

# INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

IF YOUR FAMILY LIVES IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS:



In a shelter



In a motel or campground due to the lack of an alternative adequate accommodation



In a car, park, abandoned building, or bus or train station



Doubled up with other people due to loss of housing or economic hardship

*Your school-age children may qualify for certain rights and protections under the federal McKinney-Vento Act.*



## YOUR ELIGIBLE CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- Receive a free, appropriate public education.
- Enroll in school immediately, even if lacking documents normally required for enrollment.
- Enroll in school and attend classes while the school gathers needed documents.
- Enroll in the local school; or continue attending their school of origin (the school they attended when permanently housed or the school in which they were last enrolled), if that is your preference and is feasible.

*\* If the school district believes that the school you select is not in the best interest of your children, then the district must provide you with a written explanation of its position and inform you of your right to appeal its decision.*

- At your request receive transportation up to one hour to and from the school of origin.
- Receive educational services comparable to those provided to other students, according to your children's needs.



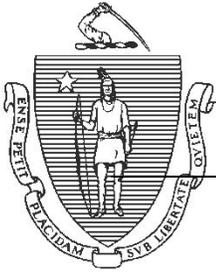
**If you believe your children including preschool-age children may be eligible, contact the local homeless liaison to find out what services and supports may be available.**



(781) 338-3700



[compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu)



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Telephone: (781) 338-3000  
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## **School Enrollment Information for Children Who Have Lost Their Housing**

The following Frequently Asked Questions are intended to provide information to parents and service providers on enrolling children and youth who have lost their housing and how schools can support their educational needs. Access to a public education and the opportunity to succeed is protected under the federal law known as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento) and reauthorized by the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015*. For guidance on specific concerns that go beyond the information provided here please first consult with the local school district's Homeless Education Liaison. Further technical assistance can be provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at 781-338-3700.

### **1. I am staying with a relative are my children covered by McKinney-Vento?**

Yes, McKinney-Vento covers children who are living in shelters, hotels, campgrounds, cars or are staying with friends or relatives due to economic hardship or loss of housing. If your home was damaged or destroyed by the hurricanes and your children can no longer live there, then they are covered by McKinney-Vento.

### **2. What is a homeless liaison?**

McKinney-Vento requires that every public school district to designate a homeless liaison to ensure that homeless children and youth are immediately enrolled and attending school. The liaison's job is help homeless families access the educational services their children need in public schools.

### **3. Where can I enroll my children in school?**

You should enroll your children in the public school where you are staying. It may help to contact the homeless liaison beforehand but that is not necessary.

### **4. What do I need to enroll my children in school? What if I do not have school records or immunization and health records with me?**

Any school records, guardianship documents, birth certificates or health records you have will help schools place your child in the most appropriate setting. However, if your family has lost its home **you do not need any records to immediately enroll your child in public school.** The school may ask you questions about your child's needs to ensure the best classroom placement.

The school will also ask you for emergency contact information in case your child gets sick in school or needs you. This can be a cell phone or the phone at the home or shelter where you are staying. This is protected information and the school cannot share it with anyone outside the school (including landlords) unless you consent to its release.

### **5. How do I access school meals for my child?**

Homeless children and youth automatically qualify for free school meals. This includes free lunch and if the school is serving breakfast and/or snacks your child will receive those as well. The homeless liaison will ensure that that happens.

### **6. Which school activities can my child participate in?**

Your child may participate in any school course, activity or event they are eligible for including school run after-school programs, sports teams, and summer school. Your child has access to special education, title 1 services, gifted and talented programs, and English Language programming if needed.

**7. Do my children need school uniforms?**

Most Massachusetts public schools do not require uniforms but some do. If the school your child is enrolling in requires uniforms it should provide your child with a uniform if you cannot afford one.

**8. I do not have school supplies for my children. Can the school help with these?**

Yes, the school can help with school supplies such as paper, pens, and pencils. If the school is using computers or tablets it must ensure that your child has access to the equipment he/she needs to be successful in school.

**9. I have a child/youth staying with me but I am not his/her parent. Can she still enroll in school?**

Yes, children/youth who are not with a parent or legal guardian (known as unaccompanied homeless youth) may enroll themselves in public school or be enrolled by an adult caregiver.

**10. I have a preschool-age child. Can he/she enroll in school too?**

If the public school where you are staying has a preschool program that your child is eligible for he/she may be enrolled or put on the waitlist. If he/she is on a waitlist or the school does not have an appropriate program, the homeless liaison may be able to refer you to a licensed early education and care program in your community that includes Head Start, Early Head Start and Family Child Care. Please use this link to access the Department of Early Education and Care website for more information-

<http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/find-early-education-and-care-programs/>

**11. I am interested in continuing my postsecondary studies in Massachusetts. Will my credits transfer to a public college or university?**

Massachusetts public colleges and universities are encouraged to work with students from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and support them as they transition to Massachusetts. Institutions of public higher education in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are accredited by Middle States Commission on Higher Education. We understand that not all students may not have access to their transcripts. If possible, students should try to acquire unofficial copies of their transcripts and institutions will work with students on a case-by-case basis. Institutions may require an official transcript at a later date once they become available. Students are encouraged to connect with a transfer advisor at one of our Massachusetts campuses. Contact information can be found by visiting this site: <http://www.mass.edu/masstransfer/about/contact.asp>.

## **Public School Homeless Education Liaisons**

There are over 400 homeless education liaisons in Massachusetts public schools. The following list includes those most likely to be receiving children who have lost their homes in Puerto Rico during the recent hurricanes. If the public school district you are looking for is not on this list please call 781-338-3700 or check the online list at

<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/search/search.aspx?leftNavId=11239>

<u>Public School District</u>	<u>Homeless Liaison</u>	<u>Phone number</u>
Boston Public schools	Mary William	617-635-8037
Brockton Public Schools	Karen McCarthy	508-580-7561
Chicopee Public Schools	Jill Fijal	413-594-3552
Fall River Public Schools	Siobhan Ryan	508-675-8420
Fitchburg Public Schools	Kathleen Niemi	978-345-3223
Framingham Public Schools	Rosangela Ferreira	508-782-6930
Haverhill Public Schools	Lorna Marchant	978-374-5700
Holyoke Public Schools	Rebeca Chaverri	413-534-2000 x1140
Holyoke Community Charter School	Sonia Pope	413-533-0111
Lawrence Public Schools	Nelson Butten	978-975-5900
Leominster Public Schools	Edward Pratt	508-534-7700 x307
Lowell Public Schools	Rosa Segarra-Morales	978-674-2040
	Nancy Humphrey	978-674-2128
Lynn Public Schools	Tracey Scherrer	978-477-7220 x3207
Marlborough Public Schools	Mary Murphy	508-460-3506 x1400
Methuen Public Schools	Gina Bozek	978-722-6014
New Bedford Public Schools	Sonia Walmsley	508-997-4511 x3315
Pittsfield Public Schools	Joseph Curtis	413-499-9510
Revere Public School	Douglas Goodwin	781-485-8453
Salem Public Schools	Jodi Connelly	978-825-3601
Southbridge Public Schools	Maria Eliza-Rodriguez	508-764-5455
Springfield Public Schools	Lourdes Soto	413-787-6959 x49842
	Jenn Wands	413-787-6764
West Springfield Public Schools	Ellen Broadhurst	413-263-3288
Westfield Public Schools	Chris Rogers	413-572-6441
Weymouth Public Schools	Robin Howard	781-335-1460
Worcester Public Schools	Maura Mahoney	508-799-3020

**MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**  
**McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance - Advisories**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) ensures homeless children and youth have equal access to the same free and appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths. It has most recently been reauthorized under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA).

The McKinney-Vento Act mandates a state coordinator in every state, a homeless education liaison in every school district, outlines the rights of homeless children and youth, defines homelessness, and requires collaboration and coordination across agencies and service providers. It also provides funding for a small competitive grant program for school districts enrolling a significant number of homeless children and youth

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) assists school districts in the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. This document is intended to advise school districts, homeless families, unaccompanied homeless youth, and homeless service providers on the following provisions of the law:

- I. [Definitions](#)
- II. [Homeless Education Liaison - Role and Responsibilities](#)
- III. [School Placement, Transportation and Enrollment](#)
- IV. [ESE McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Process](#)
  - a. [School District Notification to Parent/Guardian of Enrollment Decision Form](#)
  - b. [Parent/Guardian Appeal of School District Enrollment Decision Form](#)

Additional information, data, and resources are posted on the [ESE Homeless Education](#) webpage. ESE provides technical assistance and guidance via 781-338-3700 or [compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu).

## I. Definitions

The following terms are defined in the McKinney-Vento Act:

**Homeless children and youths:** individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. It includes:

1. Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals.
2. 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.
3. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
4. Migratory children (as defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended) who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

**Enroll and enrollment:** attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

**School of origin:** the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled, including a preschool. When a child or youth completes the final grade level served by the school of origin, the school of origin includes the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools.

**Unaccompanied youth:** a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

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## **II. Homeless Education Liaison – Role and Responsibilities**

The liaison, who may also be a coordinator for other federal programs must be able to carry out the following duties as described in the McKinney-Vento Act, and ensure that:

1. homeless students are identified by school personnel and through coordination with other agencies;
2. homeless students enroll in, and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school and to meet the same challenging state academic standards as other students, and receive educational services for which they are eligible;
3. homeless families, children and youth have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, Even Start programs and preschool programs administered by the local educational agency;
4. homeless families, children and youth receive information and referrals for health care, dental services, mental health and other appropriate services in the community;
5. parents or guardians are informed of educational and related opportunities, such as access to school nutrition programs, available to their children, and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
6. public notice of the educational rights of homeless students and the district's adopted Homeless Education Policy are disseminated where children and youth receive services such as schools, family shelters, food pantries, health clinics and where families, children, and youth are ordinarily informed of school policies such as student handbooks, school newsletters or school websites;
7. enrollment disputes are mediated and resolved;
8. parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth are fully informed of all transportation services, including to and from the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing needed transportation services;
9. district staff providing services to homeless students receive professional development and other support;
10. unaccompanied homeless youth are enrolled in school, have opportunities to meet the same challenging state academics standards as other students, are informed of their status as independent students, and are provided with verification of that status for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA);
11. there is coordination and collaboration with the office of the state coordinator, the local community, service providers and school personnel providing education and related services to homeless families, children and youth;

12. reliable, valid, and comprehensive data is collected and reported to the state coordinator;  
and
13. upon receiving appropriate training, will provide homeless families, children, and youth who meet eligibility requirements for services from the Department of Housing and Community Development, verification of homelessness.

To fulfill these responsibilities, the homeless education liaison shall inform school personnel, service providers, and advocates of his/her duties and the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act.

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### **III. School Placement, Transportation, and Enrollment**

Homeless students have the right to remain enrolled in their school of origin and receive transportation or immediately enroll in the school district where they are temporarily residing.

#### **School Placement**

School placement determinations must be based on the best interest of the homeless student. In making decisions regarding best interests, school districts must:

- Presume keeping the student in the school of origin until the end of the year in which the student obtains permanent housing is in the student's best interest except when doing so is contrary to the request of the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth;
- Consider student-centered factors related to the student's best interest including factors related to the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless students, school placement of siblings, giving priority to the request of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth

For homeless students who meet the relevant eligibility criteria, districts must remove barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities, including magnet schools, summer school, career and technical education, advanced placement, on-line learning, and charter school programs.

#### **Transportation**

School districts must 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. Furthermore:

- if the homeless student continues to live in the area served by the district in which the school of origin is located, that district must provide or arrange transportation if needed;
- if the homeless student moves to an area served by another district, though continuing his or her education at the school of origin, the district of origin and the district in which the student resides must agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation to the school of origin; and
- if the districts cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs must be shared equally.

In addition, districts must provide transportation services to homeless students that meet Massachusetts state law and are comparable to those received by other students. Each school district's homeless education liaison must ensure that the parent or guardian of a homeless student, and any unaccompanied homeless youth, is fully informed, in the language of the home, of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and is assisted in accessing transportation to the school selected.

Students who have been homeless during the school year and become permanently housed have the right to remain enrolled in their school of origin with transportation if needed through the end of the school year (June).

#### **Enrollment**

School districts must immediately enroll homeless students in school to provide educational stability and avoid separation from school for days or weeks while documents are located. Therefore, homeless education liaisons must ensure that:

- Students who chose to enroll in school where they are temporarily residing must be enrolled immediately, even if they do not bring the records usually required for enrollment with them;
- if a homeless student arrives without records, the previously attended school district is contacted and the required records requested;
- that homeless students are attending school while the records are being requested;
- districts remove barriers to homeless students receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school; and
- information about a homeless student's living situation shall be treated as a student education record and not be deemed to be directory information and therefore cannot be shared with the public including landlords.

ESE is aware that this requirement may constitute a departure with respect to school districts' enrollment policies. The immunization statute, G.L. c. 76§ 15, generally requires students to provide proof of immunization prior to enrollment. Since McKinney-Vento is a federal law, its requirements override the state immunization law. However, it should be noted that the immunization law allows, in the absence of a Department of Health declared epidemic or emergency, the enrollment of students who have not been immunized if they have religious objections to immunization. Moreover, the Department has consulted with the Department of Public Health (DPH) regarding this issue and DPH agrees that, in the absence of an emergency or epidemic of disease, the health risk of enrolling homeless students prior to receiving proof of immunization is minimal.

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#### **IV. ESE McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Process**

The McKinney-Vento Act calls for "procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding the educational placement of homeless children and youth."

##### **Reasons for Dispute**

If a dispute arises between the district and parent, guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth, the homeless education liaison must ensure that:

- the student be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought pending a final resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals;

- the parent, guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth is provided with a written explanation of any enrollment decisions made by the district and be informed of the right of the parent, guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth to appeal the decision to ESE.

### **Considerations**

Determinations regarding enrollment and the subsequent provision of transportation if necessary, must:

- Presume that keeping the student in the school of origin is in the student's best interest, except when doing so is contrary to the request of the student's parent or guardian or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth; and
- Consider student-centered factors related to the student's best interest including factors related to the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless students, giving priority to the request of the student's parent or guardian or, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth.

### **Dispute Resolution Process**

In order to ensure the prompt resolution of disputes ESE has established the following McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Process:

- The dispute resolution process begins at the time a district denies the continued enrollment or right to enroll a homeless student in the school selected by the parent, guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth.
- A student must be allowed to attend the school in which enrollment is sought and transportation provided (if needed) pending the resolution of the dispute.
- The homeless education liaison must:
  - provide notice of the denial to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth on the day of the denial using the form prescribed by ESE (see [School District Notification of Enrollment Decision](#));
  - provide the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth with written notice in clear, easy-to-understand language detailing the dispute resolution process, informing the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied homeless youth of the right to appeal and the option to obtain independent information and counsel;
  - provide the prescribed form to be completed by the parent/guardian, or unaccompanied homeless youth should he or she decide to appeal the school district's enrollment decision. (See [Appeal of School District's Enrollment Decision](#));

- assist the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth in promptly submitting an appeal to ESE in three school days with an extension of up to ten additional school days (please contact the Department's Problem Resolution System regarding an extension); and
- if the district has not notified the parent of its enrollment decision or the parent's right to appeal that decision, the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth may initiate a dispute by contacting ESE.
- Following receipt of the district's denial from the appeal by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth and any additional requested information, the Commissioner or the Commissioner's Designee shall promptly issue a decision usually in five to ten school days. The decision of the Commissioner or the Commissioner's Designee shall be final.

Note: ESE may provide technical assistance to either or both parties regarding the dispute, the dispute resolution process, the requirements of McKinney-Vento, and/or other applicable state and federal laws. Contact the Department's Problem Resolution System at 781-338-3700 or [compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu)

**MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**IV a. School District Notification to Parent/Guardian of Enrollment Decision**

This form is to be completed when a school/district denies the school placement of a parent/guardian or unaccompanied homeless youth who is seeking to enroll in school under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento) and is required by the ESE McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Process in compliance with Section 722(g)(3)(E) of McKinney-Vento, this written notice of denial of eligibility, school selection or school enrollment is provided to:

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Student(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Is the student(s) on an Individual Education Plan (IEP)? *(Please circle or underline, or indicate with an X.)*

No.       Yes without transportation.       Yes with transportation.

After reviewing the request to enroll the above student(s), the school enrollment request is denied for the following reasons:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please attach any additional relevant information/documentation.

Person Completing Form: \_\_\_\_\_

School/district: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**You (the parent/guardian) have the right to appeal this decision by contacting the district's Homeless Education Liaison who will assist you in the appeal process.**

Liaison's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

In addition:

- Until the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, or the Commissioner's designee,

makes a final decision regarding your appeal, the above student(s) will be allowed to attend the selected school and the school district(s) will provide transportation and other school services.

- You may provide either written or verbal reasons for your appeal of this decision.
- An appeal form is attached.
- You may seek the assistance of advocates or attorneys.
- You may contact the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Problem Resolution System at (781) 338-3700 or [compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu)
- A copy of this written notice of denial of school enrollment is being sent to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

**MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**IV b. Parent/Guardian Appeal of School District Enrollment Decision**

You should complete this form if you are a parent/guardian of a homeless student, or you are an unaccompanied homeless youth, who disagrees with a school district’s enrollment decision. The district Homeless Education Liaison will assist you with this form, and may take the information verbally if you wish.

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Student(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to appeal the enrollment decision made by: \_\_\_\_\_

School/district: \_\_\_\_\_

I have been provided with the following:

- a copy of the School District Notification of Enrollment Decision, and the ESE McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Process; and
- contact information for the district Homeless Education Liaison

I disagree with the enrollment decision for the following reason(s):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please attach any additional relevant information.

- I know that I may seek the assistance of advocates or attorneys.
- I know that I may contact the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Problem Resolution System at (781) 338-3700 or [compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu)

I want a copy of this appeal to be forwarded to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_