



Rights of Homeless Students During COVID-19

On any given weekday, Ohio schools serve 25,600 homeless students. That number will likely increase significantly due to workplace shut-downs and growing financial concerns as a result of local, state, and federal COVID-19 policies.

It is extremely important that families with school aged children experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied homeless students know that they have rights to access their education and receive supports from their school to maintain stability and minimize trauma.

McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that ensures the right of students to go to school even when they or their family are homeless or do not have a permanent address. The law requires districts to appoint a local liaison to identify homeless students, assist in student enrollment, arrange transportation of homeless students if needed, and connect students and families with community resources.

Who is Homeless?

Students meet the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless when they lack a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence. Students who are sharing the housing of another person (doubled up) due to loss of housing, economic hardship or similar reason meet the definition of homeless. This includes students living in motels, hotels, RV parks or campgrounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations, as well as those living in emergency or transitional shelters or abandoned in hospitals.

What is the Role of the Local Liaison?

The local liaison acts as the primary support and advocate for homeless students and provides resources, McKinney-Vento services and information. The local liaison is responsible for the academic and non-academic support of homeless students, ensuring student enrollment and the delivery of McKinney-Vento resources to increase stability in and out of the classroom.

With Regards to COVID-19, liaisons should be providing updated information regarding COVID-19 and should be proactively engaging students to ensure they are connected to school instruction and other school and community-based supports as needed and appropriate.

How Can Families and Unaccompanied Youth Access Supports/Services?

Many communities are closing schools in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. While this is an important step to protect public health, it poses challenges for families and youth who depend on the supports. Communities should consider keeping certain schools or community resource sites open for food, hygiene, and health care, or provide delivery, or drive-by options. If a school does provide meals or services, homeless students should have the ability to access these services. Schools should work with local public health officials and community partners to identify temporary, safe and stable shelter options for families or youth experiencing homelessness who must quarantine.

If I'm Homeless Do I Have To Switch Schools?

Not Necessarily. Educational stability is critical for students experiencing homelessness. A school needs to work with the student and their parents or guardians to decide where a student will attend school. One option is that the student can stay in the school they were attending at the time homelessness occurs or there was a change to the student's living situation. This is called the school of origin. A second option is to move to the school in the district where the student currently is living. A student should only move schools if staying in the school of origin creates barriers to educational stability or if the parent requests a move.

Can I Enroll in a New School?

Yes. If it is determined by the school, the student, and parent/guardian that it is in the best interest of the student to move to a new school district, the student must be immediately enrolled. Immediate enrollment is an essential practice to ensure the stability of homeless youth. Delays in enrollment can negatively impact attendance. Additionally, it can lead to other adverse outcomes, such as inaccurate enrollment in classes, not receiving necessary academic services and falling behind in coursework. When it is not in the best interest of the student to remain in his or her school of origin, the new school must immediately enroll the student with or without the necessary documentation.

What if I Don't Have Transportation?

Once in-person classes resume, you should work with your liaison to arrange transportation paid for by the school. Getting to and from school can create stress and an additional barrier to education for homeless students and their families. Your district must provide transportation for homeless students to support student success and educational stability. This includes transportation to and from extracurricular activities.

Resources

- To identify your local liaison, contact your school district, or visit ODE's website (education.ohio.gov) for a complete directory of all liaisons in the state.
- For more information regarding the state's response to COVID-19 visit the governor's website (coronavirus.ohio.gov)

The Legal Aid Society of Columbus and Southeastern Ohio Legal Services provide free legal services for low-income Ohioans and seniors. Intake lines are open 9:00am-3:30pm Monday-Friday at 614.241.2001 (Central Ohio) or 1.833.288.2936 (Southeastern Ohio).

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