

McKINNEY-VENTO IDENTIFICATION CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act) 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);
- In shelters and transitional housing programs;
- Staying in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, campgrounds and public spaces; or
- Living in motels.

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 are available at no cost at <http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/resources/posters.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.
- Keep hygiene supplies, bus passes or other important supplies on hand for students who need them. This can spark dialogue and trust.
- Ask students for help. Youth can share information by word of mouth, using 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.

For more information, contact the Texas Homeless Education Office, www.utdanacenter.org/theo.

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. 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 http://www.naehcy.org/higher_ed.html.
3. **It's the law.** The McKinney-Vento Act requires school personnel to identify homeless children and youth in school and to coordinate with other entities and agencies.ⁱ
4. **It affects the funding available to your state and district.** McKinney-Vento stimulus funds provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and Homeless Education Disaster grants allocations were based on the number of homeless students identified by states and school districts. The number of homeless children served also may be considered in other grant awards, including TRIO and 21st 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; 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 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).ⁱⁱ

ⁱ 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)(i).

ⁱⁱ 42 U.S.C. §11434A(2).

MV-FAFSA Round-Up Week

Sample Talking Points for School Counselors

Tips for discrete, positive conversations with youth experiencing homelessness

- Prior to MV-FAFSA Round-Up Week, contact your school district McKinney-Vento liaison. The liaison should have experience working with homeless youth and may have suggestions for how to talk with students. The liaison also may be able to provide you with hygiene supplies, food, clothing, backpacks, bus passes, school supplies, and/or contact information for local service providers who can assist youth. It will be helpful to have such supplies and information on hand to share with youth in need.
- If your school district McKinney-Vento liaison is not able to provide you with supplies to assist students, consider contacting the local food bank, faith-based organizations, businesses or civic clubs to request donations. Being able to help homeless youth meet their basic needs can help build trust and a strong relationship.
- Avoid using the word homeless when talking with students. It evokes images of stereotypes that do not match the reality of young people's situations. Youth tend to fear the stigma associated with homelessness and do not want their peers or teachers to know about their situation. They also may want to protect their parents, or may fear retaliation from parents if the school contacts them.
- Explain to students how their living situation might affect their ability to complete the FAFSA without a parental signature or financial information. It is important for students to understand why a school official wants to discuss such personal details as their relationship with their parents, economic stresses, and where and with whom they live.
- Inform students of your obligations as a mandated reporter at the outset of the conversation. Students need to know your obligations so they can determine what they want to reveal. Many students fear the involvement of law enforcement or child protective services, because they fear for their parents, for siblings who are still at home, or for their own safety and well-being. In fact, many students leave school and refuse to seek other services simply to avoid the involvement of law enforcement or child protective services. Counselors and educators should not assume that contacting child protective services is in the best interest of the youth, particularly because appropriate child welfare services and placements for older youth are sorely lacking in many places. It is important to work with the young person to find the most appropriate response to their situation, while respecting both the student's wishes and concerns and the counselor's obligations.
- Ensure students that, aside from the reporting requirements you just explained, your conversation will remain completely confidential. Let youth know that you may need to discuss their living situation with the McKinney-Vento liaison to obtain additional services for the student and to obtain the verification necessary for the FAFSA.

- Ask the students to talk about their living situation and how they got there. How long have they been separated from their parents or guardians? Under what circumstances did they become separated? What is their current living situation like? With whom do they live? How long have they been staying there? Do they know how long they will stay?
- If your conversation leads you to believe a student meets the definition of “homeless”, contact the school district McKinney-Vento liaison to discuss the situation. The liaison can help ensure the student is eligible, provide additional services, and write the verification letter for financial aid.
- Talk to students about college, college admissions and financial aid. Many homeless youth assume they will not be accepted to college or will not be able to pay for it. Encourage youth to apply to appropriate higher education, including community colleges and four-year colleges, and help them search for scholarships. Consult the *McKinney-Vento FAFSA Tip Sheet for School Counselors* for more ideas about financial aid for homeless youth (available as a Word document at <http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/downloads/FAFSA/FAFSA%20tip%20sheet.doc>, and as a pdf at <http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/downloads/FAFSA/FAFSA%20tip%20sheet.pdf>.)
- Ask the youth if he or she needs anything. Offer the supplies you have on hand; homeless students often need hygiene supplies, food, clothing, backpacks, bus passes, and school supplies. Ask youth if they would like information about services available in the local community, and allow them to use your phone to make contacts. Ask youth if access to school resources would help them; for example, students who are homeless often can benefit from access to school showers, laundry facilities, libraries and other study areas, and storage areas. It is important for students to be able to access these resources at inconspicuous times, to avoid stigma.
- Make sure the youth knows he or she can come back to talk about difficulties with academics, college applications, financial aid, the emotional and physical stresses of his or her living situation, or other concerns.

MV-FAFSA Round-Up Week

Sample Letter for Seniors

Dear Seniors,

Are you living apart from your parents or guardians? Are you living with a friend or relative for a temporary amount of time? Are you moving around a lot? Are you camping or crashing in different places some nights?

If so, **MV-FAFSA Round-Up Week** could be a big deal for you. It's college application and financial aid season, but if you're separated from your parents, you may wonder how you'll pay for college and apply for financial aid on your own. We may have a solution for you.

If you or someone you know is separated from parents and needs help applying for financial aid for college, stop by the counselor's office (*INSERT counselor's name, room number, etc.*) any time (*OR INSERT office hours*) next week to get more information.

Your conversation will be confidential.

Being separated from your parents does not have to lock you out of college! Come get some more information about your options. You might be surprised by what's available.

And spread the word—if you have a friend who might fit this situation, tell them to check with their counselor.

Thanks,

School Counselor

MV-FAFSA Round-Up Week
Sample Script Outline for Teachers

Dear Teachers,

We would greatly appreciate it if you could take a moment when you distribute the MV-FAFSA Round-Up Week letter to your students to focus your students' attention on the letter. Since this is a new and important initiative in our school, we want to make sure students understand what it involves.

When you distribute the letter, you may want to emphasize these points with your students:

1. The event might help them get financial aid for college.
2. The event is for students who are not living with a parent or guardian.
3. The event is for students whose living situations are not permanent. For example, students who are staying with relatives, a friend's parents, a mentor, camping out, "couch-surfing", or other living situations.
4. Please do not use the word "homeless"! It is stigmatizing and confusing.
5. Let students know their conversations with the school counselor will be confidential, and the counselor has more information about college applications, financial aid, and other resources.
6. Please encourage students to consider visiting the counselor for more information. It could make a big difference in their ability to pay for college.

Thank you so much for your support. More information about MV-FAFSA Round-Up Week is on the back of this letter.

Sincerely,

School Administrator

Who are unaccompanied homeless youth?

Unaccompanied youth are young people experiencing homelessness and not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian. Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act) defines homeless youth to include any child or youth who lacks 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);
- In shelters and transitional housing programs;
- Staying in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, campgrounds and public spaces; or
- Living in motels.

Each year, between 1.5 and 1.6 million youth run away from home or are forced out of their homes by their parents. Studies show that unaccompanied homeless youth tend to have histories of being abused physically and/or sexually at home and severe family dysfunction.

What does the FAFSA say about homeless students?

Unaccompanied homeless youth can complete the FAFSA as independent students, meaning they are not required to provide a parental signature or parental financial information. The student’s status as an unaccompanied homeless youth must be verified by a McKinney-Vento homeless liaison, director of a HUD (Housing and Urban Development) shelter, or director of a RHYA (Runaway and Homeless Youth Act) program. On the 2011-2012 FAFSA, Questions 55-57 ask about homelessness and must be answered appropriately for homeless students.

What is MV-FAFSA Round-Up Week?

High school counselors are critical members of our team to ensure that all eligible students complete the FAFSA as unaccompanied homeless youth. MV-FAFSA Round-Up Week is an opportunity for counselors to reach out to homeless youth in their schools.

1. At the outset of the Week, school counselors will provide all seniors with information about the definition of unaccompanied homeless youth and how it affects the FAFSA.
2. Then, seniors who feel they may meet the definition can choose to approach their school counselor to discuss their living situation, determine if they qualify as unaccompanied homeless youth, and request assistance and support with the FAFSA and other needs.
3. Finally, school counselors will assist youth with the FAFSA and connect them to additional resources and assistance.

PLACE ON AGENCY LETTERHEAD

**Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Verification
For the Purposes of Federal Financial Aid**

Re: Name of Student

DOB: x/x/xxxx

SSN: xxx-xx-xxxx

Current Mailing Address of Student (if none, please list name, phone number, and mailing address of current contact): _____

I am providing this letter of verification as a (check one):

- A McKinney-Vento School District Liaison
- A director or designee of a HUD-funded shelter: _____
- A director or designee of a RHYA-funded shelter: _____
- A financial aid administrator: _____

As per the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (Public Law 110-84), I am authorized to verify this student's living situation. No further verification by the Financial Aid Administrator is necessary. Should you have additional questions or need more information about this student, please contact me at the number listed above.

This letter is to confirm that NAME OF STUDENT was:

Check one:

an unaccompanied homeless youth after July 1, 2010

This means that, after July 1, 2010, NAME OF STUDENT was living in a homeless situation, as defined by Section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Act, and was not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness after July 1, 2010.

This means that, after July 1, 2010, NAME OF STUDENT was not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, provides for his/her own living expenses entirely on his/her own, and is at risk of losing his/her housing.

Authorized Signature	Date
Print Name	Telephone Number
Title	
Agency	

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

Who are Unaccompanied Homeless Youth? Unaccompanied homeless youth are young people who lack safe, stable housing and who are not in the care of a parent or guardian. They may have run away from home or been forced to leave by their parents. Unaccompanied youth live in a variety of temporary situations, including shelters, the homes of friends or relatives, cars, campgrounds, public parks, abandoned buildings, motels, and bus or train stations.

Between 1.6 and 1.7 million youth run away from their homes each year.ⁱ Generally, youth leave home due to severe dysfunction in their families, including circumstances that put their safety and well-being at risk. Unfortunately, physical and sexual abuse in the home is common; studies of unaccompanied youth have found that 20 to 50% were sexually abused in their homes, while 40 to 60% were physically abused.ⁱⁱ Unaccompanied youth do not receive financial support from their parents and do not have access to parental information.

Who are McKinney-Vento School District Liaisons? Under subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, every school district is required to designate a liaison for students experiencing homelessness. Homeless liaisons have a number of legal responsibilities under the Act, including identifying youth who meet the definition of homeless and are unaccompanied. The education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act is overseen by the U.S. Department of Education. For more information, see:
<http://www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/legislation.html>

What are HUD-funded Shelters? The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administers funding for homeless shelters and services under Title IV of the McKinney-Vento Act. These funds are distributed to communities through a competitive grant process. For more information, see: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/programs/index.cfm>

What are RHYA-funded Shelters? The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services administers the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs. These programs provide funding for Basic Centers, Transitional Living Programs, and Street Outreach Programs that serve runaway and other unaccompanied homeless youth. For more information, see:
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/youthdivision/index.htm#sub1>

ⁱ Hammer, H., Finkelhor, D., & Sedlak, A. (2002). "Runaway / Thrownaway Children: National Estimates and Characteristics." *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children*. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. See also Greene, J. (1995). "Youth with Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Experiences: Prevalence, Drug Use, and Other At-Risk Behaviors." *Research Triangle Institute*. Washington DC: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services; National Runaway Switchboard, <http://www.1800runaway.org/>.

ⁱⁱ Robertson, M. & Toro, P. (1999). "Homeless Youth: Research, Intervention, and Policy." *Practical Lessons: The 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Washington DC: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development. Retrieved July 18, 2007 from <http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/progsys/homeless/symposium/3-Youth.htm>. See also MacLean, M.G., Embry, L.E. & Cauce, A.M. (1999). "Homeless Adolescents' Paths to Separation from Family: Comparison of Family Characteristics, Psychological Adjustment, and Victimization." *Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(2), 179-187.

This page
intentionally left
blank.