The University of Texas at Tyler
UNIVERSITY ACADEMY

McKinney-Vento Program

Policies and Procedures Manual

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Program Overview

Goal
UT Tyler University Academy's McKinney-Vento program provides services to help students experiencing homelessness have equitable access to education and opportunities for success.

Student Eligibility Criteria and Definitions

The McKinney-Vento Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA, defines the following terms:

1. ***Homeless child or homeless children*** means children or youths who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The term includes—
    - Children 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; or are abandoned in hospitals;
    - Children 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;
    - Children who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
    - Migratory children living in circumstances described above. "Migratory child" means a child who made a qualifying move in the preceding 36 months (a) as a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher; or (b) with, or to join, a parent or spouse who is a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher.
2. ***Enroll and enrollment*** include attending classes and participating fully in school activities.
3. ***Unaccompanied youth*** includes a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.
4. ***School of origin*** is defined as the school that the child attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child was last enrolled, including a preschool. When a child completes the final grade level served by the school of origin, the term "school of origin" shall include the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools, as applicable.

Identification

Identification is the first step to connecting students in homeless situations with the information, resources, and support necessary to ensure their equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as is provided to other children and youth.

The Liaison ensures that children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies.

In order to ensure students in homeless situations are identified, the liaison, in collaboration with school and district personnel, should raise awareness throughout district schools and the community of the definition of homeless, the rights provided to eligible students under the McKinney-Vento Act, and the role of the local liaison in working with others to identify homeless students. Additionally, the Liaison and/or staff will conduct community assessments that include data on homelessness in the area; levels of poverty among families; trends in foreclosures, evictions, and availability of affordable housing; and student mobility. Staff will work with appropriate district and school authorities to ensure that local policies and procedures comply with the McKinney-Vento Act and provide targeted outreach through information sharing and gathering of activities, such as including a housing questionnaire as part of the district's enrollment packet to screen for possible McKinney-Vento eligibility and posting notices of the rights of McKinney-Vento students in the community in places where families and youth in homeless situations are likely to see them.

Public Notice of Educational Rights

The McKinney-Vento law requires that public notice about the rights of homeless children and youth is disseminated where families and unaccompanied youth are likely to receive services. Schools, family and youth shelters, public libraries, and food banks are all examples of locations where a notice of rights must be posted by the liaison in a manner and form that is understandable. While not an exhaustive list, other places and organizations with which liaisons may want to work to post a statement of rights include:

- Youth organizations
- Transitional living program sites
- Day or community centers
- Community action agencies
- Welfare and housing offices

- Homeless coalitions
- Free or low-cost health clinics
- Low-cost motels
- Storage facilities
- Check cashing businesses
- Laundromats

Immediate Enrollment and Admissions

A school selected, based on a homeless child's or youth's best interest, must immediately enroll such child or youth even if he or she has missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness. The McKinney-Vento Act ensures the immediate enrollment of children and youth experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youth, even if the child or youth lack records (academic, medical, proof of residency, immunizations, health records, birth certificates, or other documentation), including the enrollment in early childhood programs. Additionally, outstanding fees and fines cannot be a barrier to immediate enrollment (including full participation). Immediate enrollment includes attending classes and fully participating in school activities. All schools are required to follow these enrollment guidelines when registering a homeless child or youth in school. Students identified as unaccompanied youth will be enrolled without parent or guardian.

Per the UTTUA board policy "Admission of Homeless Students," UTTUA shall immediately enroll a homeless child, depending on available seats, even if the child:

1. Is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic record, records of immunization and other required health records, proof of residency, or other document; or
2. Has missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness.

UT Tyler University Academy may require the parent or guardian of a homeless child to submit contact information.

School Selection

In determining the best interest of the student for the purpose of continuing the student's education in the school of origin, UT Tyler University Academy shall presume that keeping the student in his or her school of origin is in the student's best interest, except when doing so is contrary to the request of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. UT Tyler University Academy shall also consider the best interests of the student with regard to the impact of moving schools on the student's achievement, education, health, and safety, including such relevant factors as:

1. Continuity of instruction;
2. Age and grade placement of the student;
3. Distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education or special needs;
4. Personal safety of the student;
5. The student's eligibility and need for any specialized services and supports, such as Section 504, special education and related services, or bilingual or English as a second language services;
6. Length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location, if applicable;
7. Likely area of the family's or youth's future housing;
8. Time remaining in the school year; and
9. School placement of siblings.

Services that UT Tyler University Academy is required to provide shall not be considered in determining the student's school of attendance.

Dispute Resolution Process

If a dispute arises over eligibility, or school selection or enrollment in a school:

1. The child shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals;
2. The parent or guardian of the child or an unaccompanied youth shall be provided with a written explanation of any decisions related to school selection or enrollment made by UT Tyler University Academy, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth to appeal such decisions.
3. The parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth shall be referred to the homeless liaison, who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute; and

4. In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the liaison shall ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in the school in which the youth seeks enrollment pending resolution of such dispute.

Comparable Services

UT Tyler University Academy shall provide a homeless child with services comparable to those offered to other students in the school in which the child is enrolled.

Professional Development

UTTUA must provide professional development opportunities and resources to support key staff members such as directors, registrars, counselors, designated liaisons, nutrition coordinators, and transportation specialists on local processes and procedures for facilitating successful school transitions for students who are homeless or in substitute care.

The purpose of professional development training is to increase awareness, support enrollment in identification, and increase staff capacity to respond to the unique educational needs of homeless children and unaccompanied youth.

McKinney-Vento professional development training is provided to campus personnel at every campus including:

1. Administration: Campus Directors and Assistant Directors, and Student Services staff
2. PEIMS Registrar/ Attendance Clerks
3. Counselors
4. Nurses
5. Teachers

The McKinney-Vento staff provide training annually. Throughout the school year, the McKinney-Vento staff communicates relevant updates.

The training is delivered in-person and includes information about Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program Basics, McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness, eligibility criteria, school responsibilities, enrollment and admissions and dispute resolution process, and eligibility for free school meals. Staff complete a survey at the beginning of the training to track attendance. At the end of the training, staff

complete an evaluation to provide feedback on the quality of the training. The training is about 1.5 hours.

McKinney-Vento staff will additionally participate in ongoing professional development training opportunities to ensure they offer the best services to their students and families, as well as implement best practices.

Coordination of Resources

The McKinney-Vento Act places a strong emphasis on collaboration as a means of meeting the needs of homeless students. The liaison and district are required to serve homeless children and youth by coordinating with school personnel and community service agencies. Following is a summary of issues and activities that the McKinney-Vento Act requires the district address through coordination and collaboration:

- coordinating services with local social service agencies and other agencies or entities providing services to homeless children, youths, and their families;
- transfer of school records;
- coordinating with housing agencies to minimize educational disruption for homeless children and youths;
- identifying homeless students;
- ensuring that homeless children and youths have access to and are in reasonable proximity to available education and related support services; and
- raising the awareness of school personnel and service providers about the effects of short-term stays in a shelter and other challenges associated with homelessness.

Collaboration entails a wide range of interactions among agencies and programs that can vary by the amount of interface involved, the time invested, the resources leveraged, and outcome desired. The McKinney-Vento staff should be strategic in determining the best type of interaction for the outcomes they wish to achieve. Some collaborations will simply involve creating awareness of the needs of homeless children and youth as a foundation for coordination while others, usually among agencies that have established partnerships, will involve more complex activities that integrate resources and conduct joint initiatives. Following are several types of activities to consider as you reach out to other programs and agencies, listed from simple to complex:

1. Networking (conducting awareness meetings);
2. Cooperating (understanding and respecting one another’s purpose and boundaries);

3. Coordinating (identifying needs and overlap and determining how each agency can best utilize its resources for the most comprehensive services); and
4. Collaborating (developing a unified approach to addressing needs, in which each agency agrees to contribute resources to a common goal).

To meet the needs of homeless students, McKinney-Vento staff must have a diverse network of collaborative partners, as students experiencing homelessness have many needs beyond what schools have the ability to address on their own. Assisting families through referrals for additional services, such as housing, medical, dental, and social services, can increase stability and ensure students are ready to learn when they reach the classroom. The following are examples of community partners that could be extremely helpful to liaisons in meeting the needs of homeless students:

- community food pantries, including:
    - Anderson County- Crisis Center of Cherokee and Anderson Counties, Palestine Community Food Pantry
    - Gregg County- Caring and Sharing, Helping Hands of Kilgore, Longview Dream Center
    - Smith County- PATH and East Texas Food Bank Foundation, Inc.,
- local health professionals who will volunteer services to help meet dental, medical, and mental health needs;
- shelter providers including Hi-way 80 Rescue Mission, Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity of Smith County, and other shelter providers;
- faith-based organizations, including St. Vincent de Paul, New Hope Missionary Baptist, Newgate Mission, and St. Paul Children's Services;
- local businesses and business associations involved in community service; and
- postsecondary education institutions.

Transition Assistance for Highly Mobile Students

UTTUA will develop systems to ease the transition of a student who is homeless or in substitute care during the first two weeks of enrollment at a new school. These systems shall include the following:

1. Welcome packets containing applicable information regarding enrollment in club activities, tutoring opportunities, the student code of conduct, available student supports, and contact information for key school staff members such as directors, registrars, counselors, nutrition coordinator, and designated liaisons;
2. Introductions for new students that maintain student privacy and confidentiality to the school environment and school processes by district faculty, campus-based student leaders, or ambassadors;

3. Mechanisms to ensure that a process is in place for all students who qualify to receive nutrition benefits upon enrollment, as all students who are homeless or in substitute care are eligible for United States Department of Agriculture Child Nutrition Programs. The process must expedite communication with the district nutrition coordinator to ensure that eligible students are not charged in error or experience delays in receiving these benefits.

UTTUA will use multiple systems to facilitate records transfer and expedite coordination and communication between the sending and receiving schools. In cases where records from the student's previous school are missing or cannot be located, UTTUA will use the Texas Student Data System (TSDS) Unique ID application to identify where the student was previously enrolled. 19 TAC 89.1605

UTTUA may conduct an in-person or phone conference upon enrollment, after a student who is homeless or in substitute care enrolls at a new school. The convening of the enrollment conference shall not delay or impede the enrollment of the student.

The student's attendance in the conference should be addressed on a case-by-case basis. The enrollment conference may be used in conjunction with an existing meeting that is designed for similar purposes for newly enrolled students.

The enrollment conference shall address the student's credit recovery, credit completion, attendance plans and trauma-informed interventions, interests and strengths, discipline or behavior concerns, previous successes, college readiness, and social and emotional supports as well as district policies relating to transfers and withdrawals and communication preferences with parents or guardians.

UTTUA will receive, review, and assess student records for the initial course and educational program placement for a student who is homeless or in substitute care upon enrollment at a new school.

To the extent possible, UTTUA shall ensure the continuation of a student's course and educational programs, if appropriate, from the previous district by placing the student in comparable courses and programs for which they are eligible. The district shall promote placement in academically challenging and career preparation courses.

If an 11th or 12th grade student experiencing homelessness or foster care changes school districts and is ineligible to graduate from the new district, the prior district must award a diploma if the student meets the graduation requirements of that district. This applies to students who change school districts within Texas, as well as those who

move out of state. When 11th or 12th grade students experiencing homelessness or foster care change move out of state and are ineligible to graduate from high school in the new state, the district they attended in Texas must award a diploma if the student meets the graduation requirements of that district.

Discipline and Suspension of a Student Identified as Homeless

A student's status as homeless or in the conservatorship of DFPS must be considered as a factor in any decision concerning suspension or expulsion, regardless of whether the decision is characterized as mandatory or discretionary.

UTTUA may not place a student who is homeless in out-of-school suspension unless the student engages in the following conduct while on school property or while attending a school-sponsored or school-related activity on or off of school property:

1. Conduct that contains the elements of an offense related to weapons under Penal Code 46.02 or 46.05;
2. Conduct that contains the elements of a violent offense under Penal Code 22.01, 22.011, 22.02, or 22.021; or
3. Selling, giving, or delivering to another person or possessing, using, or being under the influence of any amount of:
    a. Marijuana or a controlled substance, as defined by Health and Safety Code Chapter 481 or by 21 USC 801;
    b. A dangerous drug, as defined by Health and Safety Code Chapter 483; or
    c. An alcoholic beverage, as defined by Alcoholic Beverage Code 1.04.