

Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program – State Plan (Amended)

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**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
www.education.state.pa.us



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Tom Corbett, Governor

Department of Education
Carolyn C. Dumaresq, Ed.D., Acting Secretary

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Rita D. Perez, Acting Deputy Secretary

Division of Student Services
Carmen M. Medina, Chief

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Pennsylvania Department of Education
Equal Employment Opportunity Representative
Bureau of Human Resources
333 Market Street, 11th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
Voice Telephone: (717) 787-4417
Fax: (717) 783-9348
Text Telephone TTY: (717) 783-8445

For Inquiries Concerning Nondiscrimination in All Other Pennsylvania Department of Education Programs and Activities:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
School Services Unit Director
333 Market Street, 5th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
Voice Telephone: (717) 783-3750
Fax: (717) 783-6802
Text Telephone TTY: (717) 783-8445

If you have any questions about this publication or for additional copies, contact:

Pennsylvania Department of Education	Voice: (717) 783-6466
Bureau of Teaching and Learning	Fax: (717) 783-4392
333 Market Street, 5th Floor	TTY: (717)783-8445
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333	www.education.state.pa.us

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Background: McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Overview

In 1987 the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was signed into law, requiring states to review and revise residency requirements for the enrollment of homeless children and youth. In 1990, the McKinney Act was amended, requiring states to eliminate all enrollment barriers and provide school access and support for academic success for students experiencing homelessness; McKinney funds could then be used to provide direct educational services for eligible students. In 1994 the education portion of the McKinney Act was included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), adding preschool services, greater parental input, and emphasis on interagency collaboration. The latest revision occurred in 2002 where the McKinney Act was reauthorized as the McKinney-Vento Act (Title X, Part C of ESEA), strengthening legislative requirements and requiring all school districts to appoint a local liaison to ensure the law is implemented effectively at the local level.

The McKinney-Vento Act outlines how state educational agencies ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth have equal access to the same free and appropriate public education (FAPE), including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youth and details the rights offered for those students meeting the definition of homeless.

Subtitle B of Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Title X, Part C, of the No Child Left Behind Act) defines "homeless" as follows:

“The term "homeless children and youths"--

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and

(B) 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; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

(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 (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

(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).”

In the Education for Homeless Youth Basic Education Circular issued February 3, 2010, Pennsylvania further defines “homeless children and youth” as follows to ensure the prompt and accurate identification of these students in order to provide all needed services that support their educational success:

- (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; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- (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” who qualify as homeless under federal law because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii) above. The term "migratory children" means children who are (or whose parent(s) or spouse(s) are) migratory agricultural workers, including migratory dairy workers or migratory fishermen, and who have moved from one school district to another in the preceding 36 months, in order to obtain (or accompany such parents or spouses in order to obtain) temporary or seasonal employment in agricultural or fishing work.
- (v) Children and youths “awaiting foster care placement,” which means children who are placed in shelters, emergency foster care, transitional foster care or respite care. These placement settings are intended to be short term, and do not typically last longer than 30 days. However, individual circumstances may, at times, require a longer length of stay. If the placement exceeds 30 days, contact should be made with the child welfare worker and the local McKinney-Vento coordinator to determine if there is any valid reason to conclude that the child is still “awaiting foster care placement.”
- (vi) "Unaccompanied homeless youth" including any child who is "not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian." This includes youth who have run away from home, been thrown out of their home, been abandoned by parents or guardians, or separated from their parents for any other reason.

Communication and collaboration among education and child welfare professionals is critical to support school stability and continuity for children in out-of-home care. The McKinney-Vento Act requires child welfare and local education agencies to work together to promote school stability and continuity including trying to ensure children remain in the school in which they were enrolled at the time of placement when it is in their best interest. Best practice would suggest that decisions be made collaboratively between school personnel, child welfare agencies and any other individual involved in the child’s case including the child, resource parent, child advocate and attorney. It is imperative that caseworkers and school district administration and staff work together to help ensure the educational progress of all students. Local school officials should consult with their Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Program regional, site, and state coordinators, whenever necessary to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether a child is "awaiting foster care placement."

History: Summary of Pennsylvania's Implementation of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act

After the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Act was signed in July of 1987 the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) established the office of state coordinator in 1988 and then offered local education agencies (LEA) the opportunity to submit proposals for McKinney-Vento grants. Early in 1989 five program sites were established at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, Allentown School District, Bucks County Intermediate Unit, Lancaster School District and Philadelphia School District. The state plan, required by the United States Department of Education, was submitted by PDE in 1988 and amended in 1991, 1995, 2002 and 2006. Upon submission, the United States Department of Education must approve the state plan.

In September of 1988, the first Basic Education Circular on homeless youth was issued to offer guidance to LEAs regarding implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. It was revised in 2000, amended in 2005 to include the mandates of the newly reauthorized No Child Left Behind Act, revised in February 2010, and then updated in September 2011 based on changes to the McKinney-Vento Act. The current Basic Education Circular and other Basic Education Circulars related to homelessness can be accessed at www.education.state.pa.us/homeless. Many of the program's core publications were developed and distributed in the early 1990's and are still available now - including the back to school letters, School District Homeless Liaison Directory and other key publications such as the informational posters and booklets available free of charge to the state's stakeholder groups.

The program's current regional structure provides for eight program areas and eight regional coordinators located in the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, Pittsburgh; the ARIN Intermediate Unit, Indiana; the Berks County Intermediate Unit, Reading; the Bucks County Intermediate Unit, Doylestown; the Lincoln Intermediate Unit, New Oxford (ECYEH office located in York); Luzerne Intermediate Unit, Kingston; Midwestern Intermediate Unit, Grove City; and the School District of Philadelphia. The additional site coordinators and intermediate unit liaisons that support the program and the work of the regional coordinators are located in Allentown School District, Allentown; ARIN Intermediate Unit, Indiana; Berks County Intermediate Unit, Reading; Capital Area Intermediate Unit, Mechanicsburg; Chester County Intermediate Unit, Downingtown; Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center (ECYEH office located in Grindstone); Midwestern Intermediate Unit (three staff in Butler, Grove City and New Castle); Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, Norristown; Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit, Edinboro; Riverview Intermediate Unit (two staff in Clarion); School District of the City of Erie, Erie; and School District of Lancaster, (two staff in Lancaster). Through this regional structure complete coverage of all areas of the state is possible.

Program Goals, Support and Technical Assistance

The goals of Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program (ECYEH) are to:

1. ensure that all children and youth experiencing homelessness enroll, participate, and have the opportunity to succeed in school;
2. ensure children and youth experiencing homelessness receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) on an equal basis with all other children in the state; and
3. eliminate and/or reduce educational barriers through the use of local “best practices” and the authorized activities of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act.

The main objectives of the program are to:

1. reduce the disruption in the educational lives of children and youth experiencing homelessness;
2. increase awareness about the nature and extent of the problems children and youth experiencing homelessness have enrolling in and gaining access to educational programs and services;
3. explain laws and policies already in place, which overcome these barriers;
4. build on laws and policies already in place, which overcome these barriers;
5. build the capacity of others to assist identifying, enrolling, and ensuring the educational success of children and youth experiencing homelessness; and
6. provide opportunities to collaborate with other statewide initiatives such as special education, Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII), early childhood education, and Title I to improve academic achievement.

Pennsylvania’s regional approach provides eight regional coordinators whose primary responsibility is to implement the program goals and objectives. The regional coordinator position is made possible by competitive bid on a three-year cycle. In some cases the regional coordinators subcontract for additional support (site coordinators) within their region and/or use existing intermediate unit staff to support the program. The role of the ECYEH regional and site coordinators is to increase program awareness among various stakeholder groups, as well as the general public, to facilitate accurate and prompt identification of students experiencing homelessness and to ensure compliance with all McKinney-Vento Act requirements.

Professional development continues to be a main focus of the program – from individualized training and technical assistance to statewide conferences open to all professionals working in any capacity with these students. Regular training is provided to the coordinators to ensure they

are equipped to deal with all situations relating to the education of students experiencing homelessness. The network of regional and site coordinators are then charged with providing training and technical assistance to the students, families, schools, providers and other stakeholder groups. With this multi-faceted approach, based on the needs of each community, the rights and responsibilities of all parties related to the education of students experiencing homelessness are reinforced. Additionally, PDE contracts with the Center for Schools and Communities, a subsidiary of the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit to provide technical assistance to the coordinators and LEAs. The homeless state coordinator is responsible for program coordination and collaboration at the state level, as well as dispute resolutions among LEAs. This three-pronged approach supports all LEAs in Pennsylvania in complying with the McKinney-Vento Act.

Evaluation Design and Activities

PDE's Division of Student Services contracted with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit to conduct a comprehensive external evaluation of the ECYEH Program for the 2011-12 program year.

The purpose of the evaluation of Pennsylvania's ECYEH Program is to: examine the extent to which coordinators are providing support to LEAs to meet the goals and objectives of the program; examine the extent to which those students identified as experiencing homelessness receive services and support; identify the types of services and supports students received; and build capacity within each region to examine results and make improvements based on data. The 2011-12 program evaluation represents the first full year of data collection. For 2010-11, even though data collection was retroactive to the beginning of the program year (July 1, 2010), the program evaluation did not begin until January 2011. Training is conducted at the beginning of each program year for any new staff responsible for reporting and also to serve as a refresher.

The *Comprehensive State Performance Report* and *EDFacts* federal reporting file formats were used to identify all the required reporting data elements. Additionally, evaluators used the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth's quality standards and evaluation guidance to ensure adequate data was included in the evaluation. Evaluators worked with PDE to ensure that all data elements were identified and no duplication of work was required on the part of the LEAs. This meant that some data was collected at the program level and some data was collected at the state level.

It is important to note that with the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act all LEAs, regardless of the services they receive from Pennsylvania's ECYEH Program, are required to provide information on students who attend their schools. Additionally, all non-LEAs receiving direct or indirect services through Pennsylvania's ECYEH Program are required to provide information on children and youth who attend their schools or reside in their facilities. In Pennsylvania's case, non-LEAs typically refers to shelters and non-LEA Head Start/Early Head Start/pre-Kindergarten programs. To collect data at the program level, evaluators created a spreadsheet template for maintaining student information and service delivery data. The *Student Information and Service Delivery* data instrument included individual child/youth homeless information and service delivery data, including the type of funding supporting the

services(s). The PAsecureID was one of the data elements collected for students who were enrolled in school.

LEAs (the homeless liaison) in which students were enrolled, shelters in which students resided, and regional or site coordinators all completed and submitted the data. The way that each of these groups completed the instrument varied by region. However, each regional coordinator was responsible for collecting and compiling the spreadsheet for their region and submitting it to evaluators at designated times throughout the year. Part of the evaluator's task was to establish a unique, comprehensive list of students in order to request from the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) additional student demographic, assessment, and other outcome data needed for both federal reporting and evaluation.

To create the comprehensive list of students and as part of the initial evaluation in 2010-11, evaluators cross-referenced the students from three data systems: 1) the *Student Information and Service Delivery* spreadsheet described previously; 2) MIS2000, the state migrant database; and 3) PIMS, the state student database, for those students flagged as experiencing homelessness to create the unique comprehensive list of students. This initial cross-referencing provided insight into the degree to which each source identified the same individuals. Typically, school districts coded students in PIMS as experiencing homelessness and it was the ECYEH Program's responsibility to verify these students. This coding is used to prepare various state reports including the *Comprehensive State Performance Report* and *EDFacts*.

The outcome of the cross-referencing process in 2010-11 revealed that the ECYEH Program and the entities that completed and submitted the *Student Information and Service Delivery* instrument was the best avenue to designate students experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the cross-referencing revealed that the Migrant Education Program and its recruiters would be the best source to determine homelessness experienced by migrant students. Consequently these revelations resulted in improvements to data collection expectations for 2011-12.

Evaluators, PIMS staff, and ECYEH program staff worked together to secure permission for the ECYEH evaluation data collection to serve as the official source for flagging students experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania. To accomplish this, a process was established wherein homelessness status was provided to the PIMS system for all other PDE reporting that might include this population. Additionally for the evaluation, evaluators created three data collection instruments to look at program implementation beyond the information provided in the *Student Information and Service Delivery* instrument. These included the *Student Activity Detail*, *Parent Activity Detail*, and *Technical Assistance and Professional Development Detail* instruments. Coordinators completed these instruments.

The *Student Activity Detail*, the *Parent Activity Detail*, and the *Technical Assistance and Professional Development Detail* instruments captured information related to services coordinators provided to groups of students, parents, LEAs, or other organizations working with this population. Evaluators also collected monitoring reports from monitoring visits that the Center for Schools and Communities conducted to complete an analysis of program implementation. To look at student demographics, homeless information, and academic outcomes, evaluators examined individual student information from the *Student Information and*

Service Delivery spreadsheets, state assessments (PSSA), and the state data system (PIMS). Evaluators also collected Title I funding information and National School Lunch Program school data to examine the demographics of schools identified as having students experiencing homelessness.

Finally, to adhere to confidentiality in reporting afforded to domestic violence shelters, evaluators used a separate data collection instrument and procedure for youth residing in domestic violence shelters. This instrument and procedure was developed in 2010-11 in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV). This instrument captured some demographic information related to school attendance, data related to student services received at the facility, and information related to working with ECYEH. Only domestic violence (DV) shelters receiving direct or indirect services from the ECYEH program were required to report.

During the 2011-12 program year 19,914 children or youth were reported as experiencing homelessness and ‘served’ by the ECYEH program, of which 18,231 were identified as ‘enrolled’ in school. Students experiencing homelessness represented about one percent of the total Pennsylvania public school enrolled population in 2011-12. Children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified by their nighttime status and are reported based on their age or grade category, which determines if they are ‘served’ by the program and/or ‘enrolled’ in school. ‘Served’ includes all children and youth meeting the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness by age/grade categories including birth-age two, ages three to five not enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten, Pre-Kindergarten (Head Start or Pre-Kindergarten programs), kindergarten through 12th grade including ungraded, and out of school youth. ‘Enrolled’ includes a subset of ‘served’ categories and includes Pre-Kindergarten (LEA only) through 12th grade including ungraded. For further information, the full evaluation report for 2011-2012 can be found at the PDE website at www.education.state.pa.us/homeless.

State Plan Guidelines

“SECTION 722

(g) STATE PLAN

‘(1) IN GENERAL - Each State shall submit to the Secretary a plan to provide for the education of homeless children and youth within the State. Such plan shall include the following:

‘(A) A description of how such children and youth are (or will be) given the opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic achievement standards all students are expected to meet.’”

Children and youth experiencing homelessness are currently given the opportunity to meet the same challenging state academic achievement standards all students are expected to meet. Pennsylvania’s students experiencing homelessness are not separated from the mainstream school environment, and are given free access to all educational and auxiliary services that the public schools provide all students. The doors to public education are open to these children and youth in the Commonwealth. In addition, the ECYEH regional and site coordinators provide additional support to these students so they can not only attend school, but also experience success.

“(B) A description of the procedures the state educational agency will use to identify such children and youth in the state and to assess their special needs.”

Identification and Assessment of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Since 1988 the identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness and the assessment of their special needs has been accomplished on several fronts. See Pennsylvania’s expanded definition of “homeless children and youth” on pages 5-6 of this document.

1. The state coordinator collaborates with agencies on a state level and is available for calls and input on identification and special needs of students experiencing homelessness – this is facilitated through work with representatives of the Pennsylvania Departments of Health, Welfare and Education and through telephone and email. Discussion in the areas of early childhood development, special education services and the use of Title I funds are conducted internally with appropriate staff. The state coordinator attends and participates in the State Interagency Council for Early Intervention of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning to facilitate identification of and services for younger children experiencing homelessness.

Coordination with Housing Agencies:

The state coordinator attends and participates in Pennsylvania's Homeless Consumers Subcommittee of the Statewide Continuum of Care Group of the Department of Community and Economic Development to support the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. ECYEH regional and site coordinators attend meetings of the local Continuum of Care groups, housing coalitions, regional homeless advisory boards (Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development), and other community groups focused on addressing the housing needs of families and children.

Students experiencing homelessness in out-of-home care:

Communication and collaboration among education and child welfare professionals is critical to support school stability and continuity for children in out-of-home care. PDE has been collaborating with the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families to ensure ongoing cooperation. The law requires child welfare and local education agencies to work together to promote school stability and continuity including trying to ensure children remain in the school in which they were enrolled at the time of placement when it is in their best interest. Best practice would suggest that decisions be made collaboratively between school personnel, child welfare agencies and any other individual involved in the child's case including the child, resource parent, child advocate and attorney. It is imperative that caseworkers and school district administration and staff work together to help ensure the educational progress of all students. Local school officials should consult with their ECYEH Program regional, site, and state coordinators, whenever necessary to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether a child is "awaiting foster care placement."

2. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators are located in eight regions which cover the entire state. They identify the students, assess their needs and respond with federal services. Several regions also secure donations (monetary and items) or other funding through various resources to better meet this population's needs.
3. Local Educational Agency (LEA) Homeless Liaisons have been in place in the Commonwealth since 1989. These individuals' names are monitored for accuracy at least annually, so that each of the 499 school districts, 29 intermediate units, 12 comprehensive career and technical centers, and 173 charter/cyber schools can be in a position to provide valuable data. A directory of all liaisons is available online at <http://homeless.center-school.org/directory> to any interested party; contact information is provided to facilitate coordination of services for students experiencing homeless within and between schools and other agencies working with these youth.
4. Family shelters, domestic violence shelters and runaway youth facilities continue to be utilized as key points of contact for identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Development of and access to a statewide *Shelter Directory* of providers serving families with children by county greatly aids in this process. The shelter directory can also be found at <http://homeless.center-school.org/directory>.

Statewide Resources: the Center for Schools and Communities of the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit can be reached at 717-763-1661 by school districts, shelters and agencies for information and resources to meet the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. The following websites can also provide information: www.education.state.pa.us/homeless and <http://homeless.center-school.org>

Dispute Resolution Procedure

“(C) A description of procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding the educational placement of homeless children and youths.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the child/youth must be immediately admitted to the school in which he/she is seeking enrollment, pending resolution of the dispute [Sec. 722 (g)(3)(E)(I)].

The parent or guardian must be provided with a written explanation of the school’s decision on the dispute, including the right to appeal [Sec. 722(g)(3)(E)(ii)].

The parent/guardian/youth must be referred to the school district homeless contact person, who will carry out the state’s dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute [Sec. 722(g)(3)(iv)].”

When disputes or complaints of non-compliance arise regarding the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) recommends that:

- A. The person having the complaint first contact the school or school district (i.e. the local school district contact person for students experiencing homelessness, the principal, or superintendent) to present their concerns to the people closest to the situation and most likely to be able to resolve it quickly.
- B. If Step A is not successful or is not possible under the circumstances, contact should be made with the appropriate ECYEH regional or site coordinator, or the Department of Education will accept complaints directly at (717) 783-6466.
- C. The state homeless coordinator may also refer individual cases to the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Office of Chief Counsel, as needed. The Pennsylvania Department of Education will deliver a response within 20 business days of the receipt of the complaint. The complaint may arrive in the form of a copy of the school/district letter or on the Dispute Letter Form if given directly to a Liaison of the ECYEH Program.

Note: Before the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Office of Chief Counsel and the Office of the Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education will get involved in a Dispute Resolution, the ECYEH regional/site coordinators are advised to consult with their Solicitor.

Programs to Heighten Awareness

“(D) A description of programs for school personnel (including principals, attendance officers, teachers, enrollment personnel, and pupil services personnel) to heighten the awareness of such personnel of the specific needs of runaway and homeless youth.”

1. Conduct school staff awareness workshops on the enrollment process, including office personnel, at key schools that receive a large number of students experiencing homelessness. Stress the importance of responding with records on a timely basis, as well as creating a file for every homeless child, regardless of the length of time they are in the school. All school districts now have an assigned homeless liaison to assist with the identification of, and services for, children and youth experiencing homelessness. Each ECYEH regional office continually focuses training and orientation efforts on new personnel identified to serve as homeless liaisons, and also provides information and training in group training settings such as regional meetings and targeted LEA trainings as needed or requested. Specific populations of school personnel working with students are trained, including counselors, social workers, nurses, teachers, administrators or home and school visitors, and any individuals involved in the enrollment process such as school secretaries or front office staff who may be the first point of contact for a family or youth experiencing homelessness.
2. Send letters from the Pennsylvania Department of Education each fall to every superintendent and school district homeless liaison regarding the Basic Education Circulars and the importance of transferring records promptly. The information in this mailing is provided to all school district superintendents, school building principals, Intermediate Unit directors and homeless liaisons and includes the following resources: Pennsylvania’s Education of Homeless Youth Basic Education Curricular, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Compliance Checklist, the current ECYEH Map which provides the statewide regional coordinators’ contact information on the back, and the ECYEH Resource Order Form for publications provided to support the program.
3. Provide in-service programs within the school districts of the eight ECYEH Program regional sites. The regional and site staff provide individualized and group training and orientation to their assigned LEAs as needed and requested to reinforce the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.
4. Ensure coordination with providers working with families to facilitate prompt identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness. The regional and site staff work directly with the providers in their respective areas to increase awareness and support full compliance with the McKinney-Vento requirements. The state coordinator and technical assistance/training provider facilitate informational displays with educational program materials and training sessions at relevant statewide conferences to promote increased awareness.

5. Conduct on-site technical assistance visits as requested, using services provided through the State Support Grant. The regional and site coordinators provide technical assistance as needed through on-site meetings with LEAs and provider staff, and also correspond with stakeholders on a regular basis via telephone and email when questions about students eligibility or available services arise. Technical assistance is also provided by the state coordinator and the technical assistance/training coordinator when needed by regional staff or stakeholders.
6. Continue to develop and enhance awareness through the work of the ECYEH Public Relations Committee which is exploring ways to promote the program and ensure full and accurate identification of students experiencing homelessness. Ongoing and planned activities include awareness events at the statewide conference; special projects on the regional level such as poster contests, blanket projects, presentations to and partnerships with local service groups; the use of QR (quick response) codes on regional posters and other program resources; development and use of informational posters to be tailored to each region; and the use of social media via an ECYEH Facebook page .
7. Use the ECYEH Pennsylvania Department of Education website, the ECYEH Center for Schools and Communities website, the ECYEH Facebook page, and regional websites to keep school personnel informed of issues surrounding homelessness.

Procedures to Ensure Eligibility for Federal, State and Local Food Programs

“(E) A description of procedures that ensure that homeless children and youth who meet the relevant eligibility criteria are able to participate in federal, state, or local food programs.”

In Pennsylvania, school district homeless liaisons, guidance counselors and McKinney-Vento regional and site coordinators are involved to ensure that families and youth experiencing homelessness are assured immediate access to school meal programs, as mandated by the United States Department of Agriculture. Statewide, regional and local trainings reinforce the automatic eligibility of these students for school meal programs. Collaboration on the local, regional and statewide level between various state departments and local agencies occurs as needed.

Equal Access to Public Preschool Programs

“(F) A description of procedures that ensure that–

‘(i) homeless children have equal access to the same public preschool programs, administered by the State agency, as provided to other children in the State;’

Whenever possible, age appropriate children experiencing homelessness are placed in a Head Start program. If it is determined that a younger student should be in a public pre-Kindergarten classroom, and this classroom exists in a district, that student will be provided this placement. Head Start and other pre-school program staff are included in state, regional and local trainings and meetings to encourage and facilitate cross-system collaboration. Collaboration on the statewide level within and among various state departments occurs as needed. ECYEH regional and site coordinators participate in Local Interagency Coordinating Councils and other groups focused on ensuring appropriate educational opportunities for younger children.

Assistance for Youths Separated from the Public Schools

“(ii) homeless youth and youth separated from the public schools are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services;”

The ECYEH regional and site coordinators make every attempt to identify youth experiencing homelessness and any who are currently separated from the public schools. The coordinators assist in enrollment. The regional staff often serve as advocates for these youth to ensure their full access to appropriate educational services as well as housing and medical services that the youth may require. The regional staff support unaccompanied youth in their pursuit of post-secondary education by providing written verification of their unaccompanied status for the youth’s application for financial aid when needed. The local school district homeless liaison is also educated in this matter, and is the key contact in the 499 school districts, 29 intermediate units, 12 comprehensive career and technical centers, and 173 charter/cyber schools that can be in a position to provide valuable data to provide equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services.

Participation in Before-and After-School Care Programs

“(iii) homeless children and youth who meet the relevant eligibility criteria are able to participate in federal, state, or local before-and after-school care programs.”

Two main procedural issues in this matter are (1) the identification of the need for before- and/or after-school care programs for children and youth experiencing homelessness, and (2) the availability of such programs in a given district, school or community. Resources vary greatly by geography in a large state like Pennsylvania. Every effort will be made to ensure that children needing this care will be connected to the available services. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators are able to further assist in this effort through collaboration with local shelters and other providers, as well as to use federal funding or local donations to ensure these supplemental services are provided when needed.

Strategies to Address Problems and Meet Educational Needs

“(G) Strategies to address problems identified in the report provided to the Secretary under subsection (f)(3).

“(3) collect and transmit to the Secretary, at such time and in such manner as the Secretary may require, a report containing such information as the Secretary determines is necessary to assess the educational needs of homeless children and youth within the State;”

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has conducted three statewide Census projects since 1988. It will continue, as directed by the secretary of education, to collect and report information regarding the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

The ECYEH program now has a statewide data collection system which makes available statistical and program delivery data to inform necessary program changes. This state-wide evaluation is a requirement of the federal funds that support this program’s operation in Pennsylvania. The purpose of the evaluation is to examine the implementation and outcomes of ECYEH, determine the services students experiencing homelessness and their families receive, and to examine academic outcomes of these school-age children. The statewide evaluation collects data regarding the following components:

- 1) an overview of who is represented in the data in terms of LEAs, shelters, and children and youth,
- 2) student demographics as they relate to federal definitions of homelessness,
- 3) other student demographics that also reflect family demographics,
- 4) Title I and free and reduced lunch status of schools the children and youth attend,
- 5) barriers to enrollment,
- 6) services provided to LEAs, shelters, organizations, and families by the ECYEH program,
- 7) services provided to children and youth through the LEA, shelters or the ECYEH program, and
- 8) student state academic outcomes.

“(H) Strategies to address other problems with respect to the education of homeless children and youth, including problems resulting from enrollment delays that are caused by–

‘(i) immunization and medical records requirements”

PDE will follow this federal statute to comply:

“(iii) If the child or youth needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the enrolling school shall immediately refer the parent or guardian of the child or youth to the local educational agency liaison designated under paragraph

(1)(J)(ii), who shall assist in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records, in accordance with subparagraph (D).”

The regional and site staff encounter very few barriers related to immunization and medical records requirements due to the existence of the regional offices and their ongoing training and awareness efforts with all of the LEAs and providers in their respective regions.

“(ii) residency requirements;

Identify LEAs (Local Education Agencies) which continue to use laws, regulations, practices or policies that may act as barriers to school enrollment, and offer technical assistance as needed to LEAs to reduce or eliminate any local barriers to school attendance and school success.”

The updated Basic Education Circular 42 U.S.C. § 11431 Education for Homeless Youth includes language from new legislation from McKinney-Vento reauthorization. This Basic Education Circular is distributed to school districts and provider agency personnel, which explains that for enrollment purposes students experiencing homelessness do not need to prove residency. The annual *Back to School letter* includes the Basic Education Circular as an attachment. The regional and site staff review the specific LEA policies which guide their work with students experiencing homelessness and offer advice or guidance in updating policies and practices that could act as barriers to school enrollment. The regional staff provide examples of exemplary school district homeless policy statements on their regional websites as a reference tool for LEAs updating their policies and practices.

“(iii) lack of birth certificates, school records, or other documentation;”

The Basic Education Circular addresses issues related to documentation for children experiencing homelessness and states that “liaisons are required to assist children and youths who do not have documentation of immunizations or medical records to obtain necessary immunizations or necessary medical documentation” and that “the selected school shall immediately enroll the child or youth in school, even if the child or youth lacks records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of residency or other documentation.” The regional and site staff encounter very few barriers related to lack of birth certificates, school records, or other documentation due to the existence of the regional offices and their ongoing training and awareness efforts with the LEAs and providers in their respective regions.

“(iv) guardianship issues;”

The Basic Education Circular addresses all aspects of mandates of the law with regard to children who are not under the supervision of their parent, but with a guardian. Pennsylvania law/regulations mandates that the board of school directors of a school district in which there is located an agency, supervised or licensed shelter, group home, maternity home, residence,

facility, orphanage or other institution for care or training of children or adolescents, shall admit to the district's public schools school-aged children who are living at or assigned to the facility or institution and who are residents of the district or another district in Pennsylvania. Further, the definition of "supervised or licensed shelters" includes those facilities which provide temporary shelter for a specified, limited period of time. Therefore, children in temporary shelters and children who "lack a fixed, regular, adequate night time residence" – homeless children – are entitled to free school privileges from either the school district in which their person or the shelter is located or the school district of origin. Homeless students who may reside in hotels, motels, cars, tents or temporarily doubled-up with a resident family because of lack of housing are presently unable to establish "homes" on a permanent basis and therefore are not required to prove residency regarding school enrollment and are enrolled without delay, in the district where they are presently residing or continue their education in the district of prior attendance.

“(v) uniform or dress code requirements.”

In terms of uniform requirements, the ECYEH regional and site coordinators will work with school districts to obtain the uniforms either from the school districts at no cost or will use McKinney-Vento funds or donations to purchase them, if possible, depending on availability of funding. Some regional or site staff also solicit donations that can meet the students’ needs for uniforms or appropriate school attire.

Compliance with Maintenance of School Records

The Pennsylvania Department of Education will follow this federal mandate to comply:

“(D) RECORDS. -- Any record ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, and evaluation for special services or programs, regarding each homeless child or youth shall be maintained—

“(i) so that the records are available, in a timely fashion, when a child or youth enters a new school or school district; and

“(ii) in a manner consistent with section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g).”

Policies to Remove Educational Barriers

“(I) A demonstration that the state educational agency and local educational agencies in the state have developed, and shall review and revise, policies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youths in schools in the state.”

The staff located in the eight ECYEH regional offices and site offices review the policies of their assigned LEAs for consistency with the McKinney-Vento expectations. Examples of thorough and comprehensive homeless students policies are provided on regional office websites to be used by any LEA that has to develop or revise their homeless student policy. In some cases the regional staff have directly assisted LEAs in the revision of their homeless student policy. Training, regional meetings, and staff orientation provided by the regional staff helps to ensure that LEA policies do not cause nor perpetuate barriers to the enrollment and retention of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Pennsylvania's ECYEH Program has identified ten educational barriers to address through program implementation, feedback from the network of ECYEH regional and site coordinators, and information from the field garnered through training needs assessments. These common barriers are corroborated through the issues addressed by the National Center for Homeless Education and through workshop sessions provided at the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. All statewide activities and the work of the regional and site coordinators focus on these barriers in order to reduce or eliminate them to minimize their negative impact on children and youth experiencing homelessness.

1. Residency and Guardianship Requirements and Other School Enrollment/Attendance Practices

The ECYEH staff work with local LEAs to ensure that school/district policies and procedures do not create barriers for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The ECYEH staff share sample exemplary policy statements with schools/districts and also review the schools/districts' existing policies to offer suggestions for the revision of their policies to ensure they do not pose barriers for these students. Of particular interest currently is the need to define and identify the residency versus physical address of children experiencing homelessness, especially with the growing number of charter schools and cyber charter schools within the state.

2. Lack of Coordination, Collaboration and Cooperation

Every effort is made on a statewide, regional and local level to ensure ongoing communication, cooperation and follow-up with all stakeholders to ensure that students experiencing homeless attend school and are provided with necessary services while minimizing the overlap of services. Sessions are provided at the annual statewide conference to encourage and facilitate cross-system coordination to benefit these students. Regular meetings and trainings provided by the network of ECYEH regional and site coordinators helps to minimize these issues on the regional and local levels.

3. Lack of Program Continuity and Delays in Educational Evaluation and Placement

Practice and research confirm that children and youth experiencing homelessness often attend multiple schools in any given academic year, which has the potential to impede their educational progress. Irregular school attendance may interrupt continuity within any child's curriculum, as well as the implementation of important assessment procedures necessary for any student receiving special or supportive educational programs.

Therefore training, technical assistance and conscious coordination efforts on a case by case basis depending on the needs of each child help to ensure that the needs of all students experiencing homelessness are met.

4. Lack of Transportation to Stay in the School of Origin When It is in the Best Interest of the Student

Technical assistance is provided by the network of ECYEH regional and site coordinators on a daily basis to respond to and solve transportation issues experienced by this population. The rights of children experiencing homelessness to attend their school of origin are of utmost concern. The program provides a *Child Accounting Guidelines Booklet* as a training and informational tool to the field; this booklet outlines specific transportation issues and their appropriate resolution and is revised regularly based on current program practices and experience. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators address transportation barriers as needed on an individual, district-level, and regional level through informal contact with schools, parents and community-based agencies and through formal meetings and trainings with stakeholder groups to ensure adherence to the intent of the law.

5. Delays in Academic and Health Records

Based on feedback from the field, access to academic and health records of students experiencing homelessness rarely poses a barrier within the state. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators facilitate requests for records in a timely manner – even when the child is from out of state or even out of country – to mitigate this barrier. In many cases faxing has facilitated timely responses to record requests, and health officials such as school nurses often verify immunization records by phone. All stakeholders are educated about the mandate for immediate enrollment, even when records are not immediately available. The state coordinator facilitates a special procedure when needed for domestic violence situations to ensure anonymity for these families.

6. Lack of Awareness Among School Personnel

A primary role of the ECYEH regional and site coordinators is increasing the education and awareness of school district personnel to the McKinney-Vento mandates. Each region provides formal training opportunities for school personnel through regional meetings, training sessions for specific school districts and/or targeted groups of school personnel (e.g. superintendents, principals and school counselors), and orientation/training for school personnel who are new to the role of school district homeless liaison. Training and materials are provided on an as-needed basis and can include sample policies and procedures and/or regional brochures which describe the intricacies of each regional area. The annual *Back to School letter*, distributed to school district superintendents, building principals, Intermediate Unit directors and school district homeless liaisons provides the Basic Education Circular, a McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Compliance Checklist and access to the ECYEH publications – including the ECYEH regional map and educational posters and the PDE *Child Accounting Guidelines Booklet*. In addition, ECYEH regional coordinators assist the

ECYEH state coordinator in presentations provided annually at the statewide child accounting conference to reinforce eligibility and transportation rights of students experiencing homelessness.

7. Inadequate Parental Response

Both the ECYEH state coordinator and the network of regional and site coordinators respond on a regular basis to parents' questions and concerns to ensure that families experiencing homelessness know what actions they should take, are given the highest quality of support, and are provided with the encouragement and guidance needed to enroll their children in school while maintaining the students' educational progress. The goal is to better educate these parents and caregivers to minimize the likelihood that an inadequate or inappropriate parental response can pose a barrier. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators conduct parent trainings and meet with and/or consult individually with parents experiencing homelessness to mitigate this barrier.

8. Social Embarrassment

Due to the stigmatization of homelessness, the ECYEH staff is cognizant that parents may be embarrassed and fearful of reactions from school officials if their homelessness were discovered and that children and youth experiencing homelessness may be reluctant to attend school if they feel they will be treated differently after exposing their homeless situation. Because the ECYEH staff facilitates an open line of communication between and among shelters, other agencies and schools every effort is made to ensure confidentiality and to minimize the embarrassment of students experiencing homelessness. Pennsylvania is also aware that in our many rural areas family homelessness is often hidden, and therefore special outreach and awareness activities help to reach this population.

9. Transiency Among Families With Preschool Children

Outreach to and coordination with early childhood providers on the state and local level has been increasing in recent years. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators are required to link eligible preschoolers experiencing homelessness with educational programs such as Head Start and other local preschool programs. The ECYEH staff work with local and state resources to identify and enroll these preschoolers and support the continuity of their early education experience. Collaboration is also encouraged and facilitated on a statewide basis through cross-system training opportunities provided at the annual ECYEH state conference.

10. Lack of Access and Knowledge of Available Services for Runaway and Chronically Homeless

The population of runaway and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in the state has been increasing in recent years. There is also a corresponding dearth of available shelters and services for this population in certain areas in the state. In some cases chronically homeless families have over-used the service system, which can lead to their

inability to access the services they require. It is the role of the ECYEH regional and site coordinators to make special efforts to identify and serve these “hidden” youth and to support chronically homeless families in appropriate ways to access available services. In some areas special programs have been developed or funded to address the needs of runaway and unaccompanied homeless youth.

Assurances Regarding No Stigmatization or Segregation

“(J) Assurances that–

‘(i) the State educational agency and local educational agencies in the State will adopt policies and practices to ensure that homeless children and youth are not stigmatized or segregated on the basis of their status as homeless;’

It is the policy of the Pennsylvania Department of Education that no child or youth experiencing homelessness will be stigmatized or segregated on the basis of their status as homeless, and there will be no separate school established because of homelessness alone.

Designation of Local Educational Agency Liaison

“(ii) local educational agencies will designate an appropriate staff person, who may also be a coordinator for other Federal programs, as a local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youth, to carry out the duties described in paragraph (6)(A); and”

Every LEA in Pennsylvania has designated an appropriate staff person to be the local school district homeless liaison. These names are published and maintained in a statewide directory, which is accessible online to any interested party. Each school district Homeless Liaison is informed through training/orientation and educational materials of their responsibilities to:

- identify homeless children and youths with assistance by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
- inform parents or guardians of educational rights and related opportunities available to their children and provide them with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
- disseminate public notice of the educational rights of homeless students where children and youths receive services under the McKinney-Vento Act (such as schools, family shelters and food pantries);
- mediate enrollment disputes in accordance with the Enrollment Dispute section of the Basic Education Circular;
- inform the parent or guardian of a homeless child, youth and any unaccompanied youth, of all transportation options, including to the school of origin, and assist in accessing these transportation services;

- ensure that unaccompanied youth are immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of disputes that might arise over school enrollment or placement;
- assist children and youths who do not have documentation of immunizations or medical records to obtain necessary immunizations or necessary medical documentation;
- understand the guidance issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education for the education of homeless students and be ready to explain the Basic Education Circular related to homeless education to school district staff;
- get to know the best resources in the community to assist families with referrals for things such as shelter, counseling, food and transportation;
- distribute information on the subject of homeless students and arrange staff development workshops and presentations for school personnel, including office staff;
- provide standard forms and information about enrollment procedures and key school programs to each shelter in the district;
- become familiar with the various program materials that are available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education;
- collaborate with a school district's special education program to ensure that homeless children who are in need of special education and related services are located, identified and evaluated;
- identify preschool-aged homeless children by working closely with shelters and social service agencies in their area, and by inquiring, at the time families are enrolling homeless children and youths in school, whether the family has preschool-aged children;
- identify unaccompanied homeless youth while respecting their privacy and dignity by providing specific outreach to areas where eligible students who are out of school may congregate; and
- comply with all data collection requirements mandated by the statewide evaluation.

Transportation Policies and Procedures

“(iii) the State and its local educational agencies will adopt policies and practices to ensure that transportation is provided, at the request of the parent or guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the liaison), to and from the school of origin, as determined in paragraph (3)(A), in accordance with the following, as applicable:

‘(I) If the homeless child or youth continues to live in the area served by the local educational agency in which the school of origin is located, the child’s or youth’s transportation to and from the school of origin shall be provided or arranged by the local educational agency in which the school of origin is located.

‘(II) If the homeless child’s or youth’s living arrangements in the area served by the local educational agency of origin terminate and the child or youth, though continuing his or

her education in the school of origin, begins living in an area served by another local educational agency, the local educational agency in which the homeless child or youth is living shall agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing the child with transportation to and from the school of origin. If the local educational agencies are unable to agree upon such method, the responsibility and costs for transportation shall be shared equally.”

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has revised its Basic Education Circular guidance as needed to follow the federal mandates listed above and to ensure best practice in serving students experiencing homelessness. The Basic Education Circular and the federal guidance are posted on the state’s homeless website, the Center for Schools and Communities ECYEH webpage, and also referenced on the regions’ webpages where appropriate. Pennsylvania’s LEAs are required to adopt policies and practices to ensure that transportation is provided, at the request of the parent or guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the liaison), to and from the school of origin. If the homeless student continues to live in the area served by the LEA, that LEA must provide or arrange transportation. If the homeless student moves to an area served by another LEA, though continuing his or her education at the school of origin, the LEA of origin and the LEA in which the student is living must agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation to the school of origin. If the LEAs cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs must be shared equally. Distance, time of year, options available, the effects of a transfer, etc., should all be addressed.

The provision of transportation to the school of origin is based on a students' status as homeless. The provision to remain in the school of origin during the remainder of the academic year is offered to provide for school stability. However, the transportation mandate is for homeless students only. Once a student becomes permanently housed and chooses to remain in their school of origin, it is at the district's discretion to continue to provide or arrange transportation, as appropriate. The district is under no statutory obligation. When it is in the best interest of the student to remain in the school of origin, various acceptable methods of transportation will be explored.

These may include the following:

1. Bus passes
2. Nonpublic school transportation routes
3. Public transit, including bus tokens
4. Taxi service
5. Special education vans
6. Inter-district cooperation, whereby a child is transported to a pick up at the district line, and then transported from that point to the home school location
7. Regular school district buses which are used for special runs across district lines
8. Contracted services to Intermediate Units
9. Parent Reimbursement

Local Educational Agency Requirements Regarding School Placement

“(2) COMPLIANCE–

(A) IN GENERAL- Each plan adopted under this subsection shall also describe how the State will ensure that local educational agencies in the State will comply with the requirements of paragraphs (3) through (7)

(3) LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY REQUIREMENTS

(A) IN GENERAL- The local educational agency serving each child or youth to be assisted under this subtitle shall, according to the child’s or youth’s best interest–

(I) Continue the child’s or youth’s education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness–

(I) In any case in which a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year; or

(II) for the remainder of the academic year, if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year; or

(ii) enroll the child or youth in any public school that non homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.”

IV. School/Best Interest Clause

“(B) BEST INTEREST - In determining the best interest of the child or youth under subparagraph (A), the local educational agency shall--

(i) to the extent feasible, keep a homeless child or youth in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the child’s or youth’s parent or guardian;

(ii) provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal under subparagraph (E), to the homeless child’s or youth’s parent or guardian, if the local educational agency sends such child or youth to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian; and

(iii) in the case of an unaccompanied youth, ensure that the homeless liaison designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii) assists in placement or enrollment decisions under this subparagraph, considers the views of such unaccompanied youth, and provides notice to such youth of the right to appeal under subparagraph (E).”

The “Best Interest” mandates are part of the state’s official guidance through the Basic Education Circular in order to comply with these federal requirements. In determining the best interest of the child or youth under McKinney-Vento Act, the responsibilities of Pennsylvania’s LEAs are:

- to the extent feasible, keep a homeless child or youth in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the child’s or youth’s parent or guardian;
- provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal, to the homeless child’s or youth’s parent or guardian, if the LEA sends such child or youth to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian; and
- in the case of an unaccompanied youth, ensure that the homeless liaison assists in placement or enrollment decisions under this subparagraph, considers the views of such unaccompanied youth and provides notice to such youth of the right to appeal.

Several publications, various ECYEH websites, and training/presentations also include this wording to continue to educate key stakeholders around the state.

Immediate Enrollment and Assistance with Records

(C) ENROLLMENT - (i) The school selected in accordance with this paragraph shall immediately enroll the homeless child or youth, even if the child or youth is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of residency, or other documentation

(ii) The enrolling school shall immediately contact the school last attended by the child or youth to obtain relevant academic and other records.

(iii) If the child or youth needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the enrolling school shall immediately refer the parent or guardian of the child or youth to the local educational agency liaison designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii), who shall assist in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records, in accordance with subparagraph (D).”

A three-pronged approach aids in the compliance of these enrollment mandates.

1. School district homeless liaisons are informed of the “immediate enrollment” mandate and this requirement is also reinforced through correspondence, training and technical assistance.
2. The ECYEH program is exhibited at key state, regional and local conferences to get the message out to principals, guidance counselors and school secretaries, and any other professionals working with students experiencing homelessness.
3. The Basic Education Circular directly cites the federal law and is available to all 499 school districts, 29 intermediate units, 12 comprehensive career and technical centers, and 178 charter/cyber schools and is also posted on-line at the state’s ECYEH website.

“(D) Records - Any record ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, and evaluations for special services or programs, regarding each homeless child or youth shall be maintained--

“(i) so that the records are available, in a timely fashion, when a child or youth enters a new school or school district; and

“(ii) in a manner consistent with section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g).”

The ECYEH regional and site coordinators focus on all federal mandates, including the ones described in (C) Enrollment. Each school district homeless liaison receives instruction through training, materials, correspondence such as a mailing or Penn-Link e-notification or through other correspondence. The selected school immediately enrolls the child or youth in school, even if the child or youth lacks records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of residency or other documentation. The enrolling school immediately contacts the last school attended to obtain relevant records.

In order to ensure immediate enrollment, the LEA is encouraged to: train school enrollment staff about the legal requirement that homeless children and youths be immediately enrolled and provided transportation; review school regulations and policies to ensure that they comply with the McKinney-Vento Act requirements; inform families and youth, in a language they can understand, of their rights; develop clear, understandable and accessible written explanations of decisions and the right to appeal; and expeditiously follow up on any special education or language assistance needs presented by a student.

Enrollment Disputes

“(E) ENROLLMENT DISPUTES - If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school--

- (i) the child or youth shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute;
- (ii) the parent or guardian of the child or youth shall be provided with 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 shall be referred to the local educational agency liaison designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii), who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as described in paragraph (1)(C) as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute; and
- (iv) in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the homeless liaison shall ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.”

The procedures to comply with the Enrollment Dispute clause have already been documented in detail under item IX, Dispute Resolution Process, in the Basic Education Circular. Please refer to this description.

Comparable Services

“(4) COMPARABLE SERVICES - Each homeless child or youth to be assisted under this subtitle shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected under paragraph (3), including the following:

“(A) Transportation services.

“(B) Educational services for which the child or youth meets the eligibility criteria, such as services provided under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 or similar State or local programs, educational programs for children with disabilities, and educational programs for students with limited English proficiency.

“(C) programs in vocational and technical education.

“(D) Programs for gifted and talented students.

“(E) School nutrition programs.”

All students experiencing homelessness, upon enrollment, will be regarded as having equal status to their housed peers, and, therefore, will be offered comparable services as described above

when identified, appropriate and available. Ongoing professional development for the LEAs and collaboration at the state level is provided to assure that LEAs understand comparable services.

Coordination of Services with other Agencies

“(5) COORDINATION

(A) IN GENERAL - Each local educational agency serving homeless children and youths that receives assistance under this subtitle shall coordinate—

(i) the provision of services under this subtitle with local social services agencies and other agencies or programs providing services to homeless children and youth and their families, including services and programs funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (42 U.S.C. 5701 et seq.); and

(ii) with other local educational agencies on inter-district issues, such as transportation or transfer of school records.

(B) HOUSING ASSISTANCE - If applicable, each State educational agency and local educational agency that receives assistance under this subtitle shall coordinate with State and local housing agencies responsible for developing the comprehensive housing affordability strategy described in section 105 of the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 12705) to minimize educational disruption for children and youths who become homeless.

(C) COORDINATION PURPOSE - The coordination required under subparagraphs (A) and (B) shall be designed to—

(i) ensure that homeless children and youth have access and reasonable proximity to available education and related support services; and

(ii) raise the awareness of school personnel and service providers of the effects of short-term stays in a shelter and other challenges associated with homelessness.”

The Pennsylvania Department of Education currently funds eight regional ECYEH sites. Each regional and site coordinator is responsible for developing and/or participating in a task force that complies with all the provisions stated in the Coordination Section (5).

ECYEH regional and site coordinators facilitate and/or are members of local advisory committees and Continuum of Care groups that focus on the needs of families experiencing

homelessness. All subjects are included, from basic resources to housing and enrollment concerns.

Local Educational Agency Liaison Duties

“(6) LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY LIAISON -

(A) DUTIES - Each local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youth, designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii), shall ensure that--

(i) homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies;

(ii) homeless children and youth enroll in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, schools of that local educational agency;

(iii) homeless families, children, and youth receive educational services for which such families, children, and youths are eligible, including Head Start and Even Start programs and preschool programs administered by the local educational agency, and referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services;

(iv) the parents or guardians of homeless children and youth are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;

(v) public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youth is disseminated where such children and youths receive services under this Act, such as schools, family shelters, and soup kitchens;

(vi) enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with paragraph (3)(E); and

(vii) the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, as described in paragraph (1)(J)(iii), and is assisted in accessing transportation to the school that is selected under paragraph (3)(A).

(B) NOTICE - State coordinators established under subsection (d)(3) and local educational agencies shall inform school personnel, service providers, and advocates working with homeless families of the duties of the local educational agency liaisons.”

Special meetings of school district, shelter and agency staff are coordinated by the ECYEH staff as necessary to ensure ongoing information sharing and coordination. Topics are determined by the current needs and resources within each particular community, which may vary between and within ECYEH regions.

Local and State Coordination

“(C) LOCAL AND STATE COORDINATION. - Local educational agency liaisons for homeless children and youth shall, as a part of their duties, coordinate and collaborate with State coordinators and community and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to homeless children and youth.”

In addition, the following activities support cross-system coordination and collaboration:

1. Workshops train educators to identify students experiencing homelessness and to coordinate activities with other agencies.
2. Enrollment is a top priority and the local school district homeless liaisons are kept fully informed of enrollment strategies.
3. Children and youth experiencing homelessness are referred to Head Start or other preschool programs and medical and mental health care services as needed.
4. Parents are informed of the educational rights of their children by ECYEH regional and site coordinators, shelter personnel and school district homeless liaisons.
5. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has had a public notice project through a statewide poster for over 20 years. Thousands of posters have been placed in shelters, agencies, food pantries and school district buildings. The ECYEH poster is available in both English and Spanish. ECYEH staff annually ensure that posters are placed in appropriate locations in schools, shelters and other community locations frequented by families experiencing homelessness.
6. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators have developed extensive referral networks, and often maintain or secure a local resource directory for use by families experiencing homelessness and the staff who work with them.
7. The enrollment dispute process has been in existence since 1995, and has been revised as needed to ensure parents’ and students’ McKinney-Vento rights are maintained.

8. Technical assistance, training and mailings are targeted to school district homeless liaisons to ensure they are prepared to accurately advise homeless parents and guardians of all available services. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators conduct ongoing trainings, meetings and technical assistance throughout the year for parents experiencing homelessness.
9. The ECYEH regional and site coordinators coordinate and collaborate with the state coordinator on an ongoing basis, and through the bi-monthly regional coordinator trainings and the semi-annual meetings of all regional and site coordinators.
10. The Center for Schools and Communities (CSC), as the state’s technical assistance provider, also maintains ongoing contact with the ECYEH regional and site coordinators for the purposes of training and annual monitoring of each regional office and all regional and site staff. The standardized monitoring tool assesses and documents the specific activities of each region to support the McKinney-Vento mandates – including access to educational services, development of appropriate policies and practices, designation of appropriate school district homeless liaisons, immediate enrollment, appropriate transportation, access to free meals and school records, public notice of educational rights, and appropriate use of Title I funds. The CSC is responsible for coordinating professional development activities, including at least five regional coordinator and two full coordinator trainings per year, as well one statewide conference and targeted educational webinars focused on relevant issues identified through formal feedback mechanisms such as training needs assessments conducted with the field. The CSC also works with the state coordinator and the regional/site coordinators to provide educational workshops and program displays at other statewide conferences and events to support awareness; program display boards were developed for use by staff at these events and the ECYEH publications are provided as appropriate.

Review and Revisions

“(7) REVIEW AND REVISIONS.-

(A) IN GENERAL. - Each State educational agency and local educational agency that receives assistance under this subtitle shall review and revise any policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youth in schools that are selected under paragraph (3).

(B) CONSIDERATION. - In reviewing and revising such policies, consideration shall be given to issues concerning transportation, immunization, residency, birth certificates, school records and other documentation, and guardianship.

(C) SPECIAL ATTENTION. - Special attention shall be given to ensuring the enrollment and attendance of homeless children and youth who are not currently attending school.”

The Pennsylvania Department of Education and the ECYEH regional and site coordinators conduct ongoing review and monitoring of any policies that conflict with the federal homeless act. The state's Office of Chief Counsel and staff in the School Services Unit provide legal and professional support on a case by case basis.

State Technical Assistance

“(B) COORDINATION - Such plan shall indicate what technical assistance the State will furnish to local educational agencies and how compliance efforts will be coordinated with the local educational agency liaisons designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii).”

Pennsylvania is geographically diverse, covering almost 45,000 square miles, and includes large cities, expanding suburban regions and extensive rural areas. There are eight ECYEH regions which maintain contact with 499 school districts, 29 intermediate units, 12 comprehensive career and technical centers, and 178 charter/cyber schools and other entities working with families experiencing homelessness through the use of coordinators and liaisons.

Pennsylvania's ECYEH Program ensures that each student and preschooler experiencing homelessness has access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) on an equal basis with all other children in the Commonwealth. The Center for Schools and Communities and the Allegheny Intermediate Unit provide cross-system programmatic and data collection support to the Pennsylvania Department of Education in planning, coordinating, training, implementing, and reporting on objectives and activities necessary to reduce barriers, serve the eight regions and respond to other requests within and outside of Pennsylvania as they arise.

Support and technical assistance services to the Pennsylvania Department of Education include compiling data, reporting and distribution of the data results; monitoring the number and needs of children experiencing homelessness; assistance with developing and coordinating training and webinars; publishing and distributing publications; utilizing the program promotion materials to build awareness of issues facing students experiencing homelessness; securing, developing and distributing relevant information and materials; responding to questions from the field; coordinating and participating in the bi-monthly training of regional coordinators, the semi-annual training of the entire network of regional and site coordinators and the annual statewide conference.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education began making subgrants available in 1989 and complies with all aspects of Section 723. Local Educational Agency Subgrants for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

A formal application and approval process has been established regarding the provision of subgrants. Each regional coordinator is responsible for all program activity within their assigned area of the state, including data collection for the statewide evaluation. Applications follow the points under (b) APPLICATION in the McKinney-Vento Act. (Section 723). The 16 Authorized

Activities as listed in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act are the central focus of the subgrants.