POLICY FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN SCHOOL

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Ararat CHARTER SCHOOL

Climbing Towards College & Career Readiness

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Policy:

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act 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 is adopted pursuant to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. §11431 et seq.), California Education Code §§ 48850–48859, and Assembly Bill 408 (2023).

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, academic success, credit accrual (if applicable), and school stability of students who are homeless.

Background:

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act for Homeless Children and Youth 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.

Assembly Bill 408 strengthens state requirements regarding immediate enrollment, timely transfer of records, partial credit accrual, graduation protections (where applicable), dispute resolution, and liaison responsibilities.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as federal law, supersedes state and local educational law and policy.

Ararat Charter School supports with the proper identification of homeless youth, arranges transportation, and resolves school disputes by appropriately working with the LAUSD. In addition, the Charter School 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. Ararat Charter School 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 Charter 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.

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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, congregate 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

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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.

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. Immediate enrollment shall occur even if the student lacks:

    - Proof of residency
    - Immunization records
    - School records
    - Proof of guardianship
    - Birth certificate
    - Uniforms or other typical enrollment materials

    The lack of any such documentation shall not delay enrollment.

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). Charter School will connect with the appropriate support personnel in the District to learn more.

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

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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. 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.
3. 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.
4. Blank SRQ forms shall be available in the main office, attendance office, parent centers, and other locations where parents can easily access the form.
5. 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.

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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.

6. 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 .

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. The Charter School shall ensure that records, including IEPs, 504 Plans, immunization documentation, transcripts (if applicable), and discipline records, are requested and transferred within two (2) business days.

C. Records Transfer:

Upon enrollment of a homeless student, the Charter School shall request academic and other records from the previous school within two (2) business days and shall transfer requested records to another school within two (2) business days of receiving the request.

D. Transportation

At the request of the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth, the Charter School shall provide transportation to and from the school of origin, as required by law.

If the student resides outside the Charter School's attendance boundary, the Charter School shall coordinate cost-sharing arrangements with the local educational agency of residence, as applicable.

Transportation shall not be delayed during the pendency of a dispute.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Homeless Education Program Liaison Responsibilities

The Homeless Education Program Liaison serves as the identified Homeless Education Program individual for the Charter School.The Liaison is responsible for working with parents to:

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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.
12. Ensure compliance with partial credit accrual and graduation exemption requirements, if applicable.
13. Ensure that homeless status is coded appropriately in the student information system and reviewed annually.
14. Ensure dispute resolution procedures are implemented promptly and documented.

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 District to ensure eligibility for free and reduced lunch. The Food Services Branch will receive confirmation of a family's homeless status through the Charter School's timely communication..

VI. DISPUTE RESOLUTION

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth experiencing homelessness will be admitted immediately pending final resolution of the dispute.

The Charter School shall provide the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth with:

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1. A written explanation of the school's decision;
2. Notice of the right to appeal;
3. Referral to the Homeless Liaison;
4. Information regarding escalation to the County Office of Education, if necessary.

The student shall remain enrolled and receive transportation and all educational services pending final resolution of the dispute.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Charter School shall maintain the confidentiality of a student's homeless status consistent with FERPA and state law. Homeless status shall not be stigmatizing and shall not be used to segregate students.

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Migrant Education: A Chapter I Program
Migrant Education is a Chapter 1 program. It offers the student supplemental help in the areas of oral and written language, math, and reading. The emphasis is on enrichment to stimulate and challenge these students. Remedial help is also offered. Some medical and dental assistance is available. The Migrant Education program serves eligible students and their families. An eligible Migrant child is one who has moved with a parent or guardian who is seeking temporary or seasonal work in agriculture or fishing-related industries. Please answer the following questions to help us determine if your child is eligible to enter the Migrant program.
Have you or any member of your immediate family worked in agriculture, fishing, or lumber on a seasonal basis within the last five years? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Housing Questionnaire

Are you and/or your family living in any of the following situations? (Check all that apply)

The information provided below will help the LEA determine what services you and/or your child may be eligible to receive. This could include additional educational services through Title I, Part A, and/or the federal McKinney-Vento Assistance Act. The information on this form will be kept confidential and only shared with the appropriate school district and site staff.

- ☐ In a shelter (family shelter, domestic violence shelter, youth shelter) or Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailer
- ☐ Sharing housing with other(s) due to loss of housing, economic hardship, natural disaster, lack of adequate housing, or similar reason.
- ☐ Living in a car, park, campground, abandoned building, or other inadequate accommodations (i.e., lack of water, electricity, or heat)
- ☐ Temporarily living in a motel or hotel due to loss of housing, economic hardship, natural disaster, or similar reason
- ☐ Living in a single-home/apartment residence that is permanent
- ☐ Foster child awaiting placement
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ The student is under 18 and lives apart from the parent(s) or guardian. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- ☐ I choose not to state my living situation

Student Lives with:		
☐ One Parent	☐ Two Parents	☐ One Parent & Another Adult
☐ Alone with No Adults	☐ A Relative	☐ An Adult That is Not the Parent or Legal Guardian

The undersigned parent/guardian certifies that the above information is correct and accurate.

Name of Parent/Legal Guardian: _____

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature: _____ Date:_____

Current Address of Student: _____

City:_____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

☐ The student's address (shown above) is where I also can receive mail.

Your child or children may have the right to:

- Immediate enrollment in the school they last attended (school of origin) or the local district school where they currently stay.
- Continue to attend their local district school, if requested by you, and it is in their best interest.
- Receive transportation to and from their local district school, the same special programs, and services, if needed, as provided to all other children, including free meals and Title I.

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- Receive the full protections and services provided under all federal and state laws as it relates to homeless children, youth, and their families.

Please list all children currently living with you.				
Name	**Gender**	**Birthdate**	**Grade**	**School**

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For questions about these rights, please contact Ararat Charter School's Homeless Liaison	
Name	**Daniel Lee**
Phone	**818-994-2904**
Email	**dlee@araratcharterschool.com**

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