

Supporting Children & Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Secondary Super Strategies | INTRODUCTION

Who are Homeless Children and Youth?

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines homeless children and youth as:

1. individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
2. includes -
 - a. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
 - b. 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;
 - c. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - d. migratory children (as defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in (a) through (c).

The Act also defines *unaccompanied youth* as “a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.”²



Homeless Children & Youth Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Every school district must, under the McKinney-Vento Act, have an appointed, local homeless education liaison. The liaison is responsible for ensuring eligible students are identified and offered the appropriate services and rights under the Act.
- School districts should consider developing policies that support the enrollment of unaccompanied youth, including who is able to provide consent and sign for issues and extracurricular activities.
- Review enrollment policies to ensure they provide proper accommodations for students experiencing homelessness.
- Provide all staff with professional development and training regarding specific barriers faced by students experiencing homelessness as well as supports and services available to them.
- Develop outreach materials targeted specifically to youth.
 - √ Be sure to include the contact information for the liaison on all outreach materials.
- Inform all students and their families about rights and services available under the McKinney-Vento Act.
 - √ Homeless status must be self-disclosed; therefore, it is important to inform students of available services in a nonjudgmental setting.
- Homeless liaisons and counselors should be familiar with local social service and housing programs and provide referrals for students and their family when needed.

DID YOU KNOW?

In Illinois for SY 2017-2018, 52,977 homeless children and youth were enrolled in the public school system. Of these students, 85.4 % were doubled up (e.g., living with another family) and 9.8% were living in shelters, transitional housing, or awaiting foster care placement.³



Homeless Children & Youth Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop relationships with staff from dropout prevention programs, housing programs, youth shelters, law enforcement, and community agencies to further support those experiencing homelessness.
- Offer counselor services several times throughout the semester.
 - ✓ track student progress
 - ✓ provide opportunities for career assessments
 - ✓ assist in goal planning and a tailored graduation plan
 - ✓ provide academic intervention
- Inform students about the different career options within career and technical education (CTE) and how they can get started during high school.
 - ✓ Partner with your local community college for CTE career exploration days.
 - ✓ Emphasize potential earnings and timelines for completion.
- Provide flexibility with school assignments, including deadlines and needed supplies.
- Allow students access to school shower and laundry facilities.
- Provide students with a secure place to store personal belongings.

DID YOU KNOW?

Of the 52,977 homeless children and youth enrolled in Illinois public schools, 11,643 were children with disabilities, 5,262 were unaccompanied youth, 4,341 were English Learners, and 59 were migratory children and youth.³



Homeless Children & Youth Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage students to become involved in student groups and extracurricular activities.
 - √ A student's homeless status should not prevent them from engaging in school activities. Involvement within the school can actually play a key role in dropout prevention.
- Make sure staff and students are aware of supports available to those wanting to further their education.
 - √ fee waivers for AP exams, college entrance exams, and college applications
 - √ various need- and merit- based scholarship opportunities
 - √ verification of independent status for unaccompanied youth on the FAFSA



SOURCES:

- ¹ Ingram, E. S., Bridgeland, J. M., Reed, B., & Atwell, M. (2017). Hidden in Plain Sight: Homeless Students in America's Public Schools (pp. 10-51, Rep.). Washington, D.C.: Hart Research Associates. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED572753)
- ² McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 US Code §§11431-11435 (2001).
- ³ National Center for Homeless Education. (2020). Retrieved May 27, 2020, from <http://profiles.nche.seiservices.com/StateProfile.aspx?StateID=18>.
- ⁴ National Center for Homeless Education. (2017). *Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Students Experiencing Homelessness*. Retrieved from <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/youth.pdf>.
- ⁵ Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act H.R.2353, 115th Cong., (2018) (enacted). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2353/text?r=2>.