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Unaccompanied Youth Toolkit for High School Counselors and McKinney-Vento Liaisons

**McKinney-Vento Identification Checklist for School Counselors**

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. §§11431-11435.) provides educational rights and services for children and youth who lack a “fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence”, such those who are:

- Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason (including running away from their home or being forced to leave home);
- Staying in shelters and transitional housing programs;
- Sleeping in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, campgrounds and public spaces; and
- Staying in hotels or motels due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations.

The Act requires school districts to identify all children and youth who are eligible for the Act’s services. School counselors are key members of the school district’s identification team.

**How Can School Counselors Help Identify McKinney-Vento Students?**

- Avoid using the word “homeless” with students, parents or colleagues, as it evokes stereotypes that do not match the reality of most young people who have lost their homes.
- Share information about the McKinney-Vento Act and homelessness with colleagues.
- Put up a poster about the McKinney-Vento Act in your office. Posters and other awareness materials are available at no cost at <http://nche.ed.gov/products.php>.
- Make it a part of your routine to talk to youth about the McKinney-Vento Act and services for youth who have left home. The students who meet the Act’s definition may surprise you.
- Exercise sensitivity when talking with youth and parents, who often are afraid to identify themselves as homeless due to fears of stigma or negative repercussions. When talking with students, advise them of your obligations as a mandated reporter at the outset of the conversation and do not make unnecessary reports.
- Keep hygiene supplies, bus passes, food or other important supplies on hand for students who need them. This can spark dialogue and trust.
- Ask students for help spreading the word. Youth can share information by word of mouth, web-based social networking, and posting outreach materials where their peers will see them.
- Reach out to unaccompanied youth by contacting street outreach teams, drop-in centers, and youth shelters, and by working to build trust with young people.

## Why is Identification Important?

1. ***We cannot serve children and youth if we don't know who they are.*** Homeless children and youth receive rights and services through the McKinney-Vento Act, and they have priority to receive services through: Title I, Part A; IDEA; Child Nutrition; and college access programs like Upward Bound, Talent Search and Gear-Up.
2. ***It can affect students' eligibility for college financial aid.*** McKinney-Vento students who are "unaccompanied" (not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian) are automatically eligible to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as independent students, meaning they do not have to provide a parental income information or signature. However, unaccompanied youth must be verified as such by a school district McKinney-Vento liaison or director of certain shelters or youth programs. In addition, school districts must ensure that counselors provide advice to homeless youth to help prepare and improve their readiness for college.<sup>i</sup> It is critical that high school counselors know which students are eligible when they complete the FAFSA and help those students receive proper verification from the liaison. More information is available at [Helping Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Access College Financial Aid](#).
3. ***It's the law.*** The McKinney-Vento Act requires school personnel to identify homeless children and youth in school through outreach and coordination with other entities and agencies.<sup>ii</sup>
4. ***It affects the funding available to your state and district.*** McKinney-Vento subgrants are awarded based in part on need, making districts with higher numbers of identified students much more competitive for subgrants. The number of homeless children served also may be considered in other grant awards, including TRIO and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers.

### McKinney-Vento Act Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program Definition of "Homeless"

- (A) 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 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;
  - (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 or 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).<sup>iii</sup>

*For more information, contact the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, [www.naehcy.org](http://www.naehcy.org), or the National Center for Homeless Education, <http://nche.ed.gov/>, 1-800-308-2145.*

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<sup>i</sup> 42 U.S.C. 11432(g)(1)(K)

<sup>ii</sup> 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)(i).

<sup>iii</sup> 42 U.S.C. §11434A(2).