

## 597 Children and Youth in Transition

### I. Purpose

Homelessness exists in our community. A combination of high housing costs and poverty causes many families to lose their housing. Many young people leave their homes due to abuse, neglect, and family conflict. Children and youth who have lost their housing live in a variety of places, including motels, shelters, shared residences, transitional housing programs, cars, campgrounds, and others. Their lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious physical, emotional, and mental consequences. This school district will ensure that all children and youth receive a free appropriate public education and are given meaningful opportunities to succeed in the school district. This school district will also follow the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.

### II. General Statement of Policy

It is the policy of the school district to view children as individuals. Therefore, this policy will not refer to children as *homeless*; it will instead use the term *children and youth in transition*. Under federal law, children and youth in transition must have access to appropriate public education, including pre-school, and be given a full opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards. They must be included in state- and district-wide assessments and accountability systems. The school district will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation, and harassment.

### III. Definitions

*Children and youth in transition* means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, and who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

- Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, campgrounds, or trailer parks due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

- Children and youth who are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting.
- Migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.

A child or youth shall be considered to be in transition for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above.

*Unaccompanied youth* means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is in transition as defined above. The more general term youth also includes unaccompanied youth.

*Enroll* and *enrollment* mean attending school and participating fully in school activities.

*Immediate* means without delay.

*Parent* means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

*School of origin* means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

*Liaison* is the staff person designated by the school district as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned.

#### **IV. Identification**

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the liaison will identify children and youth in transition in the school district, both in and out of school. The liaison will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth as in transition, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the liaison. The liaison will also instruct school secretaries to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student and to forward information indicating homelessness to the liaison. Community partners in identification may include the following: family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels, campgrounds, drop-in centers, welfare departments and other social service agencies, street outreach teams, faith-based organizations, truancy and attendance officers, local homeless coalitions, and legal services. The liaison will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the school district, where they are living, their academic achievement (including performance on state and district-wide assessments), and the reasons for any enrollment delays, interruptions in their education, or school transfers.

#### **V. School Selection**

Each child and youth in transition has the right to remain at his or her school of origin or to attend any school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or

youth is actually living. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both the student and the school district. Students who change schools have been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. High mobility rates have also been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting the school district to benefit from the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity.

Therefore, in selecting a school, children and youth in transition shall remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent or youth's wishes. Students may remain at their schools of origin the entire time they are in transition and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing between academic years.

Feasibility shall be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent or youth's wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

- Safety of the student
- Continuity of instruction
- Likely area of family or youth's future housing
- Time remaining in the academic year
- Anticipated length of stay in temporary living situation
- School placement of siblings
- Whether the student has special needs that would render the commute harmful

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin (see next page) and services under federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.

## **VI. Enrollment**

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students in transition may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth in transition. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:

- Proof of residency

- Transcripts/school records (The enrolling school must contact the student’s previous school to obtain school records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the student’s age and information gathered from the student, parent, and previous schools or teachers.)
- Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records (If necessary, the school must refer students to the liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunization and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from previous schools or state registries, and school- or community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed.)
- Proof of guardianship
- Birth certificate
- Any other document requirements
- Unpaid school fees
- Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes
- Any factor related to the student’s living situation

Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or liaison.

## **VII. Transportation**

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent’s request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition. Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes. The liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will only be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.

Schools and liaisons shall use the school district transportation form to process transportation requests. Requests shall be processed and transportation arranged without delay. If the student in transition is living and attending school in this school district, this school district shall arrange transportation. If the student in transition is living in this school district but attending school in another, or attending school in this school district but living in another, this school district will follow the state requirements for transportation.

In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to housed students.

## VIII. Services

Children and youth in transition shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected, including:

- Transportation
- Title I
- Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners
- Vocational and technical education programs
- Gifted and talented programs
- School nutrition programs
- Before- and after-school programs

The school district recognizes that children and youth in transition suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability shall be given priority and coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. When necessary, the school district shall expeditiously designate a surrogate parent for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability. If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school shall immediately implement it. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

When applying any school district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation shall be excused. The school district will follow state procedures to ensure that youth in transition and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. School personnel shall refer children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

School personnel must also inform parents of all educational and related opportunities available to their children and provide parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education. All parent information required by any provision of this policy must be provided in a form, manner, and language understandable to each parent.

## **IX. Disputes**

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth in transition shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the rights of a student in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or youth to the liaison. The liaison shall ensure the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The liaison shall keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are repeatedly delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth in transition.

The parent, unaccompanied youth, or school district may appeal the liaison's decision as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

## **X. Free Meals**

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day a child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the school district nutrition office for immediate processing.

## **XI. Title I**

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness put students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support.

The school district's Title I plan will be coordinated through collaboration between the Title I director and the liaison. Children and youth in transition shall be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems, as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance.

## **XII. Training**

The liaison will conduct sensitivity/awareness activities for the following school staff at least once each year: the directors, principals, assistant principals, school secretaries, school counselors, school social workers, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, school nurses, and teachers. The activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with this policy, and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition.

The liaison shall also obtain from every school the name and contact information of a building liaison. Building liaisons will lead and coordinate their schools' compliance with this policy and will receive training from the school district liaison annually.

## **XIII. Coordination**

The liaison shall coordinate with and seek support from the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, public and private service providers in the community, housing and placement agencies, the pupil transportation department, liaisons in neighboring school districts, and other organizations and agencies.

## **XIV. Pre-school**

Pre-school education is a very important element of later academic success. Children in transition have experienced many difficulties accessing pre-school opportunities. To facilitate pre-school enrollment and attendance, the provisions of this policy will apply to pre-schools. The school district will ensure that children in transition receive priority enrollment in pre-school programs operated by the school district, including exempting children in transition from waiting lists.

### ***Legal References:***

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§11431 – 11436.  
Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§6311 – 6315.  
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§1400 et seq.  
April 6, 2002 Policy of the Child Nutrition Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.  
June 5, 1992 Policy of the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

### ***SCHOOL BOARD ACTION:***

Adopted March 17, 2009

**Appendix to Policy 597 Children and Youth in Transition**

**Notification Process**

