

# **Wilkes-Barre Area School District Homeless Information**

The Wilkes-Barre Area School District will follow the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Under federal law, children and youth in transition must have access to appropriate public education 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 District will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation, and harassment.

## **Identification**

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the local liaison will identify children and youth in transition in the district, both in and out of school. The Director or designee will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth in transition, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the District's Student Services Office, the offices of Food Services, Transportation, and Special Education as deemed appropriate. Instruction will be provided to school personnel to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student and to forward information indicating homelessness to the appropriate District personnel. 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. When necessary, the District will also seek the assistance of the Regional Coordinator for the PA Children's Homeless Initiative.

The Student Services Department will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the 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.

## **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 are eligible to attend. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting our schools 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 will 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.

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin and services under federal and other programs, will not be considered in determining feasibility.

## **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 available readily. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must enroll any child or youth in transition immediately. 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 (The school nurse will assist in obtaining immunizations and/or appropriate immunization information 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 enrolled immediately in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or local liaison.

## **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 will be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition. Transportation will be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes.

Requests will be processed and transportation arranged without delay. If the student in transition is living and attending school in this district and requires transportation, the Wilkes-Barre Area School District will arrange transportation. If the student in transition is living in this district but attending school in another, or attending school in this district but living in another, this district will coordinate with the neighboring district to arrange transportation. When inter-district difficulties arise with transportation, the district will consult with the Regional Coordinator. In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition will also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to non-homeless students.

## **Services**

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

- Transportation (as described above)
- Title I, Part A, services (as described below)
- 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
- Before- and after-school program

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation will be excused. Our 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 will refer children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services.

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.

## **Disputes**

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

The school where the dispute arises will provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and will refer the parent or youth to the Director of Student Services or designee who will resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible and maintain all appropriate documentation. The parent or unaccompanied youth will be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute and appeal to the District Superintendent if necessary. The parent, unaccompanied youth, or school district may appeal the school district's decision as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

## **Free Meals**

All children and youth in transition will receive free breakfast and lunch.

## **Title I**

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I, services, regardless of what school they attend. The District's Title I plan will be coordinated with the McKinney-Vento services. Children and youth in transition will be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems, as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education Regulations and Policy Guidance.

## **Training**

The local liaison will conduct training and sensitivity/awareness activities to relevant school personnel at least once each year. The trainings and 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 Director of Student Services or designee will also obtain from every school the name and contact information of a building liaison. Building liaisons will be identified to lead and coordinate their schools' compliance with this policy.

## **Coordination**

The District will coordinate with and seek support from the Regional Coordinator as well as 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, local liaisons in neighboring districts, and other organizations and agencies. Coordination may include conducting outreach and training to those agencies and participating in the local continuum of care, homeless coalition, homeless steering committee, and other relevant groups. Both public and private agencies will be encouraged to support the local school district in implementing this policy.