

# Enrollment of Homeless Children and Youth

## Purpose

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The purpose of this document is to give clear guidance regarding the enrollment of homeless children and youth in our local public schools. Homelessness is not a reason to deny children enrollment in the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Per the federal McKinney-Vento Act, homeless children, youth or unaccompanied youth must be immediately enrolled in school. The Youth Engagement Division's Homeless Children and Youth Program works to ensure homeless students' educational rights are preserved.

## Definitions

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### A. Homeless Children and Youth

The term "homeless children and youth" is defined as follows:

1. Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; who are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; who are living in emergency or transitional shelter (including DC transitional housing); who have been abandoned in hospitals;
2. Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
3. Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
4. Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above; and
5. Unaccompanied youth, including youth who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who qualify as homeless because they live in circumstances described above.

### B. School of Origin

The term "school of origin" is defined as follows:

1. The school the student attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the student was last enrolled.

## Procedures

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### A. School-based Homeless Liaison

Every school must designate a Homeless Liaison. They are the primary contact between the local school and the Homeless Children and Youth program, Specialist. Their primary responsibilities are to identify-homeless students; ensure that homeless students enroll in, and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school; arrange transportation assistance for homeless students and their families; post notices; resolve disputes; and collect and maintain accurate data for their local school's homeless student population.

### B. Compulsory Attendance and Residency

1. Every individual, residing in the District of Columbia, who has custody or control of a child aged 5-18; or 3-21 for students determined to be in need of special education services, must ensure that the child to be regularly instructed during the period when DCPS is in session.
2. DCPS shall not deny any students whose parents reside in the District of Columbia admission for the purpose of school attendance. Therefore, no child whose "parents are determined to be residents of the District of Columbia" is to be turned away by DCPS because he or she is homeless.
3. In confirming residency, if a homeless parent/guardian or an unaccompanied youth cannot provide the required documentation, the student must be enrolled in school, immediately, providing the school is the student's school of origin, the school in which a permanently housed student living in the same attendance area would be eligible to enroll, or the school selected by the District, taking into consideration the best interest of the student. Should the student be denied enrollment, the parent must contact the Homeless Children and Youth Program, Specialist for enrollment resolution.

### C. Change in Address and School of Attendance

1. The loss of housing and homelessness can result in a change in place of residence. In general, a student is to attend the school serving the boundary for his or her new or established place of residence, but has the right to remain in their school of origin;
2. Any homeless child moving into temporary/transitional shelter or into doubled-up accommodations located in boundary different from that for his or her previous residence has the right to remain in the school of origin or be allowed to enroll in the school in which the permanently housed students living in the same attendance area would be eligible to enroll.

3. Homeless children and youth are to be afforded the same rights as permanent residents, although school placement ultimately will be made in the best interest of the homeless child or youth.
4. The School District shall determine school placement based on the "best interest" of the homeless child or youth and unaccompanied youth. In determining the "best interest" of the child/youth or unaccompanied youth, the following shall be taken into consideration: continuity of instruction; age of the child/youth or unaccompanied youth; safety of the child/youth or unaccompanied youth; length of stay in the shelter; likely area where the family will find permanent housing; student's need for a specialized instructional program; impact of commute on education; impact of transfer on the child's mental health; school placement of siblings; or time remaining in the school year.
5. Specifically with regard to "best interest", unless otherwise requested by the parent, the school must:
  - a. To the extent feasible, continue the child's or youth's education in the student's school of origin for:
    - i. the duration of homelessness, if a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year; or
    - ii. the remainder of the academic year, if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during the academic year.
  - b. Enroll the homeless child or youth in any public school that non-homeless children who live in the same attendance area attend.
6. Admission and Placement of Homeless Children or Youth
  - a. When a homeless children or youth seeks enrollment in the District, these procedures shall be followed:
    - i. The homeless child's parent/guardian or any unaccompanied homeless youth shall be advised of their choice of schools. The homeless children or youth shall be allowed to either continue his/her education in the school of origin for the duration of the homelessness, or b.be placed in the school that non-homeless children/youths who live in the attendance areas in which the child/youth is actually living are eligible to attend.
    - ii. The homeless children or youth shall be offered placement in an appropriate grade level by the building principal or designee with 48 hours, using the same procedures that are used for placing non-homeless children and youth attending that school. Educational programming and services shall be provided for the child/youth consistent with legal requirements and established District policies and procedures.
    - iii. Placement decisions will be made by the Homeless Children & Youth program, Specialist, for students in grades in Pre-k (based on availability) through 8<sup>th</sup>. The DCPS Student Placement Office will facilitate all high school student placements. The Homeless Children & Youth program, Specialist, in collaboration with the Student Placement Office and schools will work together to ensure that homeless children and youth are connected with appropriate support systems.

## D. If a Dispute Concerning School Placement or Enrollment Arises

7. When school placement is determined, the school shall, immediately enroll the child or youth, even if the child lacks records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, birth certificate, proof of residency or other documentation. Note: A letter from a housing shelter including a contact name and phone number is acceptable documentation. Notation should be made on the Annual Student Enrollment form, as appropriate, for homeless children, youth and unaccompanied youth.
8. If a decision is made to send the child or youth to a school other than the school of origin or the school in which the permanently housed students living in the same attendance area would be eligible to enroll, the school or Homeless Children and Youth program, Specialist must provide written explanation to the parent or guardian, including the right to appeal under the enrollment dispute revision.
  - a. If a dispute arises over enrollment or school placement:
    - i. The child or youth must be immediately enrolled in the school requested by the individual or organization submitting the complaint until a final decision is made regarding the dispute. The challenging school must provide transportation assistance, DC One card and other school services as needed to the student until the dispute is resolved.
    - ii. the parent or guardian of the affected student(s) must be provided a written explanation of the school's decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or youth to appeal the decision;
    - iii. The child, youth, parent, or guardian must be referred to the Homeless Children and Youth program, Specialist or the Director of Student Attendance & Support Services, who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute.
    - iv. The dispute resolution process begins at the time a school challenges the right of either a parent or guardian, or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, to enroll a child or youth in school, to continue enrollment in school, or to receive services such as transportation assistance.
9. In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the local school or Homeless Children and Youth program, Specialist, must assist the youth in placement/enrollment decisions, consider the youth's wishes, and provide notice to the youth of the right to appeal under the enrollment dispute provisions;
  - a. When the School District challenges the enrollment or services of the child or unaccompanied youth, the District must:
    - i. Provide notice of the challenge to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, through the Homeless Children and Youth program.
    - ii. Provide notice of the right to appeal the challenge to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. This notice must include a form to be completed by the

- parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth should he or she decide to appeal the District's decision.
- iii. Notify the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) of the challenge and provide OSSE with copies of all notices given to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. These documents must be scanned and emailed to [Transitory.Services@dc.gov](mailto:Transitory.Services@dc.gov).
  - iv. The Homeless Children and Youth program, Specialist will provide the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth with written notice in clear, easy-to-understand language detailing the dispute resolution process.
10. The Homeless Children & Youth program, Specialist has (3) working days to review the school's initial decision and make a final decision as to the position taken, i.e. whether it will continue to challenge the right of the student to be enrolled. The decision must state all factual information upon which it is based and the legal basis in support thereof.
- a. The Homeless Children & Youth program, Specialist will provide the parent with a copy of the [District of Columbia Formal State Complaint Policy & Procedures](#) which is readily available at OSSE.DC.Gov.
  - b. If the parent indicates that an appeal will be filed and does so within two (2) business days, the school must continue to provide transportation assistance (if requested) and other school services to the student until the dispute is resolved by the OSSE. Once OSSE has issued its decision, a final decision of the District must be issued in writing and must be made by the District's Chancellor or his/her designee.
11. At the conclusion of any dispute, in the case in which a school transfer is necessary, such transfer should be expedited, including the transfer of all student records, in order to ensure the child's or youth's uninterrupted school attendance.

If school staff have specific questions about the Homeless Children and Youth program or the housing status selection process, staff should contact Tierra Washington, Homeless Children and Youth Program Specialist, at (202) 576-9502 or [Tierra.Washington@dc.gov](mailto:Tierra.Washington@dc.gov). If registrars have any other questions about the rights of homeless students and their families, please contact Tierra Washington.