required to prove residency regarding school enrollment.

School/Health Records:

The receiving school district may contact the district of origin for oral confirmation that the student has been immunized but must not be a barrier to enrollment. Oral confirmation

between professionals is a sufficient basis to verify immunization with written confirmation to follow within thirty (30) days. The instructional program should begin without delay after the enrollment process is initiated and should not be delayed until the procedure is completed. The enrolling district's liaison will assist the parent/guardian/student in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records.

The district will support families with accessibility to health-related resources — not limited to access to a physician, dentist, and other specialty doctors.

The district may assist with transportation for access to medical providers as well as assist with overcoming barriers related to insurance.

Placement/Disputes/Complaints:

If the district is unable to determine the student's grade level due to missing or incomplete records, the district shall administer tests or utilize appropriate means to determine the student's placement.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent/guardian/student will be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision on the dispute, including the right to appeal. The parent/guardian/student will be referred to the district liaison, who will carry out the state's grievance procedure as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. In the case of an unaccompanied student, the district liaison shall ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

If disputes or complaints of noncompliance rise regarding the education of homeless students, the following steps shall be taken:

1. The person filing the complaint shall first contact the school or district through the district liaison, the principal, or Superintendent to present their concerns to the people closest to the situation and, most likely, to be able to resolve it quickly.
2. If Step 1 is not successful or is not possible under the circumstances, contact should be made with the Homeless Project Education Liaison, or the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will accept complaints directly through the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.
3. Individual cases may be referred to the PDE's Office of Chief Counsel and the Office of the Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, as needed, by the State Homeless Coordinator.

PDE will deliver a response within fifteen (15) business days of the receipt of the complaint. The complaint may arrive in the form of a copy of the school district letter or on the Dispute Letter Form, if given directly to a Liaison of the Homeless Initiative.

Education Records:

Information about a homeless student's living situation shall be treated as a student education

record subject to the protections of the Family Educational Right and Privacy Act (FERPA) and shall not be deemed to be directory information.

Homeless students shall be provided services comparable to those offered to other district students including, but not limited to: transportation services, school nutrition programs, vocational programs and technical education, preschool programs, programs for students with limited English proficiency, and educational services for which students meet eligibility criteria, such as programs for disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and gifted and talented students.

Transportation:

The district shall provide transportation for homeless students to their school of origin or the school they choose to attend within the school district.

If the school of origin is outside district boundaries or homeless students live in another district but will attend their school of origin in this district, the school districts shall agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs of the transportation.

Transportation Coordinator:

Megan Patton, MBA
Director of Pupil Transportation
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Fiscal Responsibilities:

The following guidelines will be followed in cases when the education of the student is provided by the district where the homeless student is temporarily living. The guidelines shall also apply in cases when the district of prior attendance, where that is not the district the student attended when permanently housed, will educate the student:

1. Homeless individuals not in facilities (shelters) or institutions, as well as homeless individuals living in hotels, motels, cars, tents, or doubled-up with a resident family, shall be reported and reimbursed as resident students.
2. For homeless individuals in temporary shelters, the educating school district will send a form for the determination of district residence for students in facilities or institutions to the presumed district of residence.
3. If the form is acknowledged by the resident district, the educating district will enter the student on its rolls as a nonresident student from the acknowledging resident school district. The educating district will bill the resident district for tuition and will report membership data according to state child accounting procedures.
4. If the form is disclaimed and a district of residence cannot be determined, the student will be considered a ward of the state. The educating district will enter the student on its rolls as a

nonresident ward of the state and will report membership according to state child accounting procedures. The Department of Education will pay tuition to the educating district based on membership reported to child accounting.

In cases when the education of the student is provided by the district of origin, where that is the district, the student attended when permanently housed, the district will continue to educate a homeless student for the period of temporary displacement and should maintain the student on its rolls as a resident student.

In cases when the student becomes permanently housed during the academic year and continues in the school of origin, which is not the district of new residence, the educating district will continue to educate the formerly homeless student on its rolls as a nonresident student.

Training:

Training is offered by the Coordinator of Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program.

The district's liaison shall arrange professional development programs for school staff, including office staff.

School personnel providing services to homeless students, including enrollment staff, shall receive professional development and support to:

1. Improve identification of homeless students.
2. Understand the rights of such children, including requirements for immediate enrollment and transportation, and
3. Heighten the awareness of, and capacity to respond to, the educational needs of such children.

Free and Reduced Meals:

In the 2014/2015 school year, Pittsburgh Public Schools began participating in the [Community Eligibility Provision](#) (CEP) which allows all students in the district to eat for free regardless of their financial standing. CEP provides an alternative approach for offering free meals to school districts that meet specific financial requirements instead of collecting individual applications for free/reduced meals.

Benefits of CEP in Pittsburgh Public Schools include:

- All students receive a free breakfast and lunch, regardless of their financial standing
- Increases in breakfast and lunch participation
- Simplifies meal counting and claiming, reducing long serving lines
- Eliminates student debt from reduced and paid meals

Family Engagement:

Families are a valued member of our community and an essential part of a child's success. Opportunities for participation in school and building sponsored events are communicated in a variety of ways throughout the school year. If you need assistance to participate, please contact your building principal.

Community Partnerships:

The District partners with community agencies to support families through collaboration. Some examples of current community partnerships can be found on the PPS [Out of School Time webpage](#).

Academic Supports:

Students have access to numerous academic supports — based on the need of each individual student. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Title I Services
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports
- After School Tutoring
- Credit Recovery

More information can be found on the PPS [Student Supports webpage](#).

McKinney Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/mckinneyvento/Pages/default.aspx>

Pittsburgh Public Schools District Homeless Liaison:

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