

Class Placement

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized as Title X, Part C, of the No Child Left Behind Act, requires schools to enroll homeless students immediately, even if they do not have the documents normally required for enrollment such as school records, medical records, proof of residency, or others.

Unfortunately for many homeless students on the move, incomplete records often result in classroom/curriculum placements that promote frustration and result in failure. This document offers teachers, school counselors, and other school personnel tools and information to assist in making sound educational decisions for immediate placement of homeless children and youth in appropriate classroom settings.

Regardless of the cause of their homelessness, all homeless students benefit from continuity in their education. To maximize continuity and minimize disruption as much as possible, immediate enrollment and appropriate placement decisions require a quick analysis of available information about the student being enrolled. Quick analysis of student needs should start with whatever existing information can be acquired.

Gathering Information from Parents and Students

Parents and students themselves can provide important and useful information regarding student needs and appropriate classroom placement. Interviews with parents can be conducted informally with simple, descriptive questions to learn about the student's prior academic performance.

Sample questions for parents might include:

- Do you have any papers from the previous school such as notes from teachers, homework assignments, tests, progress reports, or any other papers?
- Have you worked with your child on any recent homework assignments? If so, what were the assignments about?
- What were your child's grades like? What does he/she find easy? Difficult?
- Did you ever go to a meeting at school with a lot of teachers, a doctor or someone from the school district office?
- Did you ever sign any papers that talked about goals for your child or special school services?

Sample questions for students might include:

- What was your school day like?
- Do you remember the names of any of your books or what the covers looked like?
- What were you learning in your math/history/science/language class?
- What were some of your recent homework assignments? Do you have any old homework assignments, tests, notes from teachers, or any other papers from school?
- What was the name of your math/history/science/language class?
- How many kids were in your class? How many teachers were in your class?
- Did you ever spend time alone or in a small group with a different teacher?
- Did you ever spend time alone or in a small group in a different classroom?
- What were your grades like?

Conversations such as these with parents and students can often yield helpful information to guide initial placement decisions.

Gathering Existing Information

The McKinney-Vento Act requires the receiving school to contact the previous school immediately for school records. In the case of disasters in which the previous school was destroyed or closed, receiving schools should contact the school district office or State Coordinator for Homeless Education to see what records may be available in electronic or other form. For those students whose records might be damaged, destroyed, or otherwise unavailable, it is incumbent upon the receiving schools to begin to build new student records immediately based on information gathered from parents, students, local district or state-level student databases, and any other reliable sources of student information.

Academic Placement and Support

Important Note: The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act does allow transferring records and informal conversations between schools without parental consent when a child is changing schools.

While waiting for official records, if phone/e-mail contact information is available, it may be helpful for school administrators to talk with previous teachers, school counselors, and others for informal assistance with placement decisions. Likewise, talking with school nurses on behalf of those students who have prescribed medications or Special Education teachers about those who's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) require classroom accommodations may also be advantageous. It is always in the receiving school's best interest to get as much information as possible from the prior school through informal conversations as well as official transcripts and records.

In general, it is advisable to gather all available information from students and parents including any academic records, report cards, tests, homework, immunization or other medical records, IEPs or special education referrals, evaluations, meeting notes, or any other school papers the parents or child may have. Receiving schools may also be able to access standardized testing or other achievement data from state or local database systems.