
STUDENTS – HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

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Cross Ref:

To the extent practical and as required by law, Westfield Washington Schools (“WWS”) will work with homeless students and their families to provide stability in school attendance and other services. Special attention will be given to ensuring the enrollment and attendance of homeless students not currently attending school. Homeless students will not be stigmatized or segregated on the basis of their status as homeless and will be assigned to the school serving those non-homeless students residing in the area in which the homeless child is actually living. Safeguards shall be established that protect homeless students from discrimination on the basis of their homelessness.

Homeless students are defined as lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and include students who meet any of the following criteria:

1. Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship, or similar reason;
2. Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
3. Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
4. Are abandoned in hospitals;
5. Having a primary nighttime residence that 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; or
7. Are migratory children living in conditions described above.

Liaison

The Superintendent will appoint a Liaison for Homeless Children who will perform the duties as assigned by the Superintendent and proscribed by law. Liaison will participate in professional development and other technical assistance activities as determined appropriate by the State Coordinator. The Liaison will ensure that:

- A. Homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
- B. Homeless children and youth are enrolled in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed within the corporation;
- C. School personnel providing McKinney-Vento services receive sufficient professional development and other support;

- D. Homeless families and homeless children and youth receive referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health and substance abuse services, housing services, and other appropriate services.
- E. Homeless families and youth have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible including through the Head Start Act, early intervention services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and other preschool programs.
- F. That school personnel, service providers, advocates working with homeless families, parents, guardians and homeless children and youths are informed of the duties of the liaison.
- G. Parents and guardians of homeless youth are informed of educational and related opportunities and are provided meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
- H. Enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Act.
- I. Parents and guardians of homeless children and youths and unaccompanied youths are fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to and from the school of origin and are assisted in accessing transportation services.
- J. Unaccompanied youths are enrolled in school, have opportunities to meet the same state academic standards as established for other children and youths, are informed of the status of unaccompanied youths as independent students under section 40 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20U.S.C. 1087vv), and the rights of unaccompanied youths to receive verification of this status from the local liaison.

The homeless liaison will assist, to the extent feasible, the homeless students and their parent(s) or guardian(s) or unaccompanied homeless students in their efforts to provide documentation to meet State and local requirements for entry into school.

Enrollment

WWS shall remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless students. Homeless students shall be enrolled immediately, even if they do not have the necessary enrollment documentation such as immunization and health records, proof of residency or guardianship, birth certificate, school records, and other documentation. No homeless student shall be denied enrollment due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences. Moreover, WWS shall ensure that homeless children who meet the relevant eligibility criteria do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities including summer school, career and technical education, advanced placement, or online learning. WWS shall work with the homeless student's parents or guardian (or unaccompanied youth) to determine which school the student will attend based on the best interest of the student. School of Origin is defined as the school that the child attended when permanently housed, the school in which the child was last enrolled, including a preschool, or the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools when the child has completed the final grade served by the school of origin. In determining the best interest of the student, it shall be presume the School of Origin is in the homeless student's best interest except when contrary to the request of the parent or guardian, or unaccompanied youth. Student centered factors shall also be considered consistent with federal law in determining the best interest of the student.

If the student is sent to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian, a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal, will be provided to the homeless student's parent or guardian or the unaccompanied youth. These rights and the dispute process must be communicated to the parent or guardian of the homeless student or unaccompanied youth.

In addition to notifying the parent or guardian of the homeless student or unaccompanied youth of the rights described above, WWS shall post public notice of educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness in each school, and at locations frequented by parents or guardians and unaccompanied youths, in a manner and form understandable to them.

Attendance rights by living in attendance areas, or other student assignment policies are available to homeless families on the same terms as families who reside in WWS.

If there is an enrollment dispute, the student will be immediately enrolled in the school in which the parent or guardian seeks enrollment, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent, guardian, or homeless child will be informed of WWS's decision and their appeal rights in writing. The WWS liaison will carry out the dispute resolution as provided by state law.

Once the enrollment decision is made, the school shall immediately enroll the student, pursuant to WWS policies. If the student does not have immediate access to immunization records, the student may be admitted under a personal exception. Students and families are encouraged to obtain current immunization records or immunizations as soon as possible. Records from the student's previous school shall be requested from the previous school pursuant to WWS policies. Emergency contact information is required at the time of enrollment consistent with WWS policies.

Services

Homeless preschool-aged children and their families shall be provided equal access to the educational services for which they are eligible, including preschool programs administered by WWS.

Homeless students will be provided services comparable to other students in WWS, including: transportation services and education services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, Title I, special education, bilingual education and programs for students with limited English proficiency, vocational and technical education programs, gifted and talented programs and school nutrition programs, and before-and-after care programs.

At the request of the parent or guardian, or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the local homeless liaison, transportation shall be provided for a homeless student to and from the school of origin as follows:

- A. If the homeless student continues to live in the corporation in which the school of origin is located, transportation will be provided in accordance with the corporation policy/administrative guidelines.
- B. If the homeless student moves to an area served by another corporation, though continuing his/her education at the school of origin, the District of origin and the corporation in which the student resides must agree upon a method to apportion

responsibility and costs for transportation to the school of origin. If the corporations cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs must be shared equally.

All records for homeless students shall be maintained so that they are available in a timely fashion and can be transferred promptly as necessary. All records regarding a homeless student shall be treated as a student education record consistent with policy. Further, a homeless child's living situation shall not be deemed directory information.

Youth in Foster Care

As with homeless children, WWS strives to provide stability in school attendance and other services to youth in or awaiting placement in foster care. While priority will be given to enrolling the student in the school of origin, WWS shall collaborate with the Department of Child Services (DCS) to determine which school the student will attend based on the best interest of the student. Notwithstanding, immediate enrollment in transportation shall be prioritized as evidenced by the DCS Transportation Plan Agreement.

WWS's Liaison for Homeless Children will also serve as the Foster Care Point of Contact. This individual will serve as the central point of contact for any and all issues related to collaborating with DCS to determine the best interest educational placement for foster youth, coordinating enrollment of foster youth, notification of changes in placement for foster youth, and coordinating necessary transportation for foster youth.