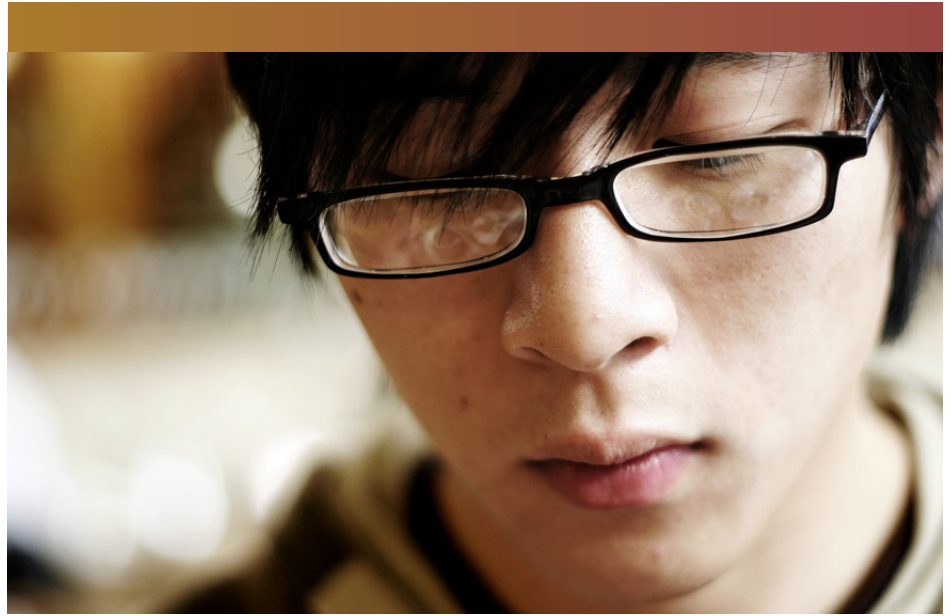




National Center for Homeless Education  
Supporting the Education of Children and  
Youth Experiencing Homelessness  
[www.serve.org/nche](http://www.serve.org/nche)



CONNECTING SCHOOLS AND DISPLACED STUDENTS BRIEF SERIES  
**Meeting the Educational Needs of Students Displaced by Disasters:  
Youth on Their Own**

INTRODUCTION

During a disaster, youth may be separated from their parents or guardians. Parents who have lost their homes may place youth temporarily with friends or relatives; or youth may be separated from their parents during an emergency evacuation. Additionally, some youth could be on their own before a disaster occurs. Unaccompanied youth who lack a caring adult to link them with supports and resources may have many unmet needs and not know how to seek help during a time of disaster.

For youth separated from their parents or guardians during a disaster, school provides a stable and secure environment, offering structure and supports to help them overcome the trauma they have experienced and regain their academic, social, and emotional footing. Therefore, schools and school districts, known as local educational agencies (LEAs), and relief or service agencies in a community impacted by a disaster, such as the American Red Cross or Salvation Army, should work together to ensure that unaccompanied youth, including those experiencing homelessness as the result of a disaster, are identified, linked to services, and enrolled in school. Unaccompanied homeless youth may not know how to access emergency services provided through agencies, such as housing, food, medical, and trauma support; therefore, coordination between schools

**McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless**  
42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)

The term “homeless children and youth”—

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; 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...
  - 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 for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

and LEAs and relief or service agencies will ensure that youth on their own will find the most expedient path to help.

This brief will help school, LEA, and relief agency staff members and administrators understand the rights and services guaranteed to unaccompanied homeless youth and plan strategies to ensure that these youth are enrolled in school and provided necessary services to help them survive and recover from a disaster.

## THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 11431-11435), reauthorized in 2001 by Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act (subsequently referred to in this brief as the *McKinney-Vento Act*), ensures educational protections for children and youth in homeless situations, including those who have become homeless due to disaster. The Act provides stability and support for students by requiring public schools to enroll eligible students immediately; keep them in their school of origin, if feasible<sup>1</sup>; assess their needs; and provide or refer them to additional services, as needed.

For an overview of the McKinney-Vento Act, download the following briefs developed by the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE):

- *The Educational Rights of Students Experiencing Homelessness: What Administrators Should Know* (<http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/administrators.pdf>)
- *The Educational Rights of Students Experiencing Homelessness: What Service Providers Should Know* ([http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/service\\_providers.pdf](http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/service_providers.pdf))

<sup>1</sup> For more information about school selection and feasibility under the McKinney-Vento Act, visit [http://center.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc\\_feasibility.php](http://center.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc_feasibility.php).

## MCKINNEY-VENTO ELIGIBILITY FOR UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

Children and youth who are experiencing homelessness as the result of a disaster often live in a variety of unstable, temporary arrangements. The McKinney-Vento Act's definition of *homeless* [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)] includes a range of living situations that are not fixed, regular, and adequate and, therefore, qualify as homeless (see the *McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless* sidebar on page 1 for the complete definition). Accommodations set up by relief and community agencies may qualify, as well. Students who are displaced by disaster generally will meet the McKinney-Vento definition of *homeless*; yet each student's and family's situation must be reviewed by the LEA on a case-by-case basis for an appropriate determination of eligibility for services.

The McKinney-Vento Act's definition of *unaccompanied youth* [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(6)] includes youth who are "not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian". In practical terms, this means a youth who is not living with a parent or guardian. For an unaccompanied youth to be eligible for McKinney-Vento rights and services, his or her living arrangement must meet the Act's definition of *homeless*.

## PROVISIONS IN THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT FOR UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

The McKinney-Vento Act requires that LEAs designate an appropriate staff person to serve as the local homeless education liaison [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)] Local liaison duties specific to unaccompanied homeless youth include

- helping them choose and enroll in school after considering their wishes [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(B)(iii)];
- providing them with notice of their right to appeal a school district's enrollment or school selection decision [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(B)(iii)], and ensuring they are

enrolled in school immediately pending the resolution of a dispute [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(E)(iv)]; and

- informing them of their rights to transportation, including transportation to the school of origin, and helping them access said transportation [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(vii)].

For more information on how schools and LEAs serve unaccompanied homeless youth, download NCHE's *Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Homeless Students* brief at <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/youth.pdf>.

### SERVING UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

The best strategy for serving unaccompanied homeless youth during a time of disaster is to make sure policies and procedures are in place to meet their needs before a disaster occurs. Having established and well-thought-out processes in place before a disaster occurs will help schools and LEAs and relief and service agencies implement strategies during a disaster efficiently.

Before a disaster occurs, local liaisons can ensure that

- the LEA conducts outreach to identify homeless youth who are not attending school [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(F)(ii)], including by displaying posters in the school and in the community where youth congregate [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(v)];
- school registrars and front office staff understand the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of *homeless* and *unaccompanied youth* and the Act's requirement to enroll unaccompanied homeless youth without a parent or guardian;
- the LEA has policies and procedures in place to address situations for unaccompanied homeless youth where a parent's or guardian's signature is needed;

- administrators and staff members are familiar with state and local policies related to unaccompanied homeless youth, such as when they are required to report youth to authorities and for what types of medical and mental health care minors can provide their own consent;
- the LEA has policies and procedures in place to assess unaccompanied homeless youths' needs and connect them to services and supports to enable them to attend, participate fully in, and succeed academically in school, including participating in extracurricular activities [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(1)];
- school staff members are trained to assess youths' emotional or mental health challenges and link them to needed services [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(iii)]; and
- youth are connected to agencies and services to address their basic needs, such as housing, clothing, food, and medical services.

Relief agency staff members can ensure that

- staff members have contact information for the local liaison in LEA(s) in the community served by their agency;
- the agency has posters displayed on the educational rights of unaccompanied homeless youth (Posters are available through NCHE at [http://center.serve.org/nche/online\\_order.php](http://center.serve.org/nche/online_order.php));
- staff members are familiar with the rights and services guaranteed by the McKinney-Vento Act;
- policies are in place to refer unaccompanied homeless youth to the local liaison in LEAs served by their agency, including consent to share information as part of the agency's intake form to facilitate this referral;
- information on community resources has been compiled to link youth in need quickly to housing, food, clothing, and medical services; and

- a list of adults who are trained and willing to provide mentoring, guidance, and emotional support for youth is available.

## SERVING UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH IMPACTED BY DISASTERS

When a disaster occurs, additional challenges for serving unaccompanied homeless youth and linking them to schools and services may include

- youth who are on their own and do not know where to turn for help, making these youth particularly vulnerable to recruitment into human trafficking and other forms of victimization;
- youth who have been separated from their parents or guardians and want to be reunited;
- school and medical records that have been lost or damaged at the school or facility where they were stored and are unavailable;
- youth who are on their own and in need of housing, food, clothing, and medical help; and
- youth who are traumatized and need mental health services.

To plan for these circumstances, school districts and relief agencies are encouraged to work together to develop or expand a district's emergency operations plan to identify processes and policies to address the prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts as they relate to homeless or displaced youth. By having plans in place to keep students and staff safe, districts and their community partners, such as relief agencies, play a key role in taking preventative and protective measures to stop an emergency from occurring or reduce the impact of an incident.

Guidance on developing such plans corresponding to before, during, or after an emergency or disaster can be found in the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency*

*Operations Plans* at [http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS\\_K-12\\_Guide\\_508.pdf](http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf). Such plans can serve to marshal staff and resources on short notice to address the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth. Moreover, addressing the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth should be part of the community's overall plan for disaster preparation and response. The federal guidance helps ensure all planning is aligned with local, state, and national emergency planning. In collaboration with their local government and community partners, LEAs and individual schools can take steps to plan for these potential emergencies through the creation or expansion of an emergency operations plan.

## NCHE RESOURCES

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) operates the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. NCHE provides publications and trainings (on site and online via tutorials and webinars) on a variety of homeless education issues, as well as customized technical assistance through its homeless education helpline (800-308-2145 or [homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org)).

For general information on topics related to homeless children and youth, visit the NCHE website at <http://center.serve.org/nche>.

NCHE has developed briefs on a wide range of topics that impact homeless children and youth, available at <http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/briefs.php>.

NCHE tutorials and a schedule of its free webinars are available at [http://center.serve.org/nche/web/online\\_tr.php](http://center.serve.org/nche/web/online_tr.php).

Four handbooks that comprise the *Connecting Schools and Displaced Students* series can be ordered at [http://center.serve.org/nche/online\\_order.php](http://center.serve.org/nche/online_order.php). This series of handbooks was published following the challenges experienced in many states as families relocated throughout the nation following the Gulf Coast hurricanes



of 2005. The handbooks explain how the McKinney-Vento Act applies to children and youth displaced by disaster and how the Act can assist these students and their families. The handbook series targets parents, relief agencies, or educators, and includes:

- *After the Storm: Information for Parents on How Schools Can Help After Disasters (A Handbook for Parents)*
- *Disaster Relief Agencies and Schools: Working Together to Ensure School Enrollment and Success (A Handbook for Local Liaisons and State Coordinators)*
- *From the School Office to the Classroom: Strategies for Enrolling and Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness*
- *School as a Safety Net: Connecting Displaced Children With Educational and Support Services (A Handbook for Relief Agency Staff and Volunteers)*

## FEDERAL RESOURCES

### U.S. Department of Education

- Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center (REMS) - <http://rems.ed.gov/>  
REMS provides a variety of publications in collaboration with practitioners in the fields of school and higher education institution emergency management, including resources related to psychological first aid.
- Project School Emergency Response to Violence (SERV) - <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/dvppserv/index.html>  
This program funds short-term and long-term education-related services for local educational agencies and institutions of higher education to help them recover from a violent or traumatic event in which the learning environment has been disrupted.

### U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

- Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness & Response (OHSEPR) - <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohsepr>  
OHSEPR promotes resilience for individuals, families, and communities impacted by disasters and public health emergencies by providing expertise in human services policy, planning, operations, and partnerships.

### U.S. Department of Homeland Security

- Disaster Response and Recovery - <http://www.dhs.gov/topic/disaster-response-and-recovery>  
The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assists in community recovery through a number of channels, including obligating monetary aid for both individual and public assistance. Individual assistance may include housing, crisis counseling, legal services, disaster case management, and unemployment assistance, among other services. Public assistance may include reimbursement to clear debris and rebuild roads, schools, libraries, and other public facilities.

### U.S. General Services Administration

- State and Local Disaster Purchasing - <http://www.gsa.gov/disasterpurchasing>  
This program allows state and local governments to buy supplies and services directly from all GSA Schedules to facilitate recovery from major disasters or facilitate disaster preparation and response. GSA's strong partnerships can help cities and towns meet their needs quickly while saving taxpayer dollars.

## OTHER RESOURCES

- American Red Cross - <http://www.redcross.org>  
The American Red Cross provides relief

services to communities affected by disasters, including food, water, short-term shelter, counseling support, and assistance with family reunification.

- The Salvation Army - <http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/>  
The Salvation Army addresses many of the typical needs of a disaster survivor and provides disaster relief, as well. Its services are adapted to the specific needs of individuals and communities and scalable according to the magnitude of the disaster.
- Save the Children, Emergency Response - <http://www.savethechildren.org/>  
Save the Children supports victims of disasters. Save the Children is committed to reducing the impact of disasters on children through effective Preparedness, Response, Recovery, and Advocacy.

#### REFERENCES

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act,  
U.S.C. §§ 11431-11435 (2012).

**This brief was developed by:**

**National Center for Homeless Education**

800-308-2145 (Toll-free Helpline)

<http://www.serve.org/nche>

Fall 2015

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) operates the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. NCHE is supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students. The contents of this brief were developed under a grant from the Department; however, these contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department.

Every state is required to have a State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and every school district is required to have a local homeless education liaison. These individuals will assist you with the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at [http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state\\_resources.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php).



For more information on the McKinney-Vento Act and resources for implementation, call the NCHE Helpline at 800-308-2145 or e-mail [homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org).

**Local Contact Information:**