

Claims, Red Flags and What to do about Them

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Moderator



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Presenters



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Homeless Student Liaison
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**Pennsylvania's Education for Children
& Youth Experiencing Homelessness
Program (ECYEH)**

**Claims, Red Flags and
What to do about Them**

Presentation Goals:

- Provide overview of eligibility within the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
 - Provide strategies for accurate and sensitive verification of homeless situations
 - Provide opportunities for discussion of case-specific examples
 - Provide information about available resources and staff support
-

Students Experiencing Homelessness:

In PA in 2015-16...

- **27,724** children or youth were reported as experiencing homelessness and were **'served,'** of which
- **23,164** were also identified as **'enrolled.'**



Poll Question 1

a. Are you the district/LEA homeless liaison?

Yes or No?

b. If yes, for how many years have you served in this role?

- less than 1 year
 - 1-2 years
 - 3-5 years
 - more than 5 years
-

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act:

A law to protect children experiencing homelessness through educational stability.



Homeless Liaison

- Every LEA must designate a liaison for children and youth experiencing homelessness who is able to carry out their duties under the law.

42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)

- The law requires liaisons to ensure that “homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination with other entities and agencies.”

42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(i)

(The Most Frequently Asked Questions on the Education Rights of Children and Youth in Homeless Situations (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, September 2016))

Students' and Parents' Rights...

- Eligibility
- Immediate Enrollment
- School of origin
- Transportation
- Free meals
- Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- Dispute



Purpose of Identification

Proper identification of families/students experiencing homelessness is important, so that the LEA can provide support and offer appropriate services to the family, child and/or youth.

Note: most families/students seeking eligibility for McKinney-Vento services do so in good faith and with good reason (Best Practices in Homeless Education – Confirming Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Services: Do's and Don'ts for School Districts, National Center for Homeless Education, 2007)

Determinations - Eligibility and Services

- Each student has a unique housing situation
- Assess each student's eligibility on a case-by-case basis
- Focus on lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
- Sometimes the situation is clear-cut, but often families' or students' situations are quite complicated

(Homeless Liaison Toolkit, National Center for Homeless Education, 2013)

Three Simple Steps...

1) Gather all the relevant information.

2) Analyze what you know.

3) Seek consultation as needed.



(Homeless Liaison Toolkit, National Center for Homeless Education, 2013)

Determining Eligibility:

Case-by-case determination – all situations are different!

Get as much information as possible...

without
intimidating
the parent
or youth.



Fixed, regular, adequate?

The student's housing must meet all three criteria to be considered permanently housed.

If one or more of the three criteria (fixed, regular, and adequate) is missing, the student is considered homeless.

(Homeless Liaison Toolkit, National Center for Homeless Education, 2013)

Challenges to Identification

- Students/families may hide their homelessness due to embarrassment or fear
- Fear of losing custody of their children
- Unaccompanied homeless youth may hide their homelessness due to fear of being returned to unsafe family environments or taken into custody by the child welfare system.

(Best Practices in Homeless Education Brief Series – Identifying Children and Youth in Homeless Situations, National Center for Homeless Education, Summer 2014)

Challenges to Identification, cont.

- Invisible children and youth not enrolled in school and living in doubled-up situations, on the street, or in hotel/motel or car or tent...
- Families and unaccompanied youth not aware they qualify for McKinney-Vento services
- School personnel misunderstanding the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and not recognizing potential signs that a student has lost housing

(Best Practices in Homeless Education Brief Series – Identifying Children and Youth in Homeless Situations, National Center for Homeless Education, Summer 2014)

Protect families'/students' privacy

- Do not contact persons or agencies outside the school system to obtain information about the student's living situation that would violate the family's or youth's privacy and dignity as well as the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).



(Best Practices in Homeless Education Brief Series – Determining Eligibility for Rights and Services Under the McKinney-Vento Act, National Center for Homeless Education, March 2015)

What if a family experiencing homelessness refuses services?

- A family or student may refuse services after identified.
- The LEA should still count the children in their data collection, even if additional services are not provided.



Strategies for identification, creating awareness, and disseminating notice are available at:

<https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/identification.pdf>

Homeless Student Liaison

Tina Onassis
Chichester School District
March 17, 2017

Homeless Student Liaison Fact Finder

- * Goal in Homeless Investigations
 - * Better understanding of family's situation
 - * Make a determination concerning children's homeless status
 - * Ensure homeless children's educational rights are protected and placement is appropriate in accordance with McKinney-Vento Act

Homeless Student Liaison Fact Finder

- * NOT A WITCH HUNT!!
 - * Information is not to be used in a punitive way



The DO-NOTS

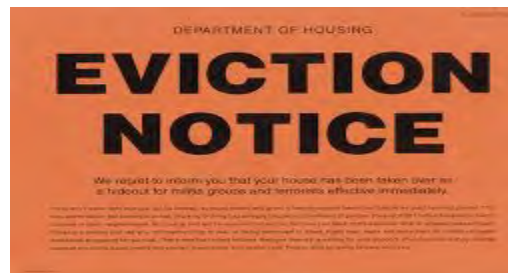
- * Do Not REQUIRE Documentation
- * Do Not Contact Landlords of current temporary address
- * Do Not Divulge Information to any Third Party

CAN DOs

- * Ask yourself these questions at all times and in every situation:
 - * Who?
 - * What?
 - * When?
 - * Where?
 - * Why? And sometimes you need to know
 - * How?

To Verify an Eviction

- * Visit the Magisterial website
<https://usjportal.pacourts.us/DocketSheets/MDJ.aspx>
- * At County, select your county from the drop down menu
- * At Search Type, select participant name and type in the name of the parent
- * At Case Type, choose Landlord/Tenant from the drop down menu



To Verify Civil Proceedings

- * Find out if your county has on line public access
- * If so, access the site for filings such as:
 - * Divorce
 - * Custody
 - * Mortgage Foreclosures
 - * Appeals of District Court Judgments



County Public Access Sites

- * You may also be able to run
 - * Property Ownership Searches
 - * Deed Searches
 - * Criminal Conviction Searches



Other Useful Public Information Sites

- * Address Searches:
 - * <http://www.zabasearch.com/>
- * General Location (towns but no addresses):
 - * <https://www.searchbug.com/peoplefinder/#pageTop>
- * Victim's notification/incarceration information:
 - * <https://vinelink.com/#/home>
- * People Searches:
 - * <http://www.dirtsearch.org/>
 - * <https://www.advancedbackgroundchecks.com/>

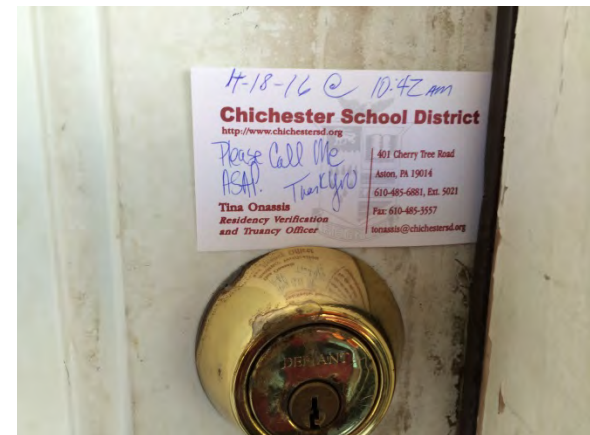


Quick Word About On-Line Searches

- * The information on these sites are not the end all be all
- * The information derived from the sites should be used in furtherance of your investigation, or to help you realize that you are on the right track
- * More is required of you and your skills in order for you to make a final determination

So what now?!

- * Get Out on the Street and follow the clues from your online search!
- * Visit and document the last address of residence
- * Leave your business card with a note to call you.



Drive-Bys

- * DON'T CUT IT
- * Get out of the car (close the door)
- * Walk around
- * Take pictures & notes
- * If the neighborhood gossip pays you a visit, listen and take notes mental or otherwise, it's up to you how.
- * Follow up on any leads that may develop.



EVASIVENESS

- * Under the McKinney-Vento Act you have every right to know where a family is residing and to inspect the residence.
- * Schedule an appointment to visit to share helpful information
- * Take a folder with you that contains a list of food pantries in the area and other available sources of assistance
- * Speak directly, but in a non-adversarial tone
- * Ask to see where everyone is sleeping

Evasiveness continued

- * If the parent pushes back, that's a red flag
- * If the parent won't let you in, that is often a red flag
- * If you arrive at your designated meeting time and no one is home and you don't get a phone call from the parent, that's a red flag

Now What?! AGAIN

- * Don't leave
- * Call from the car
- * Try to get in
- * If that's impossible:
 - * Send an outreach letter that sets a deadline for contact and make it a short deadline
 - * If no response, send another letter certified and first class mail informing parent of potential for disenrollment

NO CONTACT or a finding of NOT HOMELESS

- * Provide your Regional Coordinator with a chronology of your work to ensure you have done everything you could possibly do
- * Proceed with your district's process for disenrollment
- * In the disenrollment letter be sure there is wording that includes information about appealing the determination to your school board
- * Include information on how and where to appeal at the regional/PA Department of Education level

Some Final Words

- * I have volumes of letters to suit nearly every need. Please don't reinvent something that already exists.
- * If you are stumped about what your next investigative move should be, know that you are not alone – we all hit a brick wall.
- * Contact me and I will share whatever I have and whatever I know with all of you.



Contact!

- * Tina F. Onassis
- * Chichester School District
- * 610-485-6881 Ext. 5021 – Office
- * 484-459-7797 - Cell
- * tonassis@chichestersd.org

Poll Question 2

Should a district request an eviction notice if the family states they have been (or are being) evicted?

Yes or No?

Poll Question 3

Should a district contact a landlord or building manager to verify a family's living arrangement?

Yes or No?

Local, Regional, State Assistance

- Have you discussed eligibility with your regional and/or site coordinator?
- Have you attended regional or local training regarding homeless education?
- Have you attended the annual statewide ECYEH conference?



Mike – insert regional map photo

Visit <http://homeless.center-school.org> for the map and list of regional staff

State and National Resources...

Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program (ECYEH) - <http://homeless.center-school.org>

Pennsylvania Department of Education –
www.education.pa.gov/homeless

National Association for the Education
of Homeless Children and Youth -
<http://www.naehcy.org>

National Center on Homeless Education -
<https://nche.ed.gov>

National Law Center on Homelessness
& Poverty - <http://www.nlchp.org>

SchoolHouse Connection –
<http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/>



Questions?

- Any additional questions?



For Assistance Contact:

Storm Camara, State ECYEH Coordinator
Pennsylvania Department of Education
717.772.2066
scamara@pa.gov

Lynda Becker, ECYEH Training/Technical Assistance Coordinator
Center for Schools and Communities
717.763.1661 X 156
lbecker@csc.csiu.org

Shane Burroughs, Region 8 ECYEH Coordinator
Bucks County Intermediate Unit
800.770.4822 X 1360
sburroughs@bucksiu.org

Tina Onassis, Homeless Student Liaison
Chichester School District
610-485-6881, X 5021
tonassis@chichestersd.org

Or the ECYEH regional/site coordinator for your area (see regional map).

