

School Selection for Homeless Youth

As per McKinney-Vento, to the extent feasible, USD383 must place a homeless child in his or her school of origin, unless doing so is contrary to the wishes of the parent or guardian. The school placement decision should be a student-centered, individualized determination. Factors that USD383 should consider include:

- the age of the child or youth,
- the distance of the commute to and from the school of origin and its impact on the student's education,
- personal safety issues,
- the student's need for special instruction (e.g., special education and related services),
- the anticipated length of stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location, and
- the time remaining in the school year.

Determining Best Interest

The USD383 FIT Coordinator plays an instrumental role in assisting homeless parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth in selecting the school that will best meet the student's needs. The USD383 FIT Coordinator should:

- ensure that homeless parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth understand the school selection options;
- reinforce the importance of school stability and educational continuity; and
- discuss with the homeless parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth their unique circumstances, and assist them in making the most appropriate choice.

Consider the following questions when determining the best interest of each student:

- How permanent does the family's current living arrangement appear to be?
- How deep are the child's or youth's ties to his or her current school?
- How anxious is the child or youth about an upcoming or recent move?
- How strong is the child academically?
- How do the programs/activities at the local school compare to those at the school of origin?
- Does one school have programs and activities that address the unique needs or interests of the student that the other school does not have?
- Would the timing of the school transfer coincide with a logical juncture, such as after testing, after an event significant to the child or youth, or at the end of the school year?
- How would the length of the commute to and from the school of origin impact the child's or youth's education?
- Are there any safety issues to consider?

Once the USD383 FIT Coordinator and the parents, guardians, or unaccompanied youth discuss these questions, they should determine which school would be in the student's best interest. The USD383 FIT Coordinator should use the attached checklist entitled *School Selection: A Checklist for Decision-making* to help guide the conversation and to document placement decisions.

If remaining in the school of origin is the best option for the student, then transportation must be provided at the request of the parent or guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the USD383 FIT Coordinator).

If enrolling in the local school is the best option for the student, the USD383 FIT Coordinator in the district of origin should contact the local liaison in the district in which the child or youth is living (if these are two different districts), arrange to transfer needed records and samples of the student's work to the enrolling school, and notify the student's current teachers of his or her departure so that they can assist with farewell activities.

BEST INTEREST: In determining the best interest of the child or youth USD383 will:

1. to the extent feasible, keep a homeless child or youth in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the child's or youth's parent or guardian;
2. provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal under subparagraph (E), to the homeless child's or youth's parent or guardian, if USD383 sends such child or youth to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian; and
3. in the case of an unaccompanied youth, ensure that the USD383 FIT Coordinator assists in placement or enrollment decisions considers the views of such unaccompanied youth, and provides notice to such youth of the right to appeal.

References

1. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001. 42 USC §§11431–11435.
Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/legislation.html>
2. U.S. Department of Education. (2004). *Education for Homeless Children and Youth program non-regulatory guidance*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf>