

EDUCATING STUDENTS RENDERED HOMELESS

BY HURRICANE KATRINA:

SCHOOL SYSTEM RESPONSIBILITIES AND STUDENT RIGHTS

Hurricane Katrina has left thousands of children homeless. Many children may be coming to Kansas to live with relatives or others. The federal McKinney Vento Act protects the rights of these children and requires that they be immediately enrolled in the school system where they are temporarily residing.

Under McKinney Vento, homeless children and youths are defined as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The definition includes children who:

- Are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or similar reasons
- Are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- Are living in emergency or transitional shelters
- Are abandoned in hospitals or
- Are awaiting foster care placement
- Have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for sleeping accommodation for human beings
- Are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in the circumstances described above.

Children coming to Kansas from areas that were devastated by the hurricane and flooding will clearly meet this definition.

Key provisions of McKinney Vento Act require the following

- Schools must immediately enroll homeless children, **even without records or documentation normally required for enrollment.**
[Click here for forms requesting information from the Louisiana State Department {xls file}]
- The school's homeless liaison must immediately contact the school last attended for records, but **understand many records may be permanently destroyed or unavailable**

- for a considerable period of time.** Work with parents and/or the student in determining appropriate placement.
- Refer parents to district liaison if child needs **medical records or immunizations.** The district's homeless liaison must immediately assist in obtaining immunizations or immunization or medical records for those students who do not have them. **Students must be enrolled in school in the interim.**
 - In an attempt to aid families affected by Hurricane Katrina, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment is extending a 60-day provisional enrollment to students transferring to Kansas public and private schools and child-care facilities from areas affected by Hurricane Katrina (Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama). A special form should be used by schools and child-care facilities to track these children. Kansas will honor exemptions from immunization requirements from these 3 states.
 - **Records of homeless children** must be maintained so they are available in a timely fashion when the child enters a new school or district
 - The school must provide homeless children with **access to all programs and services available to other students** including, including transportation, Title I, IDEA, LEP, vocational and technical programs, gifted and talented programs and school nutrition programs.
 - The school should **coordinate services with other service agencies.**

Under the McKinney Vento Act, every school district is required to have a **designated liaison for homeless children and youth** to help ensure that homeless children enroll, and have a full opportunity to succeed, in the schools of the district. Your liaison should be working with these children to get them enrolled immediately pursuant to the requirements of the Act. The homeless liaison should:

- Ensure homeless children are **identified** by school personnel and through coordination of activities with other agencies.
- Ensure homeless children **enroll and have an opportunity to succeed** in school.
- Ensure homeless families and children **receive services** for which they are eligible.
 - ♦ Title I services—automatically eligible
 - ♦ Free or reduced lunch—See below
 - ♦ Special Education
 - ♦ Talented and Gifted
 - ♦ Transportation

- ◆ After-school and summer programs
 - ◆ Head start and other early childhood programs
- Ensure **parents are informed of educational opportunities** available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in their child's education.
- Ensure **public notice** of the education rights of homeless children is disseminated where they receive services such as schools, family shelters and soup kitchens.
- Facilitate **enrollment** and ensure enrollment disputes are mediated. Assist unaccompanied youth with placement and enrollment decisions.
- Ensure parents or unaccompanied youths are **fully informed of all rights and services**.
 - ◆ Post rights in schools and in other areas where homeless families and youth may receive services.
- **Inform school personnel and other service providers** of the duties of the liaison and collaborate with state coordinators, community service providers and others in providing services to homeless children
- **Assist children and youth who do not have immunizations of medical records** to obtain the necessary immunizations or records.

Other Educational Legislation: Homeless Provisions

Head Start—includes homeless pre-schoolers as a targeted population; must remove enrollment barriers

IDEA—homeless children must be included in Child Find efforts; consider need for expedited evaluation

Title I—A child who is homeless and attending any school is eligible for Title I services; coordination with McKinney-Vento must be included in the state's Title I plan.

School Lunch Programs—April 4, 2002 memorandum for the U.S. Department of Agriculture facilitates the inclusion of homeless children. The memorandum states:

To expedite the delivery of nutritional benefits, school officials may accept documentation that the children are homeless from the local educational liaison or directors of homeless shelters. Documentation to substantiate free

meal eligibility must consist of the child's name or a list of names, effective date(s), and the signature of the local educational liaison or the director of the homeless shelter. This documentation is acceptable in lieu of a free and reduced price meal application.

To implement these expedited procedures, school officials must work closely with the educational liaison and directors of homeless shelters to ensure that children are provided free meal benefits as promptly as possible, as well as to ensure that the school food service is promptly advised when children leave the school or are no longer considered homeless. In the later case, school officials must provide the household with an application for free and reduced price meals.

The memorandum indicates that a family temporarily residing in another household is eligible without considering the household size and income of the host family. However, if the host family applies for free and reduced lunches for its own children, the homeless family may be included as household members if the host family provides financial support to the homeless family, such as shelter, utilities, clothing or food. Any income received by the homeless family must be included in the reported income of the household.