Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program

Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Have the Right to a Free Appropriate Public Education
The Scale of Homelessness

• Up to two million people will experience homelessness this year
• Approximately half of these people will be children and youth
• Families are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population

Source: National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (1990)
How vulnerable are you to becoming homeless?

- FIRE
- FLOOD
- LOSS OF A JOB
- ACCIDENT
- ILLNESS
- EVICTION
- DOMESTIC ABUSE
Who is homeless?

An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who are:

- Sharing housing
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds
- Living in emergency or transitional housing
- Abandoned or Runaways
- Awaiting foster care
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in the circumstances described above
Possible Signs of Homelessness

Characteristics of homeless children:

- Attendance at several schools
- More than one family at the same address
- Attention-seeking behavior
- Hunger and hoarding of food
- Poor hygiene and grooming
- Sleeping in class
- Inappropriate dress for the weather
- Some common statements used by homeless students include:
  - “We've moved a lot.”
  - “We’re staying with relatives/friends while looking for a place.”
  - “We're going through a bad time now.”
McKinney-Vento Homeless Act

• 2001 Reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act originally enacted in 1987
• Requires educational access, attendance, and success for children and youth experiencing homelessness
• Provides states with funding to support statewide initiatives
• Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program is now statewide and covers all 499 school districts, 29 intermediate units, 175 public charter schools, and 12 full-time career-technical centers
McKinney-Vento Act: Enrollment

Requires public schools to immediately enroll students experiencing homelessness even when lacking:

• Proof of residency
• Guardianship
• Birth certificates, school records, or other documents
• Medical records, including immunization records
• Required dress code items, including uniforms
McKinney-Vento Act: Enrollment

- School placement in:
  - School of origin, if the parent wishes and it is feasible
  - School in area of current residency

- Educational rights posted in:
  - All public schools
  - The community

- Access for unaccompanied youth
- A dispute resolution process
McKinney-Vento Act: Success

- Comparable services
- Parental involvement
- Liaison collaboration between social service agencies and school districts
- Restriction of the segregation of homeless students
- Student achievement
- Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and Keystone Exam results
State and Local Policies

- Pennsylvania Department of Education
  - Basic Education Circular: Education For Homeless Youth
    42 U.S.C. §11431 et seq.
Addressing the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

School District
• Set aside Title I funds
• Reserve slots in Head Start and Even Start
• Ensure enrollment

Schools
• Enroll students in free breakfast and lunch programs
• Ensure access to appropriate instructional supports/resources, including those available through Title I set asides, gifted programs, and special education
• Conduct an educational assessment
• Provide homeless awareness training
• Alert teachers of a student's living situation (respecting privacy)
Addressing the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

Teachers

• Make the student feel welcome

• Assign a peer buddy to help the student get acquainted with the school and classroom

• Make contact with the parents

• Give the child ownership of school space (locker, etc.)
Working With Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- Reduce school entry stress
- Promote academic success through encouraging words and actions that recognize the gains made
- Use tutoring and after-school programs to provide academic support
- Increase access to services and activities
Working With Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- Encourage supportive relationships
- Establish consistent boundaries
- Have high expectations
- Recognize stressful environments outside of school, and provide accommodations for homework (for example, the child may not have the means to be able to make a collage or do a science project outside of school)
  - Provide needed supplies
  - Provide time and space in the school
  - Modify homework
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PDE Search: Homeless Children