

# **Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program**

**Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness  
Have the Right to a Free Appropriate Public Education**



## **The Scale of Homelessness**

- Up to two million people will experience homelessness this year
- Approximately half of these people will be children and youth
- Families are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population

Source: National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (1990)

*Out of sight–Out of mind? A report on anti-homeless laws, litigations, and alternatives in 50 United States.* Washington, DC: Kelly Cunningham and Kristen Brown



## How vulnerable are you to becoming homeless?

- FIRE
- FLOOD
- LOSS OF A JOB
- ACCIDENT
- ILLNESS
- EVICTION
- DOMESTIC ABUSE



## Who is homeless?

An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who are:

- Sharing housing
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds
- Living in emergency or transitional housing
- Abandoned or Runaways
- Awaiting foster care
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in the circumstances described above



## Possible Signs of Homelessness

Characteristics of homeless children:

- Attendance at several schools
- More than one family at the same address
- Attention-seeking behavior
- Hunger and hoarding of food
- Poor hygiene and grooming
- Sleeping in class
- Inappropriate dress for the weather
- Some common statements used by homeless students include:
  - “We've moved a lot.”
  - “We're staying with relatives/friends while looking for a place.”
  - “We're going through a bad time now.”



## McKinney-Vento Homeless Act

- 2001 Reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act originally enacted in 1987
- Requires educational access, attendance, and success for children and youth experiencing homelessness
- Provides states with funding to support statewide initiatives
- Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program is now statewide and covers all 499 school districts, 29 intermediate units, 175 public charter schools, and 12 full-time career-technical centers



## **McKinney-Vento Act: Enrollment**

Requires public schools to immediately enroll students experiencing homelessness even when lacking:

- Proof of residency
- Guardianship
- Birth certificates, school records, or other documents
- Medical records, including immunization records
- Required dress code items, including uniforms



## **McKinney-Vento Act: Enrollment**

- School placement in:
  - School of origin, if the parent wishes and it is feasible
  - School in area of current residency
- Educational rights posted in:
  - All public schools
  - The community
- Access for unaccompanied youth
- A dispute resolution process





## **McKinney-Vento Act: Success**

- Comparable services
- Parental involvement
- Liaison collaboration between social service agencies and school districts
- Restriction of the segregation of homeless students
- Student achievement
- Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and Keystone Exam results



## State and Local Policies

- Pennsylvania Department of Education
  - Basic Education Circular: Education For Homeless Youth  
42 U.S.C. §11431 et seq.



## Addressing the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

### School District

- Set aside Title I funds
- Reserve slots in Head Start and Even Start
- Ensure enrollment

### Schools

- Enroll students in free breakfast and lunch programs
- Ensure access to appropriate instructional supports/resources, including those available through Title I set asides, gifted programs, and special education
- Conduct an educational assessment
- Provide homeless awareness training
- Alert teachers of a student's living situation (respecting privacy)



## Addressing the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

### Teachers

- Make the student feel welcome
- Assign a peer buddy to help the student get acquainted with the school and classroom
- Make contact with the parents
- Give the child ownership of school space (locker, etc.)



## **Working With Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

- Reduce school entry stress
- Promote academic success through encouraging words and actions that recognize the gains made
- Use tutoring and after-school programs to provide academic support
- Increase access to services and activities



## **Working With Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

- Encourage supportive relationships
- Establish consistent boundaries
- Have high expectations
- Recognize stressful environments outside of school, and provide accommodations for homework (for example, the child may not have the means to be able to make a collage or do a science project outside of school)
  - Provide needed supplies
  - Provide time and space in the school
  - Modify homework



# **Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program**

Contact: Sheldon Winnick

State Coordinator

717-783-6466

[swinnick@pa.gov](mailto:swinnick@pa.gov)

<http://www.education.state.pa.us>

**PDE Search: Homeless Children**