

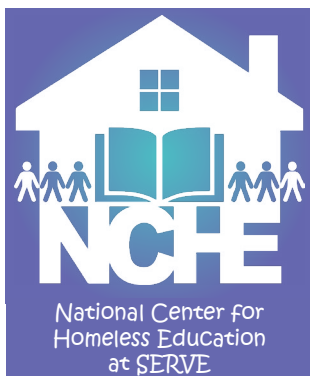


## Best Practices in Homeless Education Brief Series

# Maximizing Credit Accrual and High School Completion for Homeless Students

This NCHE brief will:

- provide information pertaining to the academic support and success for homeless students;
- address barriers that homeless students may face in obtaining academic credit; and
- include interventions and supports available under Title I.



**National Center for Homeless Education**  
Supporting the Education of Children  
and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

<https://nche.ed.gov>

### Who is homeless?

#### **Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.)**

The term “homeless children and youths”—

A. means 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; or are abandoned in hospitals;<sup>1</sup>

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).

(McKinney-Vento Act, section 725(2)).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Awaiting foster care placement provisions expire in December of 2016 or 2017, depending on a state's status as covered.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, citations to the McKinney-Vento Act are to the McKinney-Vento Act as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

## INTRODUCTION

Nearly half of students who drop out do so as a result of adverse conditions in the school, while 37% of dropouts are pulled out of school by challenges like financial worries, family needs, or employment. Only 14% of dropouts did so for reasons that can be described as failing out of school due to a lack of interest or academic progress (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). In light of this information, students experiencing homelessness are at particularly high risk for quitting school before graduation. Fortunately, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) are designed to improve those odds by providing educational opportunities and supports for students.

## PROTECTIVE MCKINNEY-VENTO REQUIREMENTS

The McKinney-Vento Act contains several provisions that can reduce dropout rates by helping students remain in school and stay on track. First, the law requires that homeless students who move be immediately enrolled at either the school of origin<sup>1</sup> or the local attendance area school, based on the student's best interest (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(3)(B)). An LEA is required to presume that keeping a homeless student in the school of origin is in his or her best interest, unless remaining in the school of origin goes against the wishes of parents, guardians, or unaccompanied youth (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(3)(B)(i)). In addition to preventing students from dropping out of school, the enrollment provisions in the McKinney-Vento Act are critical for homeless students as high mobility and seat-time policies often cause students to lose valuable classroom time necessary to earn credits.

In instances in which the benefit of staying in the school of origin is less clear, the liaison or their appointee should discuss with students factors that directly impact their chances for academic success. For example, the impact of mobility on a student's ability to accrue credits for graduation should be considered. On the other hand, in some instances, the availability of a work-based learning program or alternative education program that would allow students to earn income or recover credits may be just cause to transfer a student to the local attendance area school, if the programs are not available at the school

<sup>1</sup> The school of origin is the school a child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled, including a preschool.

of origin. Opportunities for flexible or alternative schedules that allow students to work, and bridge programs or other dual credit programs, should also be considered to ensure students are enrolled in the school in which they are most likely to successfully earn credits for graduation.

Dual credit programs are those that allow students to earn credit for a high school diploma or certificate, while simultaneously earning credit for a postsecondary credential. Policies and costs vary widely from state to state, but examples include advanced placement courses, early college programs, or other concurrent enrollment programs. For more information, as well as resources to determine the options within your state, visit [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cclo/dual.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cclo/dual.html).

Explaining the rationale behind the pros and cons of enrollment in a particular school to a student is not only required by law (McKinney-Vento section 722(g)(3)(B)(iii)), but is critical to keeping students and their families engaged in the educational process, eliciting more information from students that may need incorporated in their graduation plans, and reducing enrollment disputes. In and of itself, a solid dispute resolution process should also serve to reduce the number of dropouts and reduce out-of-class time. The McKinney-Vento Act requires that students be immediately enrolled in the school at which enrollment is sought for the duration of the dispute (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(3)(E)(ii)). This way, students remain in the learning environment while the dispute is being resolved, making it easier for them to advance academically and participate in services like special education, or career and technical education.

## IDENTIFY BARRIERS AND REVISE POLICY

Homeless students experience a variety of barriers in school that push them out and prevent them from receiving credits. State educational agencies (SEAs) must include information in their State plans for homeless education about procedures employed within the State to ensure students are able to receive credit for full or partial coursework completed when students attended previous schools (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(F)(ii)). Both SEAs and local educational agencies (LEAs) must develop, review, and revise policies to remove barriers to

the identification, enrollment and retention of homeless children and youths, including barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences (McKinney-Vento Act section 722(g)(1)(I)).

### McKinney-Vento Subgrant Funds

Funds available to LEAs through the McKinney-Vento Act may be used to attract, engage, and retain homeless students in school (McKinney-Vento Act section 723(d)(7)).

It is important to note that the McKinney-Vento Act defines enrollment as attending classes and participating fully in school activities (McKinney-Vento Act section 725(a)). When students attend school without the ability to earn credits, their full participation is effectively denied. Without the possibility of earning credits, the motivation and payoff for attending school is nullified.

## SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS UNDER TITLE I

Several changes to Title I, Part A of the ESEA, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), can directly benefit homeless students with credit accrual and dropout prevention. First, funds for schoolwide programs, which target schools with poverty levels of 40% or more, may be used to implement schoolwide credit recovery programs.<sup>2</sup>

### LEA TITLE I PLANS

LEA plans under Title I of the ESEA must be designed in coordination with other laws, including the McKinney-Vento Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Act. Requirements for LEA Title I plans provide homeless liaisons with the opportunity to engage in conversations with district leadership, Title I directors, families, unaccompanied homeless youths, and other stakeholders about the challenges faced by homeless students in all areas of education, but in relation to barriers to credit accrual in particular. LEA Title I plans must include:

- information as to how the LEA will identify and monitor the progress of those students who are most at

<sup>2</sup> Section 1114(a)(1)(B) of under the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA, permits schools to implement schoolwide programs in schools with less than 40% poverty if the school receives a waiver from the SEA to do so.

risk of failure;

- the services the LEA will provide to homeless students through the use of a set-aside of Part A funds;
- strategies the LEA will use to effectively engage parents and families;
- strategies the LEA will use to facilitate effective transitions from middle school to high school, and from high school to postsecondary education, including, if applicable, the use of early college high schools, dual opportunities or concurrent enrollment, or career counseling that identifies students' interests and skills;
- strategies the LEA will use to reduce the overuse of discipline practices that remove students from the classroom; and
- how the LEA will support, if determined appropriate, programs that coordinate and integrate academic and career and technical education content through coordinated instructional strategies, that may incorporate experiential learning opportunities, and work-based learning opportunities.

Both the McKinney-Vento Act and Title I of ESEA require coordination with other programs to improve the educational outcomes of students. Two additional federal programs that focus on preparing students for higher education by providing extra supports through middle and high school are Gear Up and Upward Bound. To learn more, visit:

- [www2.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html)
- [www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html)

## DATA REQUIREMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

New provisions in the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA, require States to include information about homeless students on their State report cards, including the use of an adjusted cohort graduation rate. State report cards must also include information on the performance of homeless students on statewide assessments for every achievement level. Finally, the requirements stipulate that State report cards must address the performance of homeless students on other academic outcomes, such as chronic absenteeism, included by the State in the State's accountability system.

The new data requirements provide liaisons and State



Coordinators with new opportunities to identify and reduce factors that prevent homeless students from graduating. For example, behavior issues and ineffective discipline push students out of the classroom, and the need to work can also take students out of the classroom. Liaisons, State Coordinators, and Title I Program Administrators can use Title I plan requirements, previously available data, and newly emerging data to structure activities that ensure homeless students stay on track for graduation.

## REFERENCES

Doll, J., Eslami, Z., & Walters, L. (2013) Understanding why students drop out of high school, according to their own reports: Are they pushed or pulled, or do they fall out? A comparative analysis of seven nationally representative studies. *SAGE Open*. 3(4). doi: 10.1177/2158244013503834



This brief was developed by:

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Every state is required to have a State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and every school district is required to have a local homeless education liaison. These individuals will assist you with the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at [https://nche.ed.gov/states/state\\_resources.php](https://nche.ed.gov/states/state_resources.php).

For more information on the McKinney-Vento Act and resources for implementation, call the NCHE Helpline at 800-308-2145 or e-mail [homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org).

Local Contact Information:

