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Georgia School for the Deaf

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## **GEORGIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF SCHOOL LEVEL HOMELESS CHILDREN & YOUTH PLAN**

### Administrative Procedures

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et. seq.)

#### **POLICY STATEMENT**

The Georgia School for the Deaf (GSD) shall provide an educational environment that treats homeless students with dignity and respect. Homeless students are provided with equal access to educational programs provided to other students, have an opportunity to meet state and district academic achievement standards to which all students are held and are not segregated or discriminated against on the basis of their homeless status. This commitment to the educational rights of homeless children and youth applies to all services, programs, and activities provided or made available.

#### **(2) DEFINITION OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Under McKinney-Vento (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. ss11431-11436, sec. 25), homeless children and youth are defined as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence." The term includes children and youth who:

- (a) are living with other persons due to the loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason, including children and youth living doubled-up with family or friends;
- (b) are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative, adequate accommodations;
- (c) are living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- (d) are abandoned in hospitals;
- (e) are temporarily housed while awaiting foster care placement;
- (f) have a primary night-time residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;



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- (g) are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- (h) are migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

**Unaccompanied youth** means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is experiencing homelessness as defined above. The more general term *youth* also includes unaccompanied youth.

**Enroll and enrollment** means attending school and participating fully in school activities.

**Immediate** means without delay.

**Parent** means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

**School of origin** means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

**Liaison** is the staff person designated by the LEA as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act.

### **(3) RIGHTS OF HOMELESS STUDENTS**

- a) Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or district liaison/designee. If the youth is enrolled by an adult other than the parent or guardian, the adult will sign the Caretaker Authorization Form.
- b) The terms "enroll" and "enrollment" are defined to mean receiving a school assignment, attending school and participating fully in school activities. The school selected for enrollment must immediately (within one school day) enroll any homeless child or youth. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment.
- c) Once permanent housing is found, the family has a choice to stay in the school of origin until the end of the school year or attend the public school for which they are eligible where they have found housing. Out of region



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and cross-district, transportation services will not be available once the family is in stable housing.

- d) books and school supplies.
- e) participate in all school-related activities, i.e. tutorial, instructional support, Community Learning Centers, etc.
- f) obtain information regarding how to get fee waivers, free uniforms, and referrals to low-cost or free medical services.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **(1) ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND ASSIGNMENT**

- A. Information regarding the Homeless Children and Youth, McKinney-Vento Assistance Act, including services available to homeless students and how to obtain these services, will be posted throughout the school and Administration offices. Information will be placed in the Family/Student Handbook, and on the GSD School Website.
- B. In collaboration with school personnel, the staff at Georgia School for the Deaf will identify homeless children and youth.
- C. The superintendent shall identify a full time staff member to serve as the Homeless Contact. The name of the school Homeless Liaison Coordinator shall be given to the Homeless Education Program (HEP) staff at Georgia Department of Education annually. The Homeless Liaison Coordinator will coordinate their schools' compliance with this policy along with the System Federal Grants Coordinator and will receive training annually. The role of the Homeless Liaison Coordinator is to:
  - a. Ensure students who are eligible for Homeless Children and Youth services are identified by school personnel.
  - b. Ensure that the student has an equal opportunity to succeed in school by receiving educational services for which they are eligible.
  - c. Receive other support services as needed.



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- d. Refer to School Social Worker (if the Homeless Liaison Coordinator is not the school social worker).
- e. Determine if the child or youth qualifies as homeless. All students identified as homeless must have a Homeless Education Program (HEP) Enrollment Form on file in the GSD's Homeless Liaison Coordinator's office at Georgia School for the Deaf. Student Services staff at Georgia School for the Deaf will be responsible for entering the information into the student data base.
- D. Homeless status continues until the student is in stable housing. If the student continues to be homeless the following school year, he/she must reapply for the Homeless Education Program. This applies to the receipt of services. Data entry into Infinite Campus is completed one time for the school year.
- E. The Homeless Liaison Coordinator and System Federal Grants Coordinator will ensure that the following primary reporting groups have professional development opportunities on a regular basis to improve identification and services:
  - 1. Administrators
  - 2. Student Services staff
  - 3. School Social Worker
  - 4. School Staff
  - 5. School Counselors
  - 6. School Psychologists
  - 7. School Nurse
  - 8. School Secretaries
  - 9. Parent Mentor
  - 10. Transition Team
- F. In addition to training regarding how to properly identify a student with a homeless status, these groups will be provided with access to the Homeless Education Program (HEP) form that will be located in the Georgia School for the Deaf Staff P drive, the student services office, the school office, the



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office of the school social worker, the office of the homeless liaison/family engagement coordinator, and the nurses' office.

- G. The above primary reporting groups will be trained on confidentiality of information.
- H. A referral to the Homeless Liaison Coordinator does not and will not automatically place the student into classification as Homeless; this information should be shared only for identification purposes and is confidential information.
- I. The system liaison will conduct training and sensitivity/awareness activities each year for school staff. The training/activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with state and federal guidelines, and increase sensitivity to children and youth experiencing homelessness through professional development.
- J. Other professional development topics may include:
  - a. students' rights under the McKinney-Vento Act,
  - b. indicators of homelessness,
  - c. sensitivity in identifying families and youth as homeless,
  - d. how to enroll students in the Homeless Education Program,
  - e. services to homeless families and unaccompanied youth,
  - f. compliance with GSD policies and procedures regarding homeless students.

## **(2) IDENTIFICATION**

- 1) The enrollment/registration form will be updated to include identifiers that will alert the Students Services Staff if a student may be eligible for Homeless Children and Youth Services. As families complete the Enrollment/Registration form process at the beginning of the year and throughout the year, any identifier that has been indicated on the Enrollment/Registration form should be noted to prompt next steps.



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Identifiers will be Questions such as Place of Residence and/or Person(s) living in the home/residence with the student.

- 2) Once identifier of possible homeless status has been noted either on the Enrollment/Registration form or by other method, the Student Services Staff will complete a Homeless Education Program referral form and provide it to the Homeless Liaison Coordinator to investigate possible homeless status of new student.
- 3) The Homeless Liaison Coordinator will meet with the family and/or student to determine status of eligibility. If student can be classified as eligible for homeless children and youth services, the Homeless Liaison Coordinator will provide a copy of the referral form indicating "McKinney-Vento Eligible" to the Student Services Staff (Operations Analysis Technician) who shall enter the student into the PowerSchool Database as Homeless for reporting purposes.
- 4) Other Methods of Identification:
  - 1) Returned Mail
  - 2) Reporting from Staff
  - 3) Reporting from others

Professional Development opportunities for the Primary reporting groups noted in section "J" will provide information on how to access the Homeless Education Program referral form and who to provide it to.

Steps 2-3 will be followed from IDENTIFICATION (4) above.

### **(3) SCHOOL SERVICES**

School personnel must inform parents/caregivers of all educational and related opportunities available to homeless children and provide parents/caregivers with meaningful opportunities to participate in the homeless child's education.

Services include but are not limited to:



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- (a) free breakfast and lunch,
- (b) school supplies and books,
- (c) preschool programs,
- (d) transportation services (see details below),
- (e) educational services for which the child or youth meets eligibility criteria such as programs for English Language Learners, special education services, or programs for gifted and talented students,
- (f) programs for "At Risk" students,
- (g) vocational and technical education programs,
- (h) Title I services,
- (i) waiver of school fees,
- (j) tutorial programs, before- and after-school programs,
- (l) school uniforms (when applicable),
- (m) Referrals to community based agencies and services.

#### **(4) ENROLLMENT**

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students experiencing homelessness may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth experiencing homelessness. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:

- **Proof of residency;**
- **Transcripts/school records** (The enrolling school must contact the student's previous school to obtain school records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the student's age and information gathered from the student, parent, and previous schools or teacher.);
- **Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records** (If necessary, the school must refer students to the liaison, or designee, to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunization and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from previous



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schools or state registries, and school-based or community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed.);

- Proof of guardianship;
- **Birth certificate;**
- Any other document requirements;
- Unpaid school fees;
- Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes;
- Any factor related to the student's living situation.

**Unaccompanied youth** must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or the LEA liaison.

#### **(5) TRANSPORTATION SERVICES**

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent's request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth experiencing homelessness. Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school as defined above, including during pending disputes. The liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will only be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation.

Requests shall be processed and transportation arranged without delay by the Student Services Staff. The McKinney Vento Form and transportation request will be sent to the transportation department and Local School Systems (LSS). The paperwork will be sent to Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) if the child is in foster care. If the student experiencing homelessness is attending Georgia School for the Deaf (GSD), it is the responsibility of Student Services Staff





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and the designated Homeless Liaison to submit transportation request to the child's new district transportation department with the necessary paperwork. If the GSD student experiencing homelessness has moved to a different county than their school of origin, this district (state schools) will follow the district transportation policy to determine who must coordinate re-routing of transportation. It is this district's policy that lack of transportation shall not result in a student experiencing homelessness missing school. If such a situation arises, this district will arrange transportation and if needed immediately bring the matter to the attention of the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth experiencing homelessness shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to non homeless youths.

## **(6) DISPUTES**

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth experiencing homelessness shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the rights of a student experiencing homelessness to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or youth to the liaison. The liaison shall ensure the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The liaison shall keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools



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are repeatedly delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

The parent, unaccompanied youth, or school district may appeal the liaison's decision as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

#### **(7) ACCRUING AND RECOVERING CREDITS**

The strategies that will be considered to support students experiencing homelessness in accruing and recovering credits may include:

- Working to keep students in their schools of origin so they can avoid the challenges associated with school change;
- Providing support to enable students to attend school consistently and progress academically;
- Complementing regular classes with independent study programs, including learning labs, online learning, and computerized models;
- Connecting with after school networks to enhance a student's ability to make work up, either through increasing a student's understanding of content or through a partnership that allows after-school time to count toward classroom credit;
- Using Multi-tiered Systems of Support, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or Response to Intervention teams to identify if students are struggling due to issues related to mobility and homelessness or if there are other needs that must be addressed in order for the student to demonstrate progress academically; and
- Working with family courts and LEA personnel to create or improve diversion programs or alternative education programs

#### **(8) APPROVAL PROCESS**

STEP 1: HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH COMMITTEE- THE COMMITTEE WILL ESTABLISH THE GSD SCHOOL POLICY FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

STEP 2: POLICY SUBMISSION TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM FOR REVIEW AND APPROVAL

STEP 3: POLICY SUBMISSION TO SCHOOL COUNCIL FOR REVIEW AND APPROVAL.

ANY AMENDMENTS AND CORRECTIONS TO THE POLICY MUST FOLLOW STEPS 2 & 3.

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