

EDUCATION OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to clarify statutory rights of children and youths experiencing homelessness as provided by federal and state law. This policy shall be interpreted and implemented to conform with federal and state law and shall supersede any other School Board policy provisions relating to children and youths experiencing homelessness. The School Board shall remove barriers based upon a student's homelessness that affect the enrollment and retention of students experiencing homelessness.

- A. The School Board of Volusia County (School Board) shall ensure that homeless children and youths are provided with equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, – including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths [s.721 (1)] and other services needed to ensure an opportunity to meet the same challenging State of Florida academic standards to which all students are held, [s.721 (4)] and to fully participate in the district's academic and extracurricular activities [s.725(1)] and [s.722 (g)(1)(ii)], and are not stigmatized, segregated, separated or isolated on the basis of their status as homeless, [s.722 (g)(1)(J)(i)] and shall establish safeguards that protect homeless students from being stigmatized or discriminated against on the basis of their homelessness.
- B. Public notice of the educational rights of homeless students will be available in the Volusia County School District ("VCSD") Student and Family Policy Guide and disseminated and displayed in schools and community.
- C. The VCSD will designate an appropriate staff person to carry out the duties described in the McKinney Vento Act, as the district's liaison for homeless children and youth [s.722(g)(1)(J)(ii)]. The VCSD's superintendent shall ensure that there is a VCSD Homeless Liaison and his/her duties are communicated to VCSD and school personnel and appropriate community agencies and provider.
 - 1. The liaison will coordinate district programs and collaborate with other school districts, community services providers and organizations, including:
 - a. Local social services and other community agencies to provide support to homeless students and their families [s.722(g)(5)(A)(i)];
 - b. Other school districts regarding homeless student-related transportation, transfer of school records, and other inter-district activities, as needed, [s.722 (g)(5)(A)(ii)];
 - c. Housing authorities [s.722(g)(5)(B)]; and
 - d. Exceptional Student Services [s.722(g)(5)(D)].

D. The VCSD will remove barriers to:

1. Identification of homeless youth and children [s.722(g)(1)(J)];
2. Enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth in school [s.722(g)(1)(J)];
3. Access to preschool programs administered by the VCSD [s. 722(g)(1)(F)(i)];
4. Receipt of appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed by homeless children and youth while attending a prior school [s.722(g)(1)(F)(ii)];
5. Access to academic and extracurricular activities [s.722(g)(1)(F)(iii)];
6. Immediate enrollment into a qualified school [s.722(g)(3)(c)(i)].

E. Definitions

1. **Homeless children and youths:** Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence [s. 725 (1)(A)] and includes children and youths who:
 - a. Are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason [s.725(1)(B)(i)];
 - b. Are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations s.725(1)(B)(i)];
 - c. Are living in emergency or transitional shelters [s.725(1)(B)(i)];
 - d. Are abandoned in hospitals [s.725(1)(B)(i)];
 - e. 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 [s.725(1)(B)(ii)];
 - f. Are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings [s.725(1)(B)(iii)]; and
 - g. Are migratory children who qualify as homeless because the children are living in circumstances described above. [s.725(1)(B)(iv)].
2. **Unaccompanied homeless youth:** A homeless child or youth who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian [s.725(6)].

3. **School of Origin:** The school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled including a preschool [s.722(g)(3)(l)(i)].
4. **Designated receiving school:** Includes the next level school, elementary from prekindergarten, middle from elementary, high from middle, that a homeless child or youth, whose homelessness continues into the next school year, may attend when the next level school is the district designated school for those students in the homeless student's school of origin [s.722(g)(3)(l)(ii)].
5. **Enroll and enrollment:** Includes attending classes and participating fully in school activities [s.725(1)].
6. **Eligible School:** The school or origin, the school zoned for the address where the student is temporarily residing, or another school which the students residing in that attendance zone are eligible to attend [s.722(g)(3)(A)].

F. Enrollment

The school selected within the VCSD, based on the definition of eligible school provided above, will immediately enroll a homeless student, even if the child or youth missed an application or enrollment deadline.

1. When a school other than the school of origin is selected, they will remove barriers to enrollment and enroll homeless children and youths immediately, even if they cannot produce records or otherwise meet enrollments [s.722 (g)(3)(C)(i)], including:
 - a. Previous academic records [s.722(g)(3)(C)(i) and s.722.(g)(1)(H)(i)];
 - b. Immunizations or other health records [s.722(g)(3)(C)(i) and s.722 (g)(3)(H)(i)];
 - c. Birth certificate [s.722 (g)(3)(D) and s.722 (g)(1)(H)(iii)];
 - d. Proof of residency [s.722 (g)(3)(C)(i) and s.722 (g)(1)(H)(ii)];
 - e. Outstanding fees, fines, or absences [s.722 (g)(1)(I)];
 - f. Other required documentation. [s.722 (g)(1)(H)(iii) and s.722 (g)(3)(C)(i)(I)].
2. If a homeless student arrives without records, the assigned school's registrar shall assist the family and contact the previously attended school system to obtain the required records. A homeless child or youth may continue their

education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness in any case in which a family becomes homeless between academic years or during and academic year [s.722(g)(3)(A)(i)(I)].

3. The eligible school's registrar shall refer the parent or guardian to the VCSD homeless education liaison, who will help in attaining necessary immunizations or immunization or medical records if the student needs to obtain these records.
4. A homeless student is considered a resident of the County if the child or youth is presently somewhere within the district to live here temporarily, but not necessarily to remain permanently. Homeless students who do not live with their parents or guardians will be considered an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and may enroll themselves in school.
5. Keeping a child or youth in the school of origin is presumed to be in their best interest, except when doing so is contrary to the request of the parent or guardian, or unaccompanied youth [s.722(g)(3)(B)(i)].
6. When considering placement in a school other than the child's or youth's school of origin, the district will consider student-centered factors to determine a placement that is in the student's best interest [s.722(g)(3)(B)(ii)].

G. Student Records

1. Student records will be maintained for each homeless child or youth attending school in the VCSD. Records will include:
 - a. Immunizations or other health related records;
 - b. Birth certificates;
 - c. Academic records;
 - d. Guardianship records;
 - e. Evaluations for special services [s.722(g)(3)(D)].
2. Records for homeless children, youth and unaccompanied youth will be made available in a timely fashion anytime they are requested by a new school [s.722(g)(3)(D)(i)].
3. All records will be held confidential in a manner consistent with section 444 of the General Educational Provision Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g) [s.722(g)(3)(D)(ii)].
4. Records will be treated as a student education record and shall not be deemed to be a directory of information as indicated under section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g) [s. 722(g)(3)(G)].

H. Disputes: Eligibility, School Selection, Enrollment

1. When considering placement in a school other than the school of origin, the district will take into consideration student-centered factors to determine a school placement that is in the best interest of the child or youth [s. 722(g)(3)(B)(ii)]
2. When VCSD determines that a placement other than the school of origin is in the best interest of the child or youth, the district will provide the parent or guardian, or unaccompanied homeless youth with [s. 722 (g)(3)(B)(iii)];
 - a. A written explanation provided in a manner or form that is understandable to the parent or guardian or unaccompanied youth.
 - b. The written explanation will include information on their right to appeal the placement determination [s.722(g)(3)(B)(iii)].
3. During a school selection dispute, the child or youth will either remain enrolled in the student's school of origin or shall be immediately enrolled in the eligible school in which enrollment was requested, pending resolution of the dispute including all available appeals [s.722 (g)(3)(E)(i)];
 - a. A parent or guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth will be provided with a written explanation of the VCSD's decision regarding the school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian or student to appeal the decision through the School Board's enrollment dispute procedure and the Florida Department of Education's appeal process [s.722(g)(3)(e)(iii)]
 - b. The unaccompanied homeless youth, parent or guardian shall be referred to the VCSD's Homeless Education Liaison, who shall ensure the resolution process is carried out as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute [s. 722(g)(3)(e)(iii)].
4. In the case of an unaccompanied homeless youth, the VCSD's Homeless Education Liaison shall ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in the eligible school pending the resolution of the dispute.
5. To obtain a copy of the Florida Department of Education Dispute Resolution Process, contact FLMVP@fldoe.org.

I. Guardianship and Caregivers

1. All schools will immediately enroll a homeless student, even if there is no proof of legal guardianship at the time of initial enrollment. The legal guardian will be asked to present to the school all court order(s) showing his/her appointment as a guardian of the student, within a reasonable period.

2. If a homeless student is not accompanied by a parent or guardian at the time of enrollment, once he or she is enrolled in and attending a school, the person acting as a caregiver or the unaccompanied youth may be asked, but is not required, to complete the VCSD's school patron authorization form (VCSB 2002-114), within a reasonable period. This form is incorporated herein by reference as part of this policy and can be located on the VCSD's forms web site.

J. Transportation

The School Board shall ensure at the request of the parent or guardian, or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the VCSD's Homeless Education Liaison, transportation will be provided or arranged for a homeless student to and from the school of origin as follows [s.722(g)(1)(J)(iii):

1. If the homeless student continues to live in the area served by VCSD in which the school of origin is located, the student's transportation to and from the school of origin will be provided and/or arranged for by the VCSD. Transportation must be provided to or arranged for the student unless the student is residing in a location within the school zone's walking distance,
2. If the homeless student moves to an area served by another school district, though continuing his or her education at the school of origin within VCSD, VCSD and the school district in which the student resides must agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation to the school of origin [s. 722(g)(1)(J)(iii)(II)].
3. If the school districts cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs must be shared equally.
4. Alternate methods of transportation may be offered, e.g., VOTRAN, or the parent/guardian may be reimbursed for providing transportation.

K. Full Participation and Comparable Services

Each homeless student shall be provided with services comparable to other students in the selected school [s. 722(g)(4)] including:

1. Transportation services [s.722(g)(4)(A)];
2. Educational Services for which the student meets the eligibility criteria, including ESE and related services and programs for English language learners [s.722(g)(4)(B)];
3. Career and technical education programs [s.722(g)(4)(C)];
4. Gifted programs [s.722(g)(4)(D)] ;

5. School nutrition programs (all identified homeless students are entitled to free meals per McKinney-Vento) [s.722(g)(4)(E)];
6. Title I, Part A [s.722(g)(4)(B)];
7. Before- and After-School programs and
8. Preschool programs administered by VCSC [s.722(g)(1)(F)(i)].

Pending grant funding, the School Board may provide additional services, including but not limited to: Tutoring (at shelters, Title I and non-Title I schools), school supplies, school uniforms/shirts, mentoring, and summer programs.

A homeless student who becomes permanently housed during the academic year, may remain at their school of origin for the remainder of the academic year and continue to receive McKinney-Vento Act benefits [s.722(g)(3)(A)(i)(II)].

Children and youths experiencing homelessness, and who meet the relevant eligibility criteria will have access to all available academic and extracurricular activities for which they meet relevant eligibility criteria [s.722(g)(1)(F)(III)].

Unaccompanied homeless high school youths will receive counseling to prepare and improve their readiness for postsecondary education [s.722(g)(1)(K)].

Legal Authority:

Sections 1001.42; 1001.43; 1003.01(12), 1003.21, Florida Statutes

Laws Implemented:

Section 1003.01 (12), 1003.21(1)(f); Florida Statutes

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §11431-11436; Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Act, 20 U.S.C. §6311-6315

History:

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