

Homeless Education: Including Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in State and Local School District Accountability Systems



Students experiencing homelessness, along with students in migrant families, students with disabilities, and those with limited English proficiency, are among those who have historically been excluded or overlooked in state and school district accountability systems.

However, with the strong emphasis on accountability in the No Child Left Behind Act, states and local education agencies (LEAs) are now responsible for the academic performance of **all** children and youth. The emphasis on inclusion in assessment systems helps ensure that all students receive the educational opportunities and services they need to learn to their full potential.

The No Child Left Behind Act recognizes the importance of including students who are highly mobile or homeless in LEA or school district and state accountability systems. States and schools must include children who are highly mobile or homeless in their annual assessments, but the performance scores of students who have not attended the same school in an LEA for a full academic year can be used only in determining the progress of the LEA and state, not that of an individual school.

Including students in homeless situations in accountability systems provides the following benefits to the LEA and/or school district:

- ◆ Performance data provides an objective indication of how districts are serving homeless children.
- ◆ Achievement data for children who are homeless can be used to influence policies and programs.
- ◆ Achievement data, along with other data, can be used to determine the effectiveness of programs that support students experiencing homelessness.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Education requires states to collect data from all LEAs with McKinney-Vento subgrants on the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness who take the state assessment and who are performing at proficiency level in reading and math.

Who is homeless?

(McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 - Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act - Sec 725)

The term “homeless children and youth”—

- (A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and*
- (B) includes —*
 - (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;*
 - (ii) children and youths 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 youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus 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 I, Part A

Accountability Provisions with Special Significance for Children Experiencing Homelessness

It is vital that all students be included in whatever accountability systems are created. And of course, the concomitant obligation is to provide whatever assistance is needed to ensure that mobile students do not fall behind. Accountability systems can employ strategies and policies, use multiple measures, create shared responsibility for students, provide opportunity to learn standards, and evaluate student progress over a period of time in order to hold schools accountable for all students.

[Piche, Taylor, Reed, ed. (2002). *Rights at Risk: Equality in an Age of Terrorism*. Report of the Citizen's Commission on Civil Rights.]

Data from state assessments enable school districts to determine ways to improve services for students experiencing homelessness and provides evidence of improvement. Project ACCESS in Fresno (CA) concluded from accountability data collected over a period of five years that "when the hardest to reach students are case managed, and a family system intervention approach is used in a community based model, mobility is reduced, attendance increases, and ultimately SAT 9 scores increase."

[Laura McBrien, Director, Project ACCESS, 2002 National Title I Conference.]

- ◇ Each state accountability system must take into account the achievement of **all** public elementary school and secondary school students. [1111(b)(2)(A)(i)]
- ◇ Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) must be defined to include separate measurable annual objectives for continuous and substantial improvement for the achievement of **all** public elementary school and secondary school students. [1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(I)]
- ◇ Assessments must enable results to be disaggregated ... by gender, by each major racial and ethnic group, by English proficiency status, by migrant status, by students with disabilities as compared to nondisabled students, and by economically disadvantaged students as compared to students who are not economically disadvantaged. [1111(b)(3)(C)(xiii)]
- ◇ For a school to make AYP, 95% of each group of disaggregation enrolled in the school must take the assessment, except when the number of students in a category is insufficient to yield statistically reliable information or would reveal personally identifiable information for an individual student. [1111(b)(2)(I)(ii)]
- ◇ Academic assessments must include students who have attended schools in an LEA for a full academic year but have not attended a single school for a full academic year; except the performance of students who have attended more than one school in the LEA in any academic year shall be used only in determining the progress of the LEA, not an individual school. [1111(b)(3)(C)(xi)]
- ◇ States must include homeless students, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act, in their academic assessment, reporting, and accountability systems. States are not required to disaggregate the assessment results of homeless students as a separate category. [Title I, Part A Regulation 200.6(d)]

Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, July 2004

Provisions Related to Assessment of Homeless Students*

- ◇ The final regulations that implemented changes to the standards and assessment requirements of Title I, Part A require states to include homeless students in their academic assessment, reporting, and accountability systems, consistent with section 1111(b)(3)(C)(xi) of the ESEA.
- ◇ Assessments of homeless students are to be included in school district or in state accountability systems when students have been in a school for a full academic year. However, states are not required to disaggregate, as a separate category, the assessment results of homeless students.
- ◇ As homeless children and youth fall at the low end of the poverty continuum, LEAs and states should include assessments of homeless students in the economically disadvantaged category of disaggregation, in addition to other applicable categories (e.g., “all student category”). [M-5]

*Note that provisions included in the *Guidance* mirror and reinforce the Title I, Part A, legislative provisions related to including homeless children in accountability systems.

Challenges in Including Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Accountability Systems

- ◇ Many LEAs experience difficulties in knowing which children may be homeless or might have been homeless at some point during the academic year. LEAs may lack strategies for identifying students who are homeless in their student information system because LEAs are not required to disaggregate their test scores, or they are concerned about not stigmatizing the students. In addition, students may not have consistent identification numbers or names from one district to another.
- ◇ Some school districts have strict policies that limit access to student data. Local homeless education (McKinney-Vento) liaisons may perceive the need to establish a record keeping system that is separate from the LEA's system.
- ◇ Mobility and low attendance during a period of homelessness may interfere with the student being present on the days when assessments are being administered. Students' and their families' situations change; they may have to exit a school system without notice.
- ◇ Confusion exists over which students to include in the reporting of scores for homeless students. Including only the scores of students who are experiencing homelessness on the day of the assessment excludes many students who have experienced homelessness during the year and received specialized services. However, some students may have been homeless for only a few days.

Strategies to Address the Challenges

Increase awareness of the legislative requirements

- ◇ Provide training to educators, administrators, and service providers about the regulations regarding the inclusion of all children in state and local accountability systems.
- ◇ Make parents in homeless situations aware that all students are required to be included in the state assessment (for the grades at which it is given), and inform them of the dates the assessment is being given.
- ◇ Assure parents that they will be provided with the results of their child's assessment; expedite the provision of the test results to highly mobile families.

Increase access of homeless students to state and local assessment

- ◇ Fully implement the McKinney-Vento Act's provisions on school of origin, immediate enrollment, and transportation. Stabilize children as much as possible by keeping them in their school of origin; ensure that children are enrolled in school and attending regularly.
- ◇ Implement flexible test administration policies to accommodate mobility; solicit board of education and superintendent involvement.
- ◇ Follow up with identified homeless students who did not take the state assessment. Examine school district patterns to determine why students experiencing homelessness were not included, and implement strategies to address these causes.
- ◇ Research LEAs and school districts that have implemented effective strategies for including students experiencing homelessness.
- ◇ Create buy-in from district and school administrators on the value of including students experiencing homelessness in accountability systems by using assessment data on homeless students to identify areas for needed program improvement and subsequent improvement in assessment scores once programs are strengthened.

Manage the data

- ◇ Coordinate record keeping between local liaisons and student information and data departments; local liaisons should have access to student records for reporting purposes—relationship and trust building is the key.
- ◇ Put code/indicators (such as non-stigmatizing language that describes living situations) for families and youth in homeless situations in the student information system to maintain confidentiality.
- ◇ Develop cooperative agreements between LEAs and between states to share data on highly mobile or homeless students.
- ◇ Ask the State Coordinator for recommendations on how to include students in data collection (i.e., how to account for a student who was homeless several times during the school year versus one who was homeless for only a short period). A consistent policy in this regard implemented by all LEAs will result in statewide data that is more reliable.
- ◇ Research LEAs and school districts that use effective strategies for identifying these students in data management systems. (Contact NCHE for suggestions on school districts to review).

National Partners in Homeless Education

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)

Contact: Diana Bowman, Director, 800-755-3277, dbowman@serve.org

Web Address: www.serve.org/nche

NCHE, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is a national resource center, providing valuable information, training, and materials to educators and community members seeking to address the educational needs of homeless children and their families. These materials are made available to the public at no charge and include such items as educational rights posters, parent packs, training resources, and “law into practice” briefs.

U.S. Department of Education, Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program

Contact: Gary Rutkin, Coordinator, 202-260-4412, gary.rutkin@ed.gov

Web Address: www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html

The Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program oversees the education of homeless children and youth in our nation’s public schools, including the granting of McKinney-Vento funds and the monitoring of their usage. Program Coordinator, Gary Rutkin, working with other Department officials and national partners, provides official guidance to states and school districts on implementing the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)

Contact: Patricia Popp, President, 757-221-7776, ppopp@naehcy.org

Web Address: www.naehcy.org

NAEHCY, a national grassroots membership association, serves as the voice and the social conscience for the education of children and youth in homeless situations. NAEHCY brings together educators, parents, advocates, researchers, and service providers to ensure school enrollment and attendance, and overall success for children and youth experiencing homelessness. NAEHCY accomplishes this through advocacy, partnerships, and education. NAEHCY also hosts an annual national conference on homeless education, which brings together educators and service providers to learn about new developments within the field.

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP)

Contact: Joy Moses, Education Staff Attorney, 202-638-2535, jmoses@nlchp.org

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The mission of NLCHP is to prevent and end homelessness by serving as the legal arm of the nationwide movement to end homelessness. To achieve its mission, the Law Center pursues three main strategies: impact litigation, policy advocacy, and public education. The Law Center strives to place homelessness in the larger context of poverty. By taking this approach, the Law Center aims to address homelessness as a very visible manifestation of deeper causes: the shortage of affordable housing, insufficient income, and inadequate social services. NLCHP provides guidance and produces high-quality publications on legal issues pertaining to homelessness and poverty.

The National Network for Youth (NNY)

Contact: Mishaela Duran, Director of Public Policy and Public Affairs, 202-783-7949 x3109, mduran@nn4youth.org

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The National Network for Youth is the leading advocacy organization for runaway and homeless youth. NNY seeks to promote opportunities for growth and development for youth who face greater odds due to abuse, neglect, family conflicts and disconnection from family, lack of resources, discrimination, differing abilities, or other life challenges. NNY achieves this through advocacy on national policy related to at-risk youth and the provision of training, technical assistance, consultation services, and publications on the issue of supporting and protecting at-risk youth.



Every state is required to have a coordinator for the education of homeless children and youth, and every school district is required to have a liaison for homeless students. These individuals will assist you with the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your state coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at www.serve.org/nche.

For further information on the McKinney-Vento Act and resources for implementation, call the NCHE HelpLine at 800-308-2145 or e-mail homeless@serve.org.