

ILLINOIS MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Every Homeless Child Should Be in School

Removing Barriers to Transportation Services for Homeless Students:

A Guide for Homeless Education Liaisons



Illinois State Board of Education
**ILLINOIS MCKINNEY-VENTO
HOMELESS EDUCATION**

www.isbe.net/homeless
www.homelessed.net

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Introduction

Transportation services provide an important and necessary link for the family (parents, legal guardians, or caretakers) and unaccompanied youth to ensure that students experiencing homelessness remain in the school of origin to maintain school stability and support student achievement.

This guide was developed to help district and school homeless education liaisons understand the law and requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act concerning the use of transportation services to support students experiencing homelessness. This guide provides information on how liaisons can assist school administrators and staff (including transportation personnel), and families in implementing required transportation services.

Illinois State Board of Education/McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program

100 North First Street - C-215
Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001

ILLINOIS MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS EDUCATION HOTLINE: **1-800-215-6379**

Helpful Websites

IN ILLINOIS:

Illinois Homeless Education Program: www.isbe.net/homeless

Opening Doors: Homeless Education Technical Assistance Project:
www.homelessed.net

NATIONAL:

The National Center for Homeless Education: www.serve.org/nche

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth:
www.naehcy.org

NCHE's publications on transportation:
http://center.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc_transport.php

Tips for Families about Transportation Services

Your school's Homeless Education Program helps children who are living in a temporary housing situation. The program keeps children in school and supports their learning.

Frequently Asked Questions

Under the Homeless Education Program, families (parents, caretakers, or legal guardians) have certain choices where their children can attend school after they move.

The choices are:

- **The school of origin:** the school your children last attended or the school they attended when your family moved to a temporary housing situation; or
 - **A new school:** the attendance area school for the area in which you are now staying.
- If you choose to enroll your children at a new school, ask the school staff about transportation services.

Why would I choose to have my children stay at their school of origin?

Staying in the same school helps children continue learning and keep friendships. Each time children change schools, they lose three to six months of progress. Whenever possible, it is better for your children to continue at their school of origin.

How long may my children remain at their school of origin?

Children may remain at the school of origin until the end of the school year in which the family becomes permanently housed.

How can my children stay at their school of origin if we do not have a car, do not live near public transportation, or do not have enough money to pay for transportation?

The school district will offer safe transportation services to help your children stay at the school of origin. If you request it, the school district will set up a plan for getting your children to and from their school of origin.

Does providing transportation mean door-to-door transportation?

Generally, no. However, the student's safety is considered when the school district sets up transportation.

What transportation services are offered by a school district?

Transportation services are different for each school district. Transportation may be by school buses, public transit, taxi, or van services. If the family has a car, the school district might offer to pay for gas to and from the school of origin.

Is transportation offered if your children's school of origin is in another school district?

Yes.

If a district does not offer transportation to summer school for other students, does it have to provide summer school transportation for my children?

Generally, no. However, if summer school is required for a student to pass to the next grade, transportation might be offered.

For more information, you can discuss your school choices and transportation services with your local homeless education liaison:

Use this text box to customize your local liaison's name and contact information.

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Education Program Hotline:
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www.isbe.net/homeless

The Illinois McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program: Tips for Families about Transportation Services is a companion piece for this booklet. The tip sheet provides answers to frequently asked questions about transportation. You can download the tip sheet at www.homelessed.net

The information on the tip sheet should be reviewed with families (parents, caretakers, and legal guardians) or with unaccompanied youth before distribution.

Information for this booklet was adapted from documents from the Illinois McKinney-Vento Areas 5 and 6 Transportation: Removing Barriers Booklet, the National Center for Homeless Education, and IL Opening Doors.

Who is Homeless?

THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS EDUCATION ACT DEFINES HOMELESS TO INCLUDE CHILDREN AND YOUTH—

(A) who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence ...; and

(B) includes—

- (i) children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (commonly referred to as “doubled up”); are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; those awaiting foster care placement or children displaced by a natural disaster (case-by-case basis);
- (ii) children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings ...
- (iii) children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- (iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

[Title VII-B 42 U.S.C. 11431-11435]

Homeless Education Liaison Roles & Responsibilities

FOR COORDINATING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES UNDER MCKINNEY-VENTO

The Importance of the School of Origin

One of the most important services a school district will provide homeless students, other than enrollment, will be transporting students to and from their school of origin as required by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act. Transporting students from where they are currently living - in a shelter, doubled up with relatives, caregivers, or friends, or in transitional housing - to the school of origin is essential to stabilize the students in school and to reduce school mobility.

Changing schools greatly impedes students' academic and social growth. A "rule of thumb" is that it takes a child four to six months to recover academically after changing schools. Highly mobile students have also been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than their peers who do not change schools. This diminished achievement hurts students and schools.

Maintaining Students at the School of Origin

The Homeless Education Liaison needs to inform school personnel about the educational rights of homeless students. Specifically, school personnel, e.g., teachers, office staff and administrators, should understand what to do in the event that a family requests a transfer because they are moving outside the attendance area due to a homeless situation. School personnel should encourage students and their families to continue at the school of origin whenever possible.

Section 722(g)(3)(A) of the McKinney-Vento Act states that keeping the student at the school of origin must be in the student's "best interest."

In determining the student's best interest, Section (g)(3)(B) states that to the extent feasible, your district must keep the student in the school of origin unless the parent decides otherwise.

The U.S. Department of Education's guidance on transportation lists factors that families and districts can consider to determine the student's best interest, including the student's age and need for special services; the commuting distance to the school of origin; the length of time the family expects to stay in temporary or transitional housing; and the time remaining in the school year. A student may remain at the school of origin until the end of the school year in which the family becomes permanently housed.

The district may be tempted to include cost as a factor in a feasibility analysis. However, such consideration must not interfere with a student's right to be transported under the McKinney-Vento Act.

Coordinating Transportation Services

Although the McKinney-Vento Act permits students in homeless situations to remain in their school of origin despite their residential instability, lack of transportation commonly prevents them from continuing there. Therefore, LEAs (Local Education Agencies) are required to inform families of their right to transportation and to provide and pay for transportation for the student. Transportation to and from the school of origin will be either intra-district (within the same district) or inter-district (between two different districts). If a dispute regarding enrollment or transportation has been filed, the student is entitled to receive transportation services while the dispute is being resolved.

It is the LEA District Liaison's responsibility to work with district and school administrators and the transportation director/coordinator to develop a transportation plan that retains students at their school of origin.

If a homeless student is living in another district and is being transported to the school of origin, the district liaison should contact the other school district liaison immediately to work out transportation issues. The administrators will need to discuss how transportation will be arranged and how transportation costs will be shared.

Transportation services do not generally include door-to-door service or transportation to summer school. However, services must take into consideration the child's safety and happen in a timely manner so that the education of the student is not delayed.

Addressing Funding Concerns and Conflicting Transportation Policies

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act requires a school district to provide or arrange transportation for homeless students to and from their school of origin at the request of the family; to provide transportation for homeless students that is comparable to services provided to other students living in the attendance area; and to provide transportation for homeless students to eliminate barriers to school enrollment. Currently, the cost of transportation services must be borne by the district and cannot be supported by Title I, Part A funds. However, according to the Fostering Connections Act 2008, federal funds may be used to provide reasonable travel for foster children to remain in the school of origin.

School districts must comply with the McKinney-Vento Act's transportation requirements. However, transportation must always be safe and appropriate and school districts must comply with safety regulations. Inter-district transportation policies usually are related to fiscal issues; such consideration must not interfere with a student's right to be transported under the McKinney-Vento Act.



School District Transportation Plan

Providing effective transportation for McKinney-Vento eligible students is a collaborative effort among the District Homeless Liaison, district and school administrators, and transportation personnel. Think creatively to find ways for solving transportation issues.

Steps for developing a comprehensive transportation plan include:

- Inform district administrators and transportation staff about the requirement for homeless students to receive transportation to and from their school of origin.
- Designate a district-level point of contact to arrange and coordinate transportation.
- Provide homeless education awareness and sensitivity training for transportation personnel, including school bus drivers. See Pupil Transportation Directors Tip Sheet for more information at http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit/app_1.pdf (page 12).

- Develop strategies for providing transportation options, such as:
 - **Re-route School Buses** – school buses, including special education, magnet school buses and others, can be re-routed to travel to shelters, motels, or other temporary housing where homeless students reside.
 - **Public Transportation** – if public transit is available in your district, the school district can pay for transit passes for homeless students. For this option, make sure to include passes for the family when necessary. It is not safe to have small children negotiate public buses or trains by themselves.
 - **Reimburse for Gas/Mileage** – Districts may reimburse homeless families for gas, or offer gas cards, if they have access to a vehicle. Use the same per mile rate as for district employees traveling on official business. Have the families sign the same forms used by employees so that there is a record of the expense.
 - **Use Taxi or Van Services** – Districts may use taxi or van services. It is recommended that taxi and van drivers have background checks to insure the safety of children traveling on their own.
- Set up bus stops to keep students' living situations confidential, especially for children living in shelters, if requested by the family.
- Look for partners in the community to help support transportation services, such as:
 - Collaborate with local public agencies and service providers to develop transportation plans or provide transportation.
 - Coordinate with public assistance agencies to take advantage of their transportation systems, if available.
 - Obtain corporate or other sponsorship for transportation costs.

- If needed, develop inter-district transportation agreements for districts that share homeless students. Agreements can address the following questions:
 - Who in each district office will be the point person for inter-district coordination?
 - Who and how will the referral for transportation be made within each district?
 - What are the timelines for scheduling transportation services?
 - How will varying school calendars be handled?
 - Can buses meet at district lines to provide a cost-effective solution?

For more detailed information, access the National Center for Homeless Education's **FREE** publication on transportation for children and youth in homeless situations, *Increasing School Stability for Students Experiencing Homelessness: Overcoming Challenges to Providing Transportation to the School of Origin* at http://center.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc_transport.php





For more
information visit:

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www.isbe.net/homeless

OPENING DOORS
www.homelessed.net

Or call the Homeless Education Program
Lead Liaison for your area:

