

Considerations for Students Experiencing Homelessness

For District and School Leaders

1. Educate School Personnel

Train all school personnel to be respectful, compassionate, and informed.

Examples of professional development topics include:

- [McKinney-Vento](#) and related requirements for serving students who are experiencing homelessness.
- Barriers to accessing McKinney-Vento services.
- Signs of homelessness.
- Strategies for identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness.
- Prevalence of student homelessness in districts and schools.
- Causes and consequences of homelessness and related challenges for different groups of students (e.g., unaccompanied youth, youth of color).
- Needs of students experiencing homelessness.
- Trauma-informed approaches to working with students and families experiencing homelessness.

2. Enhance Identification

Identification is the first step that districts can take to connect students experiencing homelessness with the information, resources, and supports that are necessary to ensure equal access to public education. Key practices for enhancing identification include:

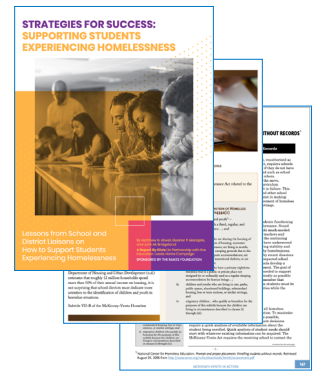
- Provide ongoing training to all school staff, including local homeless liaisons and key members of the community, on identifying students experiencing homelessness.
- Post information about homelessness and education-related rights on websites, visible places in the school, handbooks, and enrollment and registration forms, as well places where youth congregate (e.g., parks, campgrounds, libraries).
- Build relationships with community-based agencies that serve youth experiencing homelessness to support identification (e.g., homeless shelters, community centers, health clinics, motels).
- Conduct attendance reviews to determine if homelessness is a factor.
- Build inquiries about living situations into forms related to enrollment and withdrawal.
- Consider language associated with labeling students by modeling the use of person-first language, such as students experiencing homelessness, students in homeless situations, students in transition, or students eligible for [McKinney-Vento](#) services.



3. Ensure Access to Services

The McKinney-Vento Act specifies that all students experiencing homelessness must be immediately enrolled in school regardless of whether they have the necessary documentation. Key practices to ensure access to services include:

- Enroll students experiencing homelessness immediately.
- Ensure adequate transportation.
- Orient parents and students to the school and staff.
- Protect privacy and confidential information.
- Contact the previous school for any information that helps with enrollment.
- Gather information from parents and youth about school performance, experiences, and any paperwork they may have.
- Seek alternative ways to access key documents such as birth certificates (e.g., online services to obtain records)
- Use a brief, valid assessment of academic placement needs.
- Provide support to ensure consistent attendance (e.g., access to basic needs such as food, quiet study spaces, extracurricular activities, technology services).
- Connect students to wrap-around supports.



View these resources and others on page 4

4. Foster Collaborative Relationships with Students and Families

Exposure to traumatic experiences on a daily basis can hinder a family's ability to trust others and form relationships. Fostering a collaborative relationship with students and families is critical. Key practices to foster collaborative relationships include:

- Treat parents, guardians, and youth with respect in all verbal and written communications.
- Use outreach and education to alleviate students and their families' fear of school authority and ensure that support gets to those who need it.
- Educate parents, guardians and youth about their rights under McKinney-Vento.
- Use a trauma-informed approach when working with students and families.
- Identify and reduce potential triggers or trauma reminders for parents, guardians, and youth.
- Minimize the use of acronyms and other terms.
- Consider cultural factors (e.g., how to greet families and knowledge about a family's cultural norms; values; beliefs; and experiences with systems, including education).

District and school leaders, and local homeless liaisons need to be able to recognize the signs of trauma reminders and triggers. Trauma reminders and triggers cause the body to react as if the event is happening again. Reminders include sights, sounds, feelings, or situations that trigger the traumatic event, such as:

- Loud, chaotic environments.
- Being in a school building.
- Completing paperwork that ask for personal information.
- Feeling disrespected by school staff.
- Situations that provoke feelings of shame, embarrassment, or helplessness.
- Being publicly identified as needing assistance.
- Uncertainty about expectations.
- Unexpected changes or difficulties.
- Situations involving authority figures.

5. Enact Supportive Policies and Procedures

The McKinney-Vento Act includes policies to support equal access to education for students experiencing homelessness. District and school leaders should consider the following key practices to strengthen policies, such as enrollment, access to services, and school discipline:

- Key staff should receive training on policies.
- Policies are firmly in place for supporting the McKinney-Vento provisions (e.g., dispute policies, transportation policies, enrollment policies).
- Clear channels are established for communicating policy documents.
- Processes are in place for monitoring consistent implementation of policies.
- District/school leaders and liaisons should review policies regularly to understand the extent to which they support or hinder identification, enrollment, attendance, and overall success.
- Policy reviews should include feedback from students and their families.

6. Promote Safe and Supportive School Environments

All students need a safe and supportive school environment, especially students who are experiencing trauma. Ways in which districts and schools can create a safe and supportive environment for students exposed to trauma include:

- Establish physical safety.
- Support emotional safety.
- Recognize and reduce trauma-related triggers.
- Prevent and manage crises.

These key practices are important for creating safe and supportive environments:

- Be responsive, calm, and respectful in interactions with students and families.
- Be mindful of stigmas that may be associated with homelessness when considering when and how to talk to a student about their living situation and challenges (e.g., addressing reasons for a student not completing homework, asking for the student's address).
- Maintain student privacy and confidentiality related to the students' living circumstances.
- Ensure adults in schools actively address all instances of potentially traumatic experiences (e.g., bullying, bias, exclusion, or disrespect).
- Ensure students experiencing homelessness have the same opportunities to participate in the school communities and have their voices heard.
- Ensure discipline practices are safe and respectful. Implement positive school discipline policies and practices for children and youth, including getting students to accept responsibility for their actions, while recognizing their unique circumstances and responding to the context of each situation.

If you would like to learn about ...	Refer to ...
Role-alike strategies for specific audiences:	Appendix L: Tip Sheets for strategies to ensure educational access and success for educator groups with similar roles.
What other districts and schools are doing:	Strategies for Success: Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness for lessons from school district liaisons on how to support students experiencing homelessness.
Strategies for supporting immigrant and migrant students:	Strategies for Supporting Immigrant and Migrant Students Experiencing Homelessness for strategies and best practices for supporting immigrant and migrant children, youth, and families.
Identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness:	Identifying Children and Youth in Homeless Situations for implementation strategies at the local level for identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness.
Practices that align with the McKinney-Vento Act:	Equitable Education for All: A Guide to Ensure Equity for Students Experiencing Homelessness for practices that align with the McKinney-Vento and apply to all students.
Trauma-informed practices:	Trauma-Sensitive Schools Training Package for a variety of resources for education on trauma and trauma-informed practices.
Family engagement resource:	Family Engagement: Resource Roundup for tips, strategies, and resources on family engagement.
McKinney-Vento Act:	McKinney-Vento Act for the legislation, guidance, and resources.
Sample questions for parents:	Prompt and Proper Placement: Enrolling Students Without Records for strategies for prompt enrollment and sample questions for communicating with parents.
Family outreach and communication:	Family Outreach and Communication for recommendations for engaging students and families.

References

Guarino, K., & Coleman (2023). [Equitable education for all: A guide for ensuring equity for students experiencing homelessness](#). Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc.: Bethesda, MD/

Atwell, M., Manspile, E., & Bridgeland, J. (2020). [Strategies for success: Supporting students experiencing homelessness](#).