



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Superintendents of Schools

**FROM:** Stefan Pryor, Commissioner of Education

**DATE:** November 24, 2014

**SUBJECT:** Educational Rights and Supports for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

The 2013 report entitled [Invisible No More: Creating Opportunities for Youth Who Are Homeless](#), authored by Derrick M. Gordon, Ph.D. and Bronwyn A. Hunter, Ph.D. of the Consultation Center at Yale University, provides a comprehensive look at 98 homeless youths in Connecticut, ages 14 to 24, who are living on their own and lack parental, foster, or institutional care. The youth in this study reported being victims of physical and sexual abuse, being lured into prostitution, suffering from mental health problems and substance abuse, and a high dropout rate. According to the study, these youths are not connected to services or systems that prevent or ameliorate conditions caused by housing insecurity.

The scope of this report and the acknowledgement of the vulnerability faced by these youths prompt a reminder to Connecticut school districts of their responsibility to identify students who are experiencing homelessness and are in need of assistance. Any child or youth that has to leave his or her home do not lose the right to go to school.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) provides educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness. It ensures that all children and youths in homeless situations can remain in their “school of origin” or enroll in a new school immediately. These students automatically qualify to receive free school meals and must be provided with transportation, health and other related services necessary to ensure their academic success.

The McKinney-Vento Act also requires states and local education agencies (LEA) to continually review and revise policies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youths in school (42 U.S.C. 11431, section 722(g) (1) (I)). The Invisible No More report revealed that education agencies in Connecticut need to give greater attention to policies or practices that may specifically impede education stability for homeless “unaccompanied youth”- those who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. Unaccompanied youth have the same rights as other students experiencing homelessness to enroll in, attend, and succeed in public school. To ensure these rights, schools must, among other measures:

- connect the school district liaison for homeless youth to all unaccompanied youth to help them choose, enroll or stay in school and provide access to transportation, school meals, special education, Title I and other comparable services;

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- ensure unaccompanied youth have access to the state's dispute resolution process pursuant to section 10-186 of the Connecticut General Statute and that any resolution of dispute includes either the immediate enrollment or continued placement of a student experiencing homelessness;
- request that the State appoint a "surrogate parent" for any unaccompanied youth that is special education eligible or suspected to be eligible pursuant to section 10-94g (visit the [SDE Homeless Education webpage](#) to access the request for surrogate form); and
- assure that all levels of school personnel are acquainted with the McKinney-Vento Act and are specifically aware of the needs of runaway and homeless youth. Awareness measures must include staff with responsibilities that involve enrollment, truancy prevention and residency management.

Lastly, to be compliant with state reporting requirements; all students experiencing homelessness must be accurately reported in the statewide public school information system (PSIS). LEA liaisons and other school personnel who have identified a student as homeless must routinely provide the PSIS district coordinator with relevant information regarding the homeless status of a student, unaccompanied youth status, and their primary nighttime residence. Please ensure that all students identified as homeless are consistently and accurately represented in your district's PSIS data.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the education of our children and youth, especially our most vulnerable students. For more information on the Surrogate Parent Appointment System, or to request a surrogate parent for an unaccompanied homeless youth, contact Norma Sproul at 860-713-6791 or [Norma.Sproul@ct.gov](mailto:Norma.Sproul@ct.gov). For additional assistance related to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, contact Louis Tallarita at 860-807-2058 or [Louis.Tallarita@ct.gov](mailto:Louis.Tallarita@ct.gov).

SP:ltt

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