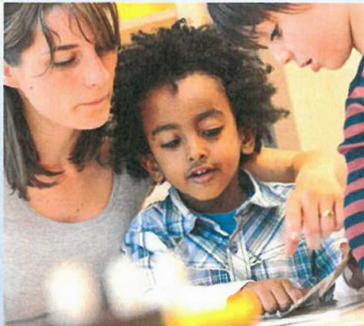


# Educating Missouri's Homeless Children



The McKinney-Vento Act guarantees homeless children and youth an education equal to what they would receive if they were not homeless.

## Who is Homeless?

According to the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless children and youth include individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. This includes the following situations:

- Sharing the housing of others (known as doubling-up) due to loss of housing or economic hardship
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters
- Abandoned in hospitals
- Living in a nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation
- Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings

The McKinney-Vento Act also recognizes unaccompanied youth who are homeless. According to the act, an unaccompanied youth is a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian.

## Which School Can a Homeless-Child Attend?

There are two choices for a student in a homeless situation - the school of origin and the school of residency. The school of origin is the school the child attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child was last enrolled. The school of residency is the school serving the area where the child or youth is currently physically dwelling. When determining the school of best interest, a homeless child or youth should remain in the school of origin (to the extent feasible) unless doing so is contrary to the wishes of the parent or guardian or to the wishes of the unaccompanied youth.



## Federal Programs

P.O. Box 480 • Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480  
<https://dese.mo.gov/quality-schools/federal-programs/homeless-children-youth>



## Enrollment

The McKinney-Vento Act requires the immediate enrollment of homeless children and youth. These children must be allowed to attend school even if they are unable to produce previous academic records, immunization and medical records, proofs of residency, birth certificates, or other documentation that is usually required.

## Transportation

School districts must provide transportation for homeless children and youth to the school of best interest. Districts must also provide transportation during the resolution of any pending disputes. While disputes over enrollment, school selection or eligibility are being resolved, students must be transported to the school of choice of the parent or the unaccompanied youth.

## The Homeless Liaison

A school district's homeless liaison plays a vital role in ensuring that children and youth experiencing homelessness enroll and succeed in school. The McKinney-Vento Act requires that every school district appoint a homeless liaison who serves as the link between homeless families and school staff, district personnel, shelter workers, and social-service providers.

## Call Missouri's Homeless Liaison

(573) 522-8763

### GSA Fyler Homeless Liaison

Sellers, Kacey - School Counselor  
314-261-4361 ext: 126

### GSA Fyler Foster Care Point of Contact

Schick, Brian - Assistant Principal  
314-261-4361 ext:106

## **Program for Homeless Students Policy**

The Governing Board of GSA adopts the following policy effective on the date that the policy is adopted by the Board.

The School recognizes that homelessness alone should not be sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment. Therefore, the School, in accordance with state and federal law (Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act) and the Missouri State Plan for Homeless Children and Youth, will give special attention to ensure that homeless children in the School have access to free, appropriate public education.

### **Definitions:**

A “homeless child” or “homeless youth” is one who:

A. lacks 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; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- 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;
- iv. is a migratory child or youth who qualifies as homeless because the child or youth is living in circumstances described in subdivisions (i) to (iii) above.

The first category may include some individuals who have moved in with others. Consideration of each individual case, along with the permanency of the situation, will be needed in order to identify those who are homeless.

The terms “enroll” and “enrollment” include attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

The “school of origin” is the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

### **Enrollment and Placement:**

Homeless children and youth frequently move, and maintaining a stable school environment is critical to their success in school. To ensure this stability, LEAs must make school placement determinations on the basis of the “best interest” of the homeless child or youth. Using this standard, the School (LEA) must –

- (a) Continue the child's or youth's education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness when a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year; or for the remainder of the academic year if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year; or
- (b) Enroll the child or youth in any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.

In determining what is a child or youth's best interest, the School (LEA) must, to the extent feasible, keep a homeless child or youth in the school of origin, unless doing so is contrary to the wishes of the child or youth's parent or guardian. If the School (LEA) wishes to send a homeless child or youth to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian, the School (LEA) must provide a written explanation of its decision to the parent or guardian, together with a statement regarding the right to appeal the placement decision.

Enrollment requirements which may constitute a barrier to the education of a homeless child or youth may be waived if allowed by law. The School (LEA) may, however, require contact information.

If the School (LEA) is unable to determine the grade level of the student because of missing or incomplete records, the School (LEA) shall administer tests or utilize other reasonable means to determine the appropriate grade level for the child/youth.

#### **Transportation:**

Transportation must be provided, at the request of the parent or guardian (or in the case of the unaccompanied youth, the homeless coordinator) to and from the school of origin.

- If the homeless child or youth continues to live in the area served by the School (LEA) in which the school of origin is located, that the School (LEA) must provide or arrange for the child's or youth's transportation to or from the school of origin.
- If the homeless child or youth continues his or her education in the school of origin but begins living in an area served by another LEA, the LEA of origin and the LEA in which the homeless child or youth is living must agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing the child with transportation to and from the school of origin. If the LEAs cannot agree upon a method, the responsibility and costs for transportation are to be shared equally.
- The transportation requirement applies even if the LEA does not provide transportation to non-homeless students.
- In general, LEAs may not use funds under Title I, Part A or Title V, Part A to transport homeless students to or from their school of origin.

**Services:**

Each homeless child or youth shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the School (LEA) including, but not limited to, transportation services, educational services for which the child meets the eligibility criteria, such as educational programs for disadvantaged, disabled, and gifted and talented students, vocational programs, and school meals programs; before-and-after-school care programs; and programs for students with limited English proficiency.

Homeless students will not be segregated in a separate school or in a separate program within a school based on the students' status as homeless.

In the event that it is in the best interest of the homeless child or youth to attend the school of origin, it shall be the responsibility of this LEA to provide for the transportation of the student. This may be achieved through the transportation services of this LEA, the school of origin, or another outside agency.

**Records:**

Once the School (LEA) officials have determined that an enrolling student is homeless, the School's homeless coordinator must assist the student in obtaining his/her education, immunization, medical, and other records. According to McKinney-Vento, the student must be enrolled in the interim.

*Immunization:*

If the homeless coordinator is unable to obtain prior immunization records within thirty (30) days of enrolling and the student is still eligible for services under the homeless education program; the student must begin the immunization series and demonstrate that satisfactory progress has been accomplished within (90) days. If the homeless student maintains that he/she is exempted from receiving immunizations, then after thirty (30) days the student must provide documentation in accordance with the exemption requirements provided for in § 167.181.3, RSMo.

Any records ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, and evaluation for special services or programs of each homeless child or youth shall be maintained so that appropriate services may be given the student, so that necessary referrals can be made, and so that records may be transferred in a timely fashion when homeless children or youth enters a new LEA. Copies of records shall be made available upon request to students or parents in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

**Coordinator:**

The Board designates the school counselors as the District's homeless coordinator to ensure compliance with federal and state law. The homeless coordinator will "ensure that homeless children and youth enroll and succeed in the schools of that agency; and homeless families, children and youth receive educational services for which they are eligible, and referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services." The homeless coordinator will also ensure that disputes regarding the placement or education of homeless children or youth are resolved in a timely fashion.

The School (LEA) shall inform school personnel, service providers and advocates working with

homeless families of the duties of the School (LEA) homeless coordinator.

### **Resolving Grievances:**

Level I - A complaint regarding the placement or education of a homeless child or youth shall first be presented orally and informally to the LEA's homeless coordinator. If the complaint is not promptly resolved, the complainant may present a formal written complaint (grievance) to the homeless coordinator. The written charge must include the following information: date of filing, description of alleged grievances, the name of the person or persons involved and a recap of the action taken during the informal charge state. Within five (5) working days after receiving the complaint, the coordinator shall state a decision in writing to the complainant, with supporting evidence and reasons. In addition, the coordinator will inform the Superintendent or his/her designee of the formal complaint and the disposition.

Level II - Within five (5) working days after receiving the decision at Level I, the complainant may appeal the decision to the Superintendent or his/her designee by filing a written appeal package. This package shall consist of the complainants' grievance and the decisions rendered at Level I. The Superintendent or his/her designee will arrange for a personal conference with the complainant at their earliest mutual convenience. Within five (5) working days after receiving the complaint, the Superintendent or his/her designee shall state a decision in writing to the complainant, with supporting evidence and reasons.

Level III - If resolution is not reached in Level II, a similar written appeals package shall be directed through the Superintendent or his/her designee to the Board requesting a hearing before the Board at the next regularly scheduled or specially called meeting. The hearing before the Board may be conducted in closed session upon the request of either the Board or the complainant. Within thirty (30) working days after receiving the appeals package, the Board shall state its decision and reply in writing to the parties involved. For the School (LEA) purposes, the decision of the Board is final.

Level IV - If the complainant is dissatisfied with the action taken by the board of directors of the School (LEA), a written notice stating the reasons for the dissatisfaction may be filed with the state director of special federal instructional programs. The state director will initiate an investigation, determine the facts relating to the complaint, and issue notice of his or her findings within thirty (30) days to the School (LEA) and the complainant. If the findings support the action taken by the School (LEA), such action will be confirmed. If the findings support the allegations of the complainant, the LEA will be directed to take corrective action. An appeal of this decision can be made within ten (10) days to the Deputy Commissioner of Education. Within thirty (30) days after receiving an appeal, the Deputy Commissioner of Education will render a final administrative decision and notify the complainant and all other interested parties in writing.

## **Foster Care Support Policy**

The Governing Board of GSA adopts the following policy effective on the date that the policy is adopted by the Board.

The purpose of this policy is to provide foster care students with educational stability and remove barriers to, and provide opportunities for, academic excellence for foster care students. In order to achieve this purpose, GSA (the School) will work collaboratively with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Children's Division (CD) of the Missouri Department of Social Services.

### **Definitions:**

**Foster Care:** Twenty-four-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents/guardians and for whom the CD has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, placement in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, childcare institutions and pre-adoptive homes, regardless of whether the home, shelter, facility or institution is licensed or receives payments from the state.

**Foster Care Student:** Any K-12 student who is residing in a foster care setting in this state or who is awaiting foster care

**School of Origin:** The school in which the student was enrolled at the time of placement in foster care. If the student's placement changes, the school of origin is the school in which the student was enrolled at the time of the change.

### **Liaison:**

The Board designates the Assistant Principals of School Culture as the District's foster care liaison. The liaison will provide assistance regarding all aspects of the enrollment, placement, transfer, and withdrawal of children in foster care and serve as the point of contact for DESE and the CD. The liaison will also work with DESE and the CD to implement the district's complaint resolution process.

### **Enrollment and Placement of Foster Care Students:**

Students in a foster care placement located within the boundaries of the district will be educated in the school of origin unless it is not in the best interest of the student to do so. A student placed in the school of origin will remain in the school of origin for the duration of the time he or she is in foster care. If it is not in the best interest of the student to stay in the school of origin, the Gateway Science Academy will immediately enroll the student, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, and will contact the school of origin to obtain relevant records.

Foster care students who attend school in the district because attending the school of origin was not in their best interest will be initially placed in the same courses and programs the students were in while attending the previous district to the extent this district offers such courses and programs. If necessary, the district will waive course or program prerequisites or other preconditions for

placement in courses or programs offered at the district. After placement, the School may perform additional evaluations to ensure that the student has been placed appropriately and may change the student's placement after consultation with the student's foster parent.

### **Best-Interest Determination (BID):**

#### **Placement**

Within three days of the student enrolling, the liaison will organize a meeting or consultation to determine which placement is in the best interest of the student. The meeting or consultation will include a representative of the CD; the foster parents; the parents/guardians and student, if appropriate; and any other person requested by the student, the foster parents or the CD who has a special relationship with the student. These individuals will be considered the best interest determination (BID) team and will determine the best placement for the student. If the BID team cannot reach a consensus as to the best placement, the representative from the CD will make the final determination.

#### **Dispute Resolution**

If the parent/guardian, foster parent, student or educational decision maker disputes that the placement assigned by the BID team or CD is in the student's best interest, he or she may contact the liaison in an effort to resolve the dispute. If the liaison is not able to resolve the dispute, the parent/guardian, foster parent, student or educational decision maker may request a conference with the superintendent or designee. The superintendent or designee will meet with the parent/guardian, foster parent, student or educational decision maker and the pertinent members of the BID team in an effort to resolve the dispute.

If the superintendent or designee is unable to resolve the dispute, the parent/guardian or educational decision maker may appeal the placement to:

State Foster Care Coordinator

P.O. Box 480

Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480

(573) 751-4192

### Transportation:

If the BID team determines that the school of origin is the best placement for a foster care student, the student will be transported to the school of origin in accordance with the transportation plan developed in collaboration with the CD. Transportation will be provided in a cost-effective manner and in accordance with law.

### Transportation Disputes

Disputes over transportation will be handled in the same manner as disputes over placement.

### Records:

The foster care liaison will provide foster parents and other legal guardians access to student records. In accordance with law, the district will allow a child placement agency access to a foster care student's records for the purposes of assisting the school transfer or placement of a student and fulfilling educational case management responsibilities required by the juvenile officer or by law.

The liaison will ensure that student records are properly transferred between the School and any other district from or to which foster students transfer. When a request involves a foster care student, the liaison will:

1. Respond within three business days to a request for records by another district, and
2. Request records from other districts within two days of enrolling a student.

### Attendance:

If a student in foster care is absent from school due to a decision by a court or child-placing agency to change the student's placement or due to a verified court appearance or related court-ordered activity, the grades and credit of the student will be calculated as of the date the student left school, and the district will not lower the student's grade as a result of absence under these circumstances.

### Programs and Activities:

The School will encourage foster care students to participate in extracurricular activities and assist them in joining extracurricular activities. Locally imposed application deadlines for participation in extracurricular activities will be waived for foster care students who are otherwise eligible to participate in the activities. Foster care students are automatically eligible for participation in the School's free nutrition program.

### Graduation:

In order to facilitate timely graduation of foster care students, the School will:

1. Waive specific courses required for graduation if similar course work has been satisfactorily completed in another school. If such course work is not waived, the district will provide reasonable justification for the denial.
2. Accept the results of exit exams, end-of-course exams, nationally norm-referenced tests or alternative testing from another school to satisfy district testing requirements related to graduation.
3. Accept for credit full or partial course work completed at the previous school attended in accordance with district policy.

If a foster care student who enrolls in the School at the beginning of or during his or her senior year cannot meet the School's graduation requirements by the end of the senior year, even after all alternatives have been considered, the liaison will contact the student's previous district to determine if the student is eligible to receive a diploma from the previous school.

The School will award a diploma to foster care students who transfer out of the district at the beginning of or during the senior year if, considering all courses, tests and attendance at the school to which the student transferred, the student has met the School's graduation requirements.