

The board of education is committed to providing a free appropriate education for all students enrolled in the school system. In accordance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and the North Carolina State Plan for Educating Homeless Children, the board will make reasonable efforts to identify homeless children and youth of school age within the district, encourage their enrollment, and eliminate barriers to their receiving an education which may exist in district policies or practices. Based on individual need, homeless students will be provided services available to all students, such as preschool, free or reduced school meals, services for English language learners, special education, vocational/technical education, gifted and talented services, and before- and after-school care.

The provisions of this policy will supersede any and all conflicting provisions in board policies that address the areas discussed in this policy.

A. DEFINITION OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

Homeless students are children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Unaccompanied youth includes a youth who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. Homeless children and youth include those students who are as follows:

1. sharing the house of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
2. living in motels, hotels, transient trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
3. living in emergency or transitional shelters;
4. awaiting foster care placement;
5. living in a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings;
6. living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations or similar settings; or
7. living in a migratory situation that qualifies as homeless because the child lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

B. HOMELESS LIAISON

The superintendent or the superintendent's designee will appoint a school employee to serve as the homeless liaison. Homeless student issues shall be under the authority of the Safe Schools Committee of Cherokee County Schools. The homeless liaison shall be the chair of the Safe Schools Committee. The homeless liaison's duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. ensuring that school personnel identify homeless children and youth;

2. ensuring school/pre-school enrollment and opportunities for academic success for homeless children and youth;
3. informing parents of available transportation services and helping to coordinate such services;
4. ensuring that public notice of the educational rights of homeless students is disseminated in locations where these students and families receive other support services;
5. informing parents of educational and related opportunities available to their children and ensuring that parents have a meaningful opportunity to participate in their child's education;
6. helping to mediate enrollment disputes;
7. working with school personnel, the student, parents or guardians and/or other agencies to obtain critical enrollment records, including immunization and medical records, in a timely manner; and
8. working with the superintendent or his/her designee to identify board policies or procedures that might serve as a barrier to enrollment of homeless students, including those related to immunization records, medical records, uniforms or dress codes, school fees, and school admission.

C. ACCESS TO STUDENT'S RECORDS

Homeless students transferring into the school district may provide cumulative and other records directly to the school district. The school district will not require that such records be forwarded from another school district before the student may enroll. However, school personnel will immediately request the official records from the previous school.

School personnel will immediately enroll homeless students, even if they do not have proof of residency, school and immunization records, birth certificates, or other documents, and even if they are not accompanied by an adult. The homeless liaison will assist the students/parent in securing appropriate records or otherwise meeting enrollment requirements.

D. ENROLLMENT

A homeless student (or his/her parent or guardian) may request to attend his/her school of origin or any public school that other students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend. The school of origin is defined as the school the student attended before losing permanent housing or the school in which the student was last enrolled. To the extent feasible, the student will remain enrolled in the school of origin for the entire time the student is homeless or until the end of any academic year in which the student moves into permanent housing.

The superintendent, or the superintendent's designee, in consultation with the homeless liaison, will make the decision regarding which school a homeless student will attend. The decision will be based upon the student's best interests. In making the enrollment decision, the superintendent or designee may consider the following factors :

- the age of the student;
- the distance of the commute and its impact on the student's education;
- personal safety issues;
- the student's need for special instruction (such as special education and related services);
- the length of any anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location; and
- the time remaining in the school year.

If the superintendent or designee assigns a student to a school other than the school of origin or one requested by the parent/guardian, he/she must provide a written explanation of the decision to the parent/guardian, along with a statement regarding the right to appeal the placement decision.

E. ENROLLMENT DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The school district will implement an enrollment dispute resolution process that is consistent with the process required by the State Board of Education in the North Carolina Administrative Code section 6H.0012.

1. Initiation of the Dispute and Stay Put

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school for a homeless student, the following will occur:

- a. The homeless student shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, shall receive all services for which he/she is eligible and shall be allowed to participate fully in school activities, pending resolution of the dispute.
- b. The parent/guardian of the student shall be provided a written explanation of the school's decision regarding the enrollment, including the right to appeal the decision. Such information must be provided in a language that the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth can understand.

- c. The student or parent/guardian shall be referred to the district's homeless liaison who will carry out the appeal process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute.
 2. Homeless Liaison Review
 - a. Any parent/guardian or student initiating an enrollment dispute (hereinafter "complainant") is encouraged to attempt to resolve the dispute informally through discussion with the homeless liaison. If the dispute cannot be resolved informally, the complainant may present a formal complaint orally or in writing to the homeless liaison.
 - b. The complaint should include the date of the filing, a description of the disputed action, the name of the person(s) involved and a description of the relief requested. The complainant may provide supporting written or oral documentation and may be accompanied by an advocate or attorney.
 - c. Within five school days after receiving the complaint, the homeless liaison will provide a written decision, including the reasons for the decision, to the complainant and the superintendent.
 3. Appeal to the Superintendent of the Liaison's Decision
 - a. Within five school days of receiving the liaison's decision, the complainant may appeal the decision to the superintendent in writing. The homeless liaison shall ensure that the superintendent receives copies of the written complaint and the response.
 - b. The superintendent or his/her designee shall schedule a conference with the complainant to discuss the complaint.
 - c. Within five school days of receiving the appeal, the superintendent or designee shall provide a written decision to the complainant including a statement of the reasons for the decision.
 4. Appeal to the Board of the Superintendent's Decision

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the superintendent's decision, he/she may file a written appeal with the board of education. The board will provide a written decision within 30 days of receiving the appeal. The board's decision will constitute the final decision of school district. The written statement of the board's opinion will include the name and contact

of the state coordinator for homeless education and will describe the appeal rights to the state coordinator.

5. Appeal to the State Coordinator of the Board's Decision

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the action taken by the board of education, he/she may file an appeal with the state coordinator for homeless education, who will issue a final decision on the complaint.

F. TRANSPORTATION

The board of education will provide homeless students with transportation services comparable to those of other students. In addition, at the parent/guardian's request (or the request of the homeless liaison for unaccompanied youth), the board will provide transportation services to/from the school of origin. The superintendent or designee and the homeless liaison will coordinate homeless students' transportation needs, based on the child's best interest and feasibility. In situations where a student attends school in this district but his/her temporary housing is in another district (or vice versa), the superintendent or designee will work with the other district to share the cost and/or responsibility for transportation. If an agreement cannot be reached between the districts, the cost of such transportation will be divided evenly.

If a homeless student becomes permanently housed and chooses to remain in his/her school of origin, the board will provide transportation to the student for the remainder of the school year, except in extraordinary circumstances as recommended by the superintendent.

G. TITLE I

Homeless students are automatically eligible for Title I services. The homeless liaison and the Title I director will collaborate to identify the needs of homeless students.

Legal References: McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 11431, *et seq.*; U.S. Department of Education Non-Regulatory Guidance on Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (2004); G.S. 115C-366(a2); 16 N.C.A.C. 6H.0112; State Board of Education Policy EEO-I-000

Cross References: Immunization Requirements for School Admission (policy 4110), Domicile or Residence Requirements (policy 4120), Discretionary Admission (policy 4130), School Assignment (policy 4150)

Adopted: May 10, 2007

Amended: March 19, 2009