



OUR HOME

Opening Doors: Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth

OUR HOME

February 2006

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NAEHCY Listserv

The NAEHCY Listserv provides colleagues across the nation with a forum for communicating about emerging issues in the field of homeless education, including the application of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and strategies for educating and protecting the rights of homeless children and their families.

The listserv is sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) and hosted by the National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE (NCHE).

To subscribe to the listserv, please send an e-mail request to homeless@serve.org

Resources on the Web
National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE
<http://www.serve.org/nche/>

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
<http://www.nlchp.org>

Hotline Assistance

If you have questions or comments regarding the Opening Doors Project, or a homeless student, you may contact the ISBE Homeless Hotline at **800/215-6379** or contact Rich Dehart, Principal Consultant
Accountability Division
Illinois State Board of Education
100 North First Street
Springfield, IL 62777-0001
Phone 217/782-2948
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Ensuring Opportunities for Success for Children and Youth with Disabilities Who Are Homeless: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004

Barbara Duffield, Policy Director, NAEHCY

Children and youth who are homeless face additional educational challenges when they have disabilities. Studies indicate that children who are homeless are twice as likely to have learning disabilities and three times as likely to have an emotional disturbance as children who are not homeless (Better Homes Fund, 1999).

Yet children and youth who are homeless and have disabilities may not receive the special education services for which they are eligible. In 2000, 50 percent of states reported that children and youth who are homeless experienced difficulties accessing special education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) includes many new provisions that, for the first time, specifically address the needs of children who are homeless and have disabilities. Perhaps most significantly, IDEA now requires that States receiving IDEA funding ensure that the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act are met for all children with disabilities in homeless situations in the state [Section 612(a)(11)(A)(iii)]. This provision makes compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act a requirement of receipt of IDEA funds and should raise awareness among special educators of children experiencing homelessness who have disabilities.

Other new homelessness-related provisions in IDEA

2004 address definitions of homelessness, student mobility, coordination, and the special education needs of homeless unaccompanied youth and homeless infants and toddlers.

IDEA now contains a definition of homeless children that includes any children or youth considered homeless under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Section 602 (11).

IDEA now includes a timeframe of 60 days to conduct initial evaluations for special education. This rule has limited exceptions, including an extension for schools receiving transfer students who were in the middle of the evaluations process prior to changing schools. However, to qualify for such an extension, the new school must make sufficient progress toward completing the evaluations and the parents must agree to the new timeframe. Section 614(a)(1)(C).

When assisting students who transfer between school districts in an academic year, new districts must coordinate their evaluation efforts with previous school districts in order to ensure prompt completion of the process. Section 614(a)(1)(C). Thus, new school districts should consider using evaluations developed in previous school districts, provided that those evaluations are appropriate and reliable.

School districts must promptly provide special education

services when children with IEPs change school districts during the course of a school year. Districts must provide services comparable to those included in the previous IEP, in consultation with parents, until the previous IEP is adopted or a new IEP is developed. Section 614(d)(2)(C)(i).

School districts are required to immediately request records (including evaluations and IEPs) from previous schools. Previous schools must immediately send those records. Section 614(d)(2)(C)(ii).

Unaccompanied youth with special needs must have surrogate parents appointed to them within 30 days. Section 615(b)(2).

States are required to meaningfully involve homeless families and wards of the state in their special education programs for infants and toddlers. Section 637(b)(7).

Although IDEA 2004 went into effect on July 1, 2005, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has not yet issued its final regulations. In June, ED published proposed regulations in the Federal Register for IDEA, Part B. Those proposed regulations include a provision enabling staff members of emergency shelters, transitional shelters, independent living programs, and street outreach programs to serve as temporary surrogates for homeless unaccompanied youth, if appropriate.

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BEST PRACTICES

Providing Transportation to the School of Origin

Here are some ideas offered by NCHE (download document at www.serve.org/nche) and by a panel presentation at NAEHCY: "Transportation for Homeless Children and Youth: Common Problems - Strong Approaches":

Community:

- Initiate conversations with housing authorities, foster care, juvenile justice, etc.
- Create partnerships with shelters, group homes, community agencies
- Identify a contact in each such agency to facilitate communication

Department of Pupil Transportation

- Develop a team approach to coordination
- Provide training to department staff to increase sensitivity to and buy-in for the needs of homeless children

Inter-district Collaboration:

- Have frequent communication between local liaisons and pupil transportation directors across districts
- Develop transportation procedures that are in place **before** the need arises

Handling Data:

- Create an interagency electronic database
- Attend to confidentiality issues, especially in domestic violence cases

Economical, Creative Solutions

- Be flexible with bus routes and use of special education or magnet school buses
- Involve private sector businesses and foundations for funding
- Investigate issuing city bus tickets/keep a distribution log
- Offer gas vouchers to parents/establish guidelines and keep a log
- **Think outside the box:**
 - Encourage after-school programs for students (more bus drivers may be available later; parents may be able to pick students up later)
 - Explore use of shelter vans!

Awareness in Accessing Pre-school Programs for Homeless Children

"It's Their Right under the Law"

Lois Porter, Liaison/ Family Case Manager Lee/Ogle ROE #47

The federal McKinney-Vento Act protects the rights of children and youth in homeless situations to attend and succeed in [public] school, *including pre-school* (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2002).

As we continue to search out best practices in child-care delivery while working to serve our homeless children, we must be diligent and current in our approach by distinguishing appropriate pre-school models. It is most important to identify pre-schools funded with either federal or state dollars as they have been drastically under-utilized by homeless families—at times due to misinterpretation of guidelines by homeless liaisons, school district administrators and directors of pre-schools. Further, we must offer a "how-to approach" in order to provide our youngest homeless population with the same rights to a quality pre-school education as any other child.

Students who qualify as "homeless" under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act are to be given priority in enrollment in the programs funded by Federal or State monies. If there are no openings in the program, contact should still be made to get the homeless student identified, and have them prioritized as one of the first to receive services as openings occur.

This report will offer a variety of preschool options meant to assist the reader to better understand the availability and importance of child-care programs for our children in families identified as homeless. Hopefully, this will lead to effective advocacy for children's placement in one of the programs presented.

Head Start Programs

Head Start began in 1964 as a federally funded program of the War on Poverty and Early Head Start began in 1994. In meeting the needs of homeless families, there are programs in communities that focus on comprehensive services essential for families experiencing homelessness. In reporting data to the Feds, Head Start is required to complete a section entitled, "*Services To Homeless Families*" Form: PIR 2005 (Version 8.0).

Head Start Programs are free to low-income families under the federal government guidelines and at least 10% of enrollment is set aside for children with identified disability (no income guidelines applied). Center-based programs are part-day and full-day, serving 4-5 year olds who are not age-eligible for kindergarten. Serving 3-year-olds, home-based programs include home visits and weekly socialization in a center-based setting. Early Head Start is designed for pregnant women, infants and toddlers.

Program components include: community partnerships and resources, health screenings and treatment, nutrition services and nutritious meals, and ongoing assessment of children in eight domains. Parents are required to participate in the program and there is a parent council. (*Refer to: Administration for Children and Families (ACF Homeless Children and the Head Start Program 06/05/1992) Visit Website:*

Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Early Childhood Block Grant

ISBE Early Childhood Program (PreKindergarten) is a state-funded program that began during the 1989-1990 school year. The intent of delivery was to house programs in public school buildings. Currently, PreK programs are in community settings assisting in the deliver of PreK services to eligible children in child-care centers and children in family child-care homes. Kay Henderson, ISBE Early Childhood Division Administrator, said at the Bilingual Advisory Council 8/5/2005: "...The idea is to use childcare centers, schools and churches for sites and partnerships so services can be expanded." Is the purpose also to further meet the need of our homeless?

Each program has its own list of *may be* "at-risk" of academic failure criteria for entry, which is based on the needs of the community. Cost is *usually* free to families. Program models include: center-based 2-half-day and full-day classes serving 3, 4, & 5 years old who are not age-eligible for kindergarten; a home-based program for 3-year-olds consisting of home visits and weekly socialization in a center-based setting; prevention initiative programs *only* for birth-to-age 3, in a home-based setting with the concept "parent-as-teacher."

Program components include: community partnerships and resources, preschool screenings, as well as snacks for part-day and nutritious meals for full-day. A limited number of programs provide

transportation to/from the child's home. Under some circumstances school districts permit the PreK child to ride the school bus along with their older brother or sister. PreKindergarten programs are located in public schools; however, where the needs are great for child-care, there are center-based programs currently located within community-like facilities.

Even Start Family Literacy Program

The Even Start Family Literacy program is a federally funded program designed to break the cycle of illiteracy by improving educational opportunities for low-income families. Early Childhood, Adult Literacy, Parenting Education and Interactive Literacy Activities between parents and their children are required components in order to meet the goals of the program. (Taken from: *ISBE Early Childhood Division – www.isbe.net*)

Department of Human Services (DHS) Child-Care Programs

The DHS child-care program gives working parents greater access to services that help their children get ready for school. DHS is also working to increase child-care resources to help meet the needs of Illinois families who work weekends, rotating shifts or unconventional hours.

DHS will help pay for child-care arrangements to help ensure the well-being and safety of a child. Illinois law defines the following legal care arrangements: Licensed Child Care Center, License-Exempt Child Care Center, Licensed Family Child Care Home, Licensed Group Family Child Care Home, License-Exempt Family Child Care Home, Child Care by Non-relative – in the child's home, or Child care by Relatives – in the relative's or child's home

Income eligibility categories are available, outlining family size and maximum gross annual income. A list of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies by counties served is also available. "...The office in your area can help you find child care and get help paying for it." (1-800-843-6154) (Taken from: Brochure: DHS 3211 (R-3-98) Affordable Child Care)

Early Childhood Special Education Programs

A child must be assessed and referred before entry -- Early Childhood Special Education programs for children ages three to five are part of the special education continuum as operated by the public schools of Illinois. While the Illinois Department of Human Services is the lead agency for special education services for children ages birth to three, ISBE Early Childhood staff act as liaisons to that program. (Taken from: *ISBE Early Childhood Division – www.isbe.net*)

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In reviewing the needs of children and youth who are homeless and have disabilities, program coordinators should bring to bear the full range of both IDEA and the McKinney-Vento Act to optimize the educational access and success of these children. It is important to note that the two laws do not operate exclusive of one another, nor does one law supersede the other. Communication between special education staff and homeless education staff will be essential to making the new IDEA work as intended for children and youth with disabilities who find themselves without a place to call home.

More information about IDEA 2004 (including the text of the legislation and a comprehensive summary) can be found on the website of the Council for Exceptional Children (http://www.cec.sped.org/law_res/doc/).

Better Homes Fund. (1999). Homeless Children: America's New Outcasts. Newton Center, MA: Author.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2000). Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2000.



Save the Date - November 11 - 14, 2006

The Peabody Little Rock - Little Rock, AR

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth 18th Annual Conference

For more information go to <http://naehcy.org>



Opening Doors

Who are we?

Opening Doors is an Illinois State Board of Education grant-funded project provided through the McKinney - Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001.

Under the direction of Rich Dehart, Principal Consultant, Accountability Division, the goal of this initiative is to disseminate information and provide technical assistance to Illinois schools and shelters as to the educational rights and needs of homeless children and youth.

The Opening Doors project partners include:

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Visit us on the world wide web at <http://homelessed.net> to receive FREE materials!

Our Home

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We're on the Web! <http://homelesseed.net>

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THE CLASS OF "OH-SIX"

Glen Weatherwax, Homeless Education Case Manager
Lee/Ogle Regional Office of Education #47

I realize it is somewhat early in the new year to be talking about graduations. Not really though, because many colleges and high schools do graduate seniors at the end of each semester. Such is the case of a young gentleman, who has been--and still is--homeless, that I have been working with for approximately two years.

This particular graduating high school student is an extremely shy and reserved young man. Some negative circumstances, many out of his control but others of his own doing, have not prevented him from succeeding. His local school liaison, counselor, school secretary, teachers, school nurse, a couple of distant relatives, and the individual himself have worked very hard to achieve this milestone. It does not end here, either. With continued support from many people, he plans to continue his education as a mechanic. He has goals, and graduating from high school is only the first one that he has achieved.

An issue sometimes seen as an obstacle for homeless students involves the length of time it might take for a student to complete all of the required school credits. This particular graduate happens to be a sixth-year senior. (Really five-and-one-half years since he graduates this January.)

The way he and I approached this potential obstacle involved graduating in five-and-a-half years and having 2006 as his graduation year. Personally, I graduated from high school in '65, my mom in '42, and my grandmother in '04. (Remember, these are all dates in the 1900's.) Going the other direction, my daughter graduated high school in '91, and my youngest granddaughter, hopefully, will graduate in 2021!

By now I think you see the pattern. Most people refer to the year that they themselves graduated, after finishing all requirements. No one refers to the year that they began their high school (or college) studies. It really does not matter how long it took you to graduate. Just GRADUATE! You can be in the class of "whatever." There should be no stigma as to the length of time it takes. Besides, I tease this particular graduate that it must have been fate for him. He is graduating as a "6"-year senior in "two-thousand-and-oh-'6".