

# **POLICY FOR ENROLLMENT SUPPORT** **FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND** **YOUTH IN SCHOOL**



Climbing Towards College & Career Readiness

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Inspiring Collaboration, Innovation, & Empowerment

## **Policy:**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, part of No Child Left Behind, mandates that all local educational agencies, such as school districts, independent charter schools, private schools and county offices of education, designate an appropriate staff person as the liaison for homeless children/youth.

This policy addresses the rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness to a free and appropriate public education. Ararat Charter School is responsible for ensuring the identification, enrollment, attendance, and academic success of students who are homeless.

This law is applicable to all schools, centers and offices within the Los Angeles Unified School District, including, but not limited to early education centers; preschools; elementary, middle, and high schools; magnet schools and centers; educational options schools; adult schools; continuation schools; special education schools; and dependent/ affiliated charter schools.

## **Background:**

On January 8, 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law. This legislation reauthorized the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act for Homeless Children and Youth, under NCLB, Title X, Part C. This law entitles all homeless school-aged children equal access to the same free, appropriate public education that is provided to non-homeless students. Accordingly, schools and centers are required to remove barriers to the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless students in school. The basic educational protections of the reauthorization apply to all school districts in the United States. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as federal law, supersedes state and local educational law and policy.

On behalf of homeless children and youth, the Homeless Education Program implements the District's homeless education policy, coordinates proper identification of homeless youth, arranges transportation, and resolves school disputes. In addition, the Homeless Education Program connects identified students with supplemental support services to enhance educational achievement, collaborates with homeless service agencies, conducts parent education workshops, facilitates professional development for school administrators and staff, participates in Title 1 school-wide planning training and coordinates the distribution of written materials.

The Ararat Charter School's Governing Board and staff believe there is a strong correlation between student attendance and student achievement. The District is committed to closing the achievement gap for at-risk students while improving student attendance. Factors related to homelessness and other socio-economic barriers often impede the learning process. The School's mission is to provide a quality education for all students in conjunction with assuring continual advocacy and support services to students. Ultimately, the Charter School is dedicated to promoting maximum success for its varied socio-economic and culturally diverse student population.

## **Guidelines:**

### **I. DEFINITION OF A "HOMELESS STUDENT"**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines "homeless" as follows: the term homeless children and youth means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including but not limited to:

- a. A primary nighttime residence that is a shelter designated to provide temporary living accommodations including, but not limited to, motels/hotels, family shelters, domestic violence shelters, congregated shelters, and transitional housing.
- b. Living in a car, park, abandoned building, garage, substandard housing, or other public or private places not designed for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation, for human beings.

- c. Temporarily living in a trailer park or camping area with his/her family, because of a lack of adequate living accommodations.
- d. Living “doubled –up”. These are children and youth who are temporarily sharing the housing of other families due to loss of housing, stemming from financial problems (e.g., loss of job, eviction, or natural disaster). *Families who share housing due to cultural preferences or convenience would not be considered homeless.*
- e. Youth abandoned at a hospital.
- f. Residing in a home for unwed mothers as a school-aged, unwed mother, or mother-to-be, if there are no other available living accommodations.
- g. Awaiting foster care in limited circumstances (e.g., does not include placement in kinship care, foster family, foster family agency, or group home).
- h. Placed by the state in an emergency shelter because there was no other place.
- i. Abandoned, runaway, or pushed out youth or a migratory child living in circumstances as described above. Unaccompanied youth are defined as youth who are not in the physical custody of a parent, guardian or caregiver and includes youth who have run away from home, have been told to leave, or pregnant or parenting teens not living with their parent or guardian.

## II. ENROLLMENT RIGHTS UNDER MCKINNEY-VENTO

Homeless students have the right to:

- a. Choose to:
  - 1. Remain at their “school of origin”, which is defined as the school the student last attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the student was last enrolled. OR
  - 2. To enroll in the public school serving the attendance area where the student is temporarily residing.
- b. Considerations For Determining School Of Enrollment:
  - 1. Request of parent/guardian to continue at the school of origin.
  - 2. School placement of siblings.
  - 3. Age of the student.
  - 4. Distance of the commute and the impact it has on the student’s education.
  - 5. The length of anticipated stay in the temporary location.
  - 6. The time remaining in the school year.
  - 7. Continuity of the instructional program.
  - 8. Need for specialized instructional or support services to provide the students with a free appropriate public education (FAPE), including but not limited to services identified in an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan.
  - 9. Special circumstances.
  - 10. Note: Homeless students matriculating to the next school level (e.g. preschool to elementary to middle school, middle school to high school) shall attend the school in the attendance area where they are currently residing.
- c. Attend his/her school of origin, to the extent feasible, for the duration of homelessness. This includes situations where the student becomes homeless between academic years.

- d. Immediate enrollment in school. Immediate means on the spot or at the time the student or family is present in the school office. The family should not be told to return on another day or at another time. Enrollment means that the student is attending classes and participating in all school activities.
- e. Unaccompanied homeless youth have a right to enroll in school without a parent, guardian or caregiver. In situations where a student is a homeless unaccompanied youth, and the school has determined the child is mature enough to consent to disclosure of pupil record information, the student may authorize disclosure in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Contact the Homeless Education Program for assistance.
- f. If the student becomes permanently housed during the academic year, the student is entitled to stay in the school of origin for the remainder of that academic year.
- g. Access To Comparable Services And Programs
- h. A homeless student shall be provided equal access to enroll in any educational program for which eligibility requirements are met. Homeless children and youth shall have access to necessary educational and support services that will afford them the opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic student achievement standards as all students.
- i. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - 1. Services provided under federal and state categorical programs, as well as local programs
  - 2. Programs for students with disabilities
  - 3. Programs for students with Limited English Proficiency
  - 4. Gifted and Talented programs
  - 5. School nutrition programs
  - 6. Before-and after-school programs
  - 7. If a student becomes homeless, he or she may remain at the charter school. However, if the student or family chooses to attend the school of residence or another school site, the student may lose his/her placement within the charter school. He/she would need to reapply during the open enrollment.
- j. Confidentiality: A student's residency status, like all school records, shall be kept confidential.
- k. Early Education students are entitled to the same educational rights as their school aged siblings.
- l. Homeless students should not be stigmatized or segregated from their peers.

### **III. ENROLLMENT PROTOCOLS FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS**

#### **A. Identification and Student Residency Questionnaire**

The Student Residency Questionnaire (SRQ) determines eligibility for families under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The SRQ provides information about the family's nighttime residence accommodations. If any selection is checked other than "none of the above applies," the family meets the federal definition of homelessness and the student shall be enrolled immediately, even if documents normally required for enrollment are lacking.

- 1. A separate SRQ form is needed for each child in the family, including children under the age of five.
- 2. Discard all copies of the Student Residency Questionnaire from previous bulletins.

3. The SRQ shall be included in the enrollment packet as part of the registration procedure. It will assist the school administrator and enrolling staff in determining documentation needed for enrollment.
4. The SRQ of homeless students shall not be placed in the student's permanent record. It should be placed in a confidential student file maintained by the Designated School Site Homeless Liaison.
5. Blank SRQ forms shall be available in the main office, attendance office, parent centers, and other locations where parents can easily access the form.
6. If "none of the above apply" is checked, then the family does not meet the federal definition of homelessness and the school administrator and enrolling staff are to follow the standard enrollment procedure.

## **B. Enrollment**

1. After identification as homeless, the school shall immediately enroll the student in school, even if records normally required for enrollment are lacking (e.g., academic records, special education records, proof of residency, medical records and/or immunizations).
2. Every student must be enrolled immediately. "Enroll and Enrollment" are defined as attending classes and participating fully in school activities.
3. The enrolling school shall immediately contact the last school of attendance to obtain academic, health and other relevant records that are lacking at the time of enrollment.
4. As required for all students, an emergency contact form must be completed.
5. A thirty (30) day conditional enrollment is to be granted if immunization records are not available at the time of enrollment; including the Tdap requirement. The school nurse will follow up every thirty (30) days until the immunization record is completed and the student continues to attend school. Enrollment MUST NOT be delayed, even if documents normally required for enrollment are lacking.
6. If homeless families do not have appropriate documentation forms, school staff is to provide alternative forms such as: (for additional forms refer to BUL 4926.2)
  - Affidavit of Temporary Residence (Attachment A)
  - Affidavit for Proof of Age of Minor (Attachment B)
  - Affidavit of Parent/Legal Guardian Identification (Attachment C)
  - Caregiver Authorization Affidavit (Attachment D)
7. If the family is residing in a domestic violence shelter, the school shall enroll the student as homeless with a confidential address in accordance with the California Confidential Address Program. If a family is residing in a shelter (not due to domestic violence), the school shall enter the shelter address in the student information system address field or place an alternative mailing address or a P.O. Box address preferred by the family in the address field .
8. If a family is residing in their automobile and does not have a temporary address to put in the student information system address field, the school shall temporarily put the school address in this field. This field will be updated as the family finds temporary housing.
9. Any of the alternative forms listed may be used to permit students to transfer schools in order to participate in athletic or other extracurricular activities.
10. For students with disabilities, refer to the Special Education Policies and Procedures Manual, dated July 2007.

11. If a homeless student was receiving accommodations under Section 504 but does not bring a current 504 plan to the school, the school is obligated to immediately enroll that student and provide the required accommodations (refer to BUL 4045.0 Section 504 and Students with Disabilities, dated January 15, 2008).
12. After enrollment is complete if services are requested, homeless students shall be referred to the designated School Site Homeless.

#### **IV. RESPONSIBILITIES**

##### **A. Homeless Education Program Coordinator Responsibilities**

The Homeless Education Program Pupil Services and Attendance Coordinator serves as the identified Homeless Education Program Liaison for the District. The Coordinator is responsible for working with Homeless Education Program staff, school sites, Educational Service Centers (ESC), community agencies and parents to:

1. Ensure notification of the educational rights of homeless students is disseminated where children and youth receive services such as schools, shelters, hotels/motels and community agencies.
2. Ensure homeless children and youth are properly identified and promptly enrolled by school personnel.
3. Inform parent/guardian/unaccompanied homeless youth of educational and related opportunities available and encourage parents to actively participate in their child's education.
4. Ensure children, youth, and their families have equal access to all educational services for which they are eligible.
5. Inform parent/guardian/unaccompanied homeless youth of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and the criteria for transportation assistance.
6. Assist unaccompanied homeless youth with enrollment, school placement, and obtaining immunization records.
7. Provide students and their families with referrals to community services, such as healthcare, mental health, dental, and other appropriate services as needed.
8. Provide training and technical assistance as appropriate.
9. Participate in training for Title I School-Wide Planning.
10. Participate in the mediation of school enrollment disputes.
11. Collaborate with county and state homeless liaisons.

##### **B. Homeless Education Counselor/Advocate Responsibilities**

The Homeless Education Counselor/Advocates are responsible for ensuring that legal mandates are implemented at the school site level. The Homeless Education Counselor/Advocates responsibilities include:

1. Ensure notification of the educational rights of homeless students is disseminated where children and youth receive services such as schools, shelters, hotels/motels and community agencies.
2. Ensure homeless children and youth are properly identified and promptly enrolled by school personnel.
3. Facilitate the school enrollment process to ensure equal access to educational and meal programs, as well as tutoring and other services available at the school site.
4. Assist unaccompanied homeless youth with enrollment procedures, school placement options, and retrieval of immunization records.
5. Provide technical assistance regarding the proper identification, enrollment, and service needs of homeless students and their families.
6. Ensure that homeless students are identified at the school sites via the Student Residency Questionnaire (SRQ) form which is to be placed in every student enrollment packet and disseminated annually.

7. Provide assistance with transportation, backpacks, school supplies, and clothing.
8. Provide referrals to medical, dental, and mental health services, in addition to other school/community services as needed.
9. Educate students and parents regarding their educational rights, and promote parent participation in school related activities.
10. Collaborate with various District personnel (i.e., Organizational Facilitators, ESC staff, PSA Counselors, school site personnel, etc.) to address barriers that may prevent a student from accessing education.
11. Conduct professional development trainings for school personnel and community agencies regarding the rights and responsibilities of the homeless population.

### **C. Educational Service Centers Responsibilities**

The Governing Board shall designate a certificated staff member to serve as the Educational Service Center Homeless Liaison. This designee may be a School Director, Principal, Coordinator, or an administrative staff. The primary responsibility of the Educational Service Center Homeless Liaison shall be to ensure that schools are following McKinney Vento guidelines and policy regarding homeless students.

### **D. School Site Responsibilities**

Each school is required to implement policy according to federal guidelines and district policy as outlined in this bulletin.

1. Every school principal shall designate a School Site Homeless Liaison to ensure the implementation of policy.  
Note: The principal will automatically be considered the Designated School Site Homeless Liaison if this form is not returned.
2. Ensure that students, who become homeless at any time during the school year, are identified at the school sites via the SRQ.
3. Place the SRQ in every enrollment packet and disseminated annually to all students.
4. Include in the Single Plan for Student Achievement, the education of homeless students and access to any supplemental instructional and support services, including, but not limited to Title I, Economic Impact Aide.
5. Ensure the completion of the Homeless Student Survey annually in compliance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
6. Ensure that homeless student information is updated throughout the year. Students who have become permanently housed during the academic year should have the homeless indicator removed at the beginning of the following school year.

### **E. School Site Homeless Liaison Responsibilities**

The School Site Homeless Liaison is responsible for implementing the mandates of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

1. Ensure proper identification and enrollment procedures for homeless students are implemented.
2. Provide advocacy and support as needed to ensure that homeless students are placed in the appropriate classrooms to facilitate academic growth and success.
3. Train school staff on proper guidelines and procedures in regard to homeless youth and children.
4. For transportation assistance, refer to Section V.
5. Assist families with referrals to school based educational programs and/or support services as well as community resources.
6. File all SRQs in a CONFIDENTIAL in-school file. The SRQ is not part of the student's cumulative record.

## **V. ELIGIBILITY FOR FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH PROGRAM**

All students who meet the federal definition of homelessness are automatically eligible for the USDA free nutrition program and are not required to submit a meal application. This eligibility must be reviewed annually. The following procedures have been established to simplify access to the child nutrition programs for homeless students:

- A. In instances where families are living doubled up, the income of the host family is not taken into consideration. If the host family applies, they may include the homeless family as household members if the host family provides financial support to the homeless family, such as shelter, utilities, clothing, or food.
- B. School staff shall ensure that the student's SRQ information is entered into the student information system and homeless status is designated upon enrollment and verified annually.
- C. The SRQ must be submitted to the Homeless Education Program Office immediately to ensure eligibility for free and reduced lunch. The Food Services Branch will receive confirmation of a family's homeless status through the Homeless Education Program Office on a weekly basis.

## **VI. TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE**

Ararat Charter School shall ensure that transportation is provided, at the request of the parent/guardian/unaccompanied homeless youth, to and from the school of origin, if the student is eligible. Eligible students and families will be provided with tokens or a pass from a local public transit agency. The Homeless Education Program transportation is designated solely for homeless students who have been approved to receive transportation assistance from the HEP office and is not to be used for other purposes.

- A. Eligibility Criteria for Transportation Assistance for Elementary: Homeless student must reside two (2) or more miles from the school of origin.
- B. Homeless students residing within their school's residence boundaries are not eligible for transportation services.
- C. Under special circumstances, shorter distances may be eligible for transportation assistance. Please consult with the Homeless Education Program staff to see if the student's individual circumstances may qualify for an exception to policy.
- D. The student's commute may not be more than 90 minutes each way. Transportation assistance will not be provided for longer commutes due to feasibility and the best interest of the child. Please contact the Homeless Education Program regarding any special circumstances.
- E. Homeless Education Program staff will verify that the student is enrolled in school and determine eligibility for transportation assistance. Transportation assistance will not be provided until the Homeless Education Program office has given approval. Once eligibility is determined, transportation arrangements will be made.
- F. Students 12 years of age and under cannot ride alone on a public transit. Parents of transportation eligible students under 12 years of age will be provided with transportation services until the student turns 12.
- G. A parent/guardian or designated adult must ride with student's age 11 and younger to and from school each day, and sign in daily to continue to receive transportation assistance. Transportation assistance for both student and parent will be changed to daily tokens if parent fails to sign in daily and ride with student(s) under the age of 11. Please consult with the Homeless Education Program Coordinator if the parent/guardian or designated adult is unable to participate in this process.



- H. If a student is attending sporadically at their school of origin, regular attendance protocols should be followed and the School Site Homeless Liaison should call the Homeless Education Program to determine feasibility of continuing transportation eligibility. The Homeless Education Program will determine the feasibility of the student remaining at the school of origin. These students/parents may also lose public transit pass privileges and be placed on daily tokens until regular school attendance is re-established. The student/parent will need to sign in for the tokens on a daily basis at the school site. The Homeless Education Program will provide a special sign in sheet.
- I. Student Residency Status Changes
1. Schools shall notify the Homeless Education Program Office when there are changes in a student's residency status. Status updates may include change of residence (permanent or temporary) or change of school (new school or unknown).
  2. If a homeless student moves into the boundaries of another school district, while continuing his/her education at the school of origin, the two districts must agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation. If the districts cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibilities and costs shall be shared equally.
  3. Schools should submit the Residency Status Update for Homeless Students Form
- J. Processing Transportation Requests
1. To make a request for transportation assistance, the School Site Homeless Liaison shall submit to the Homeless Education Program Office:
    - A. Student Residency Questionnaire per student
    - B. Approved Signatures form - Tokens and TAP forms
    - C. The MTA Transit Access Pass (TAP) Application per student
    - D. Proof of Enrollment for MTA and provide **one** of the following:
      - Photocopy of valid school ID
      - Complete printout showing enrollment and/or in-class schedule
      - Letter verifying enrollment on school letterhead containing the original signature of a school official.
  2. If the student qualifies, a temporary TAP card will be issued for the student to the school from the Homeless Education Program Office. The temporary TAP cards are valid for 30 days from the date of issuance.
  3. Ararat Charter School Homeless Education Program will replace lost TAP cards only one time. The parent must purchase additional cards. Updated card information must be provided to the LAUSD Homeless Education Program in order to properly load the card on a monthly basis.
  4. Upon receipt of the permanent TAP card from MTA, the Homeless Education Program Office will note the student TAP number in the Homeless Education database and send the TAP card to the school for distribution to the student. Please allow six to eight weeks for processing of the TAP card application.
  5. The fare will be uploaded to the permanent card for the next month upon receipt of proof of attendance by the 20th of the month. Example: In order to process fare for a qualifying student for November, please submit the homeless student's attendance by October 20.
  6. Parents of students 11 years of age or younger, must continue to sign in once per day on the sign in form to assure that a parent/guardian is accompanying the student on the bus to and from school.
  7. Homeless Special Education students will continue to participate in their program specific transportation, according to District guidelines. The Homeless Education Program staff can assist with identifying alternative pick-up sites based upon the student's residence location.
  8. A student with special needs who becomes homeless remains entitled to the services designated on his/her IEP, including home-to-school or school-to-school transportation. The Homeless School Site Liaison should contact the Program Specialist from the Special Education Support Unit to discuss pick-up or drop-off changes. The Program Specialist will facilitate the IEP process to

address any transportation, placement, and service issues. The Program Specialist, Homeless Education Program, and Transportation Branch will agree on a resolution in accordance with policy.

## **VII. DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment of a homeless student, the student must be immediately admitted to the school in which he/she is seeking enrollment, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth must be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the right to appeal.

- a. The school administrator shall provide a copy of the "Dispute Resolution Process", the "Written Notification of the Enrollment Decision" to the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth.
- b. The parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth shall be provided with the "Parent Dispute Resolution Form" to complete and return to the school to facilitate the dispute resolution process.
- c. A copy of the completed forms shall be provided to the parent/guardian/unaccompanied homeless youth for their records.
- d. Parent/guardian/unaccompanied youth must be informed that they can provide oral or written documentation to support their position about school selection or enrollment.
- e. Parent/guardian/unaccompanied youth must be informed that they can seek the assistance of social services, advocates and/or service providers in the dispute process.
- f. Every effort must be made to obtain a mailing address at the initiation of the dispute resolution process. If a mailing address is not available, the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth should provide another means of communicating with the school.
- g. The Principal or designee must report the dispute to the Homeless Education Program Coordinator within the same school day the dispute resolution process was initiated and fax all relevant documentation to the Homeless Education Program Office.
- h. The Homeless Education Program Coordinator must make a decision within two (2) working days, and a written report of the decision sent to the parent within three (3) working days. This report shall be sent via mail and a copy sent home with the student, or other agreed upon alternative means of communication. A copy of the outcome shall be provided to the parents/guardians or unaccompanied youth for their records, even when the dispute is resolved satisfactorily.
- i. If the dispute remains unresolved, or the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth is not satisfied with the District decision, an appeal may be filed within three (3) working days to:

Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE)  
Division of Student Support Services  
C/O Los Angeles County Homeless Coordinator  
9300 Imperial Highway  
Downey, CA 90242  
(562) 922-6301

- j. The Homeless Education Program Coordinator will forward all written documentation and related paperwork to the homeless liaison at LACOE. The LACOE homeless liaison will review these materials

and determine the school selection or enrollment decision within five (5) working days of receipt of the documents. The LACOE homeless liaison will notify the District and the parent of the decision.

- k. If the dispute remains unresolved, or if the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth is not satisfied with the LACOE decision, an appeal may be filed within three (3) working days to the California Department of Education (CDE):

California Department of Education  
C/O Homeless State Coordinator  
1430 N Street, 6th Floor, Suite 6208  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 319-0383

- l. The LACOE homeless liaison shall forward all written documentation and related paperwork to the State Homeless Coordinator. The CDE will notify the parent of the final school selection or enrollment decision within ten (10) working days of receipt of materials.