

FCPS Homeless Education Program

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FCPS Homeless Education Program

McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance is a federal law that requires every school division to have a designated **program/liaison** for students who are experiencing homelessness.

The purpose of homeless education programs is to ensure that students in temporary living situations have the resources necessary to obtain a successful education. Schools are responsible for ensuring that homeless students ***are identified, enrolled, and receive equitable access to high quality education and support services.***

Consistent and stable enrollment and attendance is critical to end the cycle of homelessness.



Definitions of Homelessness

There are two definitions of homelessness: HUD & McKinney-Vento.

This can be confusing as schools follow the Department of Education, McKinney Vento definition while homeless services use the HUD definition.

The primary difference between the two is that Department of Education definition includes families who are doubled up due to hardship.

The McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless

The term “homeless children and youths” means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and includes:

- (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
- (ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- (iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

Homeless Unaccompanied Youth

An unaccompanied youth is defined in the McKinney-Vento Act as “a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.” This definition can be used to describe youth who are residing with a caregiver who is not a parent or guardian as well as youth who are living without the care of an adult.

An unaccompanied youth must fit the definitions of both homeless and unaccompanied in the McKinney-Vento Act to receive assistance under the provisions in the law. That is, **a homeless unaccompanied youth is a child or youth who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian AND lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.**

Referrals for Families Needing Assistance

Referrals to the FCPS Homeless Education Program come from:

- Parents/students
- School staff
- County/community agencies
- Shelters
- Law enforcement
- Other school divisions

Once the FCPS Homeless Education Program is notified, a school social worker connects with the family to identify their needs. The student's school is notified and the student is flagged as having homeless status in the FCPS student information system for the full school year. Immediate resources and supports are put into place, including free meals at school, school supplies, transportation assistance, and connections with community resources.

Rights of Homeless Families

- Students experiencing homelessness have the right to attend school, regardless of whether they have a permanent address.
- School enrollment cannot be denied due to lack of immediate school records.
- Students may be eligible for transportation services to and from school.
- Students can either remain in their original school or attend the local school to where the child is sleeping at night, based on their best interest.
- Students are eligible for free breakfast and lunch.
- Students have the right to participate in extracurricular activities and eligible federal, state, or local programs. Transportation may be available for these activities.

FCPS Supports

In addition to identification, enrollment, and access to educational opportunities, the FCPS Homeless Education Program supports students with the following:

- Basic needs assistance and food resources
- Connections to medical care, dental care, and mental health resources
- Tutoring
- Post high school planning
- Educational advocacy
- Collaboration with community programs and services
- Child care assistance and teen parenting supports
- Coordinating supports/resources from faith-based partners and community groups

Pressing needs:

#1: Shelter needs for homeless high school students

HUY ages 18-22 are often unable to access current adult shelters, as they are often full and/or prioritize space for vulnerable older adults. These arrangements are also not well suited for high school students due to transportation difficulties and safety concerns.

Second Story currently has a program serving HUY, however the program is underfunded to support these students on an emergency basis while their application is being processed for a longer-term shelter program.

Recommendation:

- Additional support for Second Story to build capacity to serve these students with temporary emergency shelter.

Pressing needs:

#2: After-hours staffing for families in crisis

Many of our families learn they have no place to stay for the night at the end of the day, when CSP and other support agencies are closed for the day or weekend. These families often reach out to FCPS in the early evening hours when other agencies are closed. At times, these families are stranded in a school building with no place to go.

Recommendation:

- After-hours staffing for families, outside of current CSP hours.

Pressing needs:

#3 Increased access to transportation

Public transportation in Fairfax County is limited and often does not have routes near public schools or homeless shelters. This creates barriers that prevent our homeless families from accessing needed services such as supplemental food pantries, medical and dental care, and other supports.

Recommendation:

- Review and expand current transportation options in Fairfax County, prioritizing access to the needs of homeless families (shelters, food pantries, community resources, schools, etc.)

Contact Information

FCPS Homeless Education Program

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