

HOMELESS STUDENTS: ENROLLMENT RIGHTS AND SERVICES

The Cambridge Public Schools is committed to ensuring that homeless children and youth and unaccompanied youth have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youth in the school district in accordance with the provisions of the McKinney Vento Homeless Education Act. As required by law, the Cambridge Public Schools will work with homeless children and youth and unaccompanied youth (collectively “homeless students”) as well as their families or legal guardians to provide stability in school attendance and other services. Special attention will be given to ensuring the enrollment and attendance of homeless students not currently attending school. Homeless students will be provided district services for which they are eligible, including Head Start and comparable pre-school programs, Title I, similar state programs, special education, bilingual education, vocational and technical education programs, gifted and talented programs, school nutrition programs, summer programming and extracurricular activities.

Homeless Students are defined as lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence including

- sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- being abandoned in hospitals;
- living in public or private places not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- migratory children living in conditions described above in the previous examples

Students Remaining in Schools of Origin

It is presumed to be in the best interest of homeless students to remain in their school of origin, i.e., the school that the student was attending at the time they became homeless, or the last school the student attended prior to becoming homeless. Homeless students may continue to attend their school of origin for as long as they remain homeless or until the end of the academic year in which the student obtains permanent housing. For homeless students who complete the final grade level served by the school of origin, the term “school of origin” shall also include the receiving school in the same school district educating students at the next grade level.

Homeless students are entitled to transportation comparable to that provided for all other students attending school in the Cambridge Public Schools. The Cambridge Public Schools will transport students who are sheltered or temporarily residing within the district to the student’s school of origin. For homeless students attending a school of origin located outside the district in which the student is sheltered or temporarily residing, the district in which the school of origin is located will coordinate with the district in which the student is sheltered or temporarily residing to provide the transportation

services necessary for the student, and these districts will divide the cost equally. Homeless students who find permanent housing mid-school year will continue to receive transportation services until the end of the school year.

Students Enrolling in District Where Sheltered or Temporarily Residing

Parents/Guardians/Caregivers may elect to enroll students in the school district in which the student is sheltered or temporarily residing, rather than having the student remain in the school of origin. Enrollment changes for homeless students should take place immediately.

If homeless students are unable to provide written proof of their shelter or temporary residence in the district, the homeless liaison will work with the family seeking enrollment to determine homelessness. Information regarding a homeless student's living arrangement shall be considered a student education record, and not directory information. Records containing information about the homeless student's living arrangement may not be disclosed without the consent of the parent/guardian/caregiver or satisfaction of another student-privacy related exemption.

If the student does not have immediate access to immunization records, the student shall be permitted to enroll under a personal exception. Students and families should be encouraged to obtain current immunization records or immunizations as soon as possible, and the district Homeless Education Liaison is directed to assist. Emergency contact information is required at the time of enrollment consistent with Cambridge Public School's policies, including compliance with the state's address confidentiality program when necessary. After enrollment, the Cambridge Public Schools will immediately request available records from the student's previous school.

Attendance rights by living in attendance areas, other student assignment policies or intra or inter-district choice options are available to homeless families on the same terms as families who reside in the district. Accordingly, the Cambridge Public Schools will provide transportation services to school in a manner comparable to the transportation provided for all other students in the district.

Dispute Resolution

If the district disagrees with a parent/guardian/caregiver's decision to keep a student enrolled in the school of origin and considers enrollment in the district where the student is sheltered or temporarily residing to be in the student's best interest, the district will explain to the parent/guardian/caregiver, in writing and in a language the parent/guardian/caregiver can understand, the rationale for its determination and provide the parent/guardian/caregiver with written notice of their rights to appeal the district's determination to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. During the pendency of any such appeal, the student should remain enrolled in the school selected by the parent/guardian/caregiver, receiving transportation to school and access to other available services and programs.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Advisory on Homeless Education Assistance contains additional information about educating homeless students and the appeal process.

Homeless Liaison

The Superintendent shall designate an appropriate staff person to be the Cambridge Public Schools' Homeless Education Liaison for students and their families. The Homeless Education Liaison will coordinate with local social service agencies that provide services to homeless children and youth and their families; other school districts on issues of transportation and transfer of records; and state and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies. This coordination including providing public notice of the educational rights of homeless students in locations such as schools, family shelters and soup kitchens. The Homeless Education Liaison will also review and recommend amendments to district policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless students. The Homeless Education Liaison shall ensure that Cambridge Public Schools' staff receive professional development and other support on issues involving homeless students.

LEGAL REF.: The McKinney-Vento Act and Title I, Part A, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015

Adopted: August 4, 2020