



# SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT PACKET

*Involving your schools in ending youth homelessness.*



**Youth  
Count** 2017

# MERIDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Pride In All We Do



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Dear Colleague,

I am pleased to share with you a most worthwhile project that we did in our high schools to raise awareness about youth homelessness and to help connect our unstably housed students with needed resources. Tackling chronic absenteeism and assuring all students are present, on time, and ready to learn is a difficult challenge. Many elements outside of our school doors impact our students' attendance, engagement and school performance. One contributing factor may be the lack of a stable, safe place to live.

Our state, through the CT Opening Doors for Youth Plan, has committed to ending youth homelessness by the end of 2020. Connecticut is already a leader in the country in ending homelessness among Veterans and people experiencing chronic homelessness. Communities across the state are now beginning to intensify their efforts to commit resources, build collaborations, and utilize proven strategies to address the important issue of youth homelessness and housing instability. I encourage you, as leaders of school systems, to join me in making this a priority in your districts.

There is a simple way to do this. Partnering with the CT Coalition to End Homelessness and the Institute for Community Research, the Meriden Public Schools developed and conducted a lesson plan for use during the advisory period for all high school students. Using this lesson plan, we educated students and teachers about youth homelessness and how these young people can access help. The response from teachers and students was extremely positive. Many students and teachers reported that they had been unaware of the educational rights of students under the McKinney-Vento Act and that the advisory lesson was both engaging and informative. The lesson provided much needed guidance to students and teachers about the resources that are available and whom to contact for help. Another positive result was that more of our high school students felt comfortable reaching out to their teachers and guidance counselors, who, in turn, connected them with our district's McKinney-Vento liaison in order to provide the support that they need to stay in school and experience success.

Meriden's lesson plan is attached, and I would be happy to discuss any details around implementation. You can also view the lesson plan and additional tools for schools at [www.youth-help.org](http://www.youth-help.org). This advisory lesson can be administered anytime during the school year; however, based on the feedback received from students and teachers, early implementation is recommended. Thank you for joining this effort!

All the best,

Mark D. Benigni, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

For more information on how you can be a part of your community's effort to end youth homelessness, contact Mimi Haley at the CT Coalition to End Homelessness - [mhaley@cceh.org](mailto:mhaley@cceh.org)

# YOUTH RIGHTS IN SCHOOL

## GRADE ALL

Time Required: 30 minutes

**GOAL:** Students will learn about youth rights under the McKinney-Vento Act and the resources that are available to youth who are unstably housed.

### Activity Statements:

Students will watch a 3-minute video and discuss the scenario depicted in the video. They will discuss the rights and resources that are available to students, and how to promote awareness of these rights.

### Materials:

1. Video - Eligibility for McKinney-Vento School Benefits (available via internet)
2. Computer & projector with audio speakers
3. Handout – *Youth Rights in School*
4. Exit Slip (one per group) – last 5 minutes of period – instructor led

### Procedures:

1. Play 3-minute video - view at: <https://youtu.be/u2jUCXwRNfc>
2. Discuss questions 1-2.
3. Distribute or display handout (Youth Rights in School) and facilitate a discussion focused on questions 3-5.
4. Encourage students to stop by the guidance office to get more information.
5. Last 5 minutes of period, complete the attached Exit Slip with 3 questions to provide feedback to your school. Only one submission per Advisory group is required with multiple responses from the group. It is suggested that you open a Google Doc, enter responses, and then Share with administration. If this option is not available, you may submit on paper.

### Discussion:

1. When Jasmine is thinking about where she can sleep that night, she tells the viewer that she has stayed several nights at a friend's house.
  - a. How common do you think it is for students to stay at a friend's house temporarily because something is going on at home and they can't stay at home?
  - b. Who else do you think you might turn to for help or a place to stay? Would they turn to an adult at school or in the community? Why/why not?
2. Jasmine is afraid to tell her teacher about her housing situation. In the film, she says, "But if I'm living in another town, then they might make me change schools and I don't want that. I want to stay here."
  - a. Is Jasmine right about that?
  - b. Do you feel that this is one of the fears that students might have? Why/why not?
  - c. What other fears do you think students might have that could prevent them from telling others and getting help?
3. What rights and resources does Jasmine have access to under the McKinney-Vento Act? (Encourage students to use the Handout as a resource to answer this question.)
4. Do you think if more students knew about these rights and resources that they would be more likely to ask for help? Why/why not?
5. What kinds of things do you think students and schools can do to promote awareness of youth rights under this law?

## **WHO IS ELIGIBLE?**

### **Do you know someone who:**

- Was kicked out of their house?
- Ran away from home?
- Is staying with friends or another family because they couldn't go home or they lost their housing?
- Is staying in a shelter?
- Is staying in a temporary place in DCF care?
- Is living in a motel, hotel, trailer park, or campground because they lost their housing?
- Has no place to stay?

If someone you know is experiencing one of these situations, there are laws and resources to help them. Even if they have a temporary place to stay, they may still be able to get help. The law helps youth who are alone and moving around, and those who are living with family and moving around.

## **WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS?**

### **If I've been moving around a lot, do I have to change schools every time I move?**

No. You have the right to choose between the school you went to before you lost your housing, the school where you are staying now, or the school where you were last registered.

### **How will I get to school?**

You have a right to get transportation back to your old school - if that is what you or your parent/guardian believes is best for you. The transportation might be a bus, a bus pass, or even a taxi.

### **Who can help me figure this out?**

Every school district has a person called a "McKinney-Vento liaison." That person's job is to help you. Visit [youth-help.org](http://youth-help.org) and click on "McKinney-Vento liaisons in Connecticut" and find the contact information of your representative in your school district. Or ask your guidance counselor.

### **The school won't let me register until they get records. How long do I have to wait?**

If you are a student that is experiencing any of the situations described above, you have the right to be registered immediately - even if you don't have proof of residency, immunizations, school records, or other documents. If the school disagrees with you, you still have the right to be registered immediately while the disagreement is worked out.

### **Can I do after-school activities?** Yes. You have the right to be involved in all school activities.

### **How can I register in school if I am not living with my parent or guardian?**

The liaison will help you register if you are by yourself. You are considered an "unaccompanied youth."

### **Do I have to leave my school when I find a place to live?**

If you find a permanent place to live during the school year, the law allows you to stay in your school for the rest of the school year, if that is best for you.

\*\*For specific information about the law, please call the Center for Children's Advocacy at 860-570-5327 or 203-223-8975.

**EXIT SLIP**

**Instructions:**

- 1 per Advisory group
- Submit via Google Doc or paper copy

1. Was today's lesson helpful? If so, in what way?

2. What can you, your school, or your community do to get this information to kids who need it?

3. How can this presentation/lesson be improved?

## Local Homeless Education Liaisons



Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized by Title X, Part C, of the No Child Left Behind Act, ensures educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness. This brief explains the key provisions in the Act concerning the roles and responsibilities of the local homeless education liaison and offers strategies for implementing the Act in a school district. Additional briefs on various topics in the law may be found at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.

### Introduction

Local homeless education liaisons are Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff responsible for ensuring the identification, school enrollment, attendance, and opportunities for academic success of students in homeless situations. Some of these activities may be performed by the local liaison himself or herself, while others are accomplished by coordinating the efforts of other staff.

National evaluations have found that local liaisons are an important factor contributing to the success of a school district's homeless education program; therefore, the McKinney-Vento Act now requires every LEA to appoint a local homeless education liaison and specifies his or her legal responsibilities. By linking students and their families to school and community services, local liaisons play a critical role in stabilizing students and promoting academic achievement at the individual, school, and district level.

### Key Provisions

- Every LEA, otherwise known as school district, must designate an appropriate staff person as a local homeless education liaison. This person may also be a coordinator for other federal programs.
- Local liaisons must ensure that:
  - Children and youth in homeless situations are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies.
  - Students experiencing homelessness enroll, and have full and equal opportunity to succeed, in school.
  - Families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, Even Start, and preschool programs administered by the LEA; and referrals to health, mental health, dental, and other appropriate services.

### Who is homeless? (Sec. 725)

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 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).

## Local Homeless Education Liaisons (continued)

- Parents or guardians of students experiencing homelessness are informed of educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
- Public notice of the educational rights of students in homeless situations is disseminated where children and youth receive services.
- Enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the Enrollment Disputes section of the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Parents, guardians and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness are fully informed of all transportation services provided under the McKinney-Vento Act, including transportation to the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing these services.
- Local liaisons must:
  - Assist homeless children and youth who do not have immunizations or immunization or medical records to obtain necessary immunizations or immunization or medical records.
  - Help unaccompanied youth choose and enroll in a school, after considering the youths' wishes, and provide youth with notice of their right to appeal an enrollment decision that is contrary to their wishes.
  - Ensure that unaccompanied youth are enrolled in school immediately pending the resolution of any dispute that may arise over school enrollment or placement.
  - Collaborate and coordinate with State Coordinators for Homeless Education and community and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to children and youth in homeless situations.
- State coordinators and LEAs must educate

school personnel, service providers, and advocates who work with families in homeless situations about the duties of the local homeless education liaison.

*(See Endnotes for the text of the law.)*

### Strategies for Implementation

- LEA administrators should work with their State Coordinator for Homeless Education to identify an appropriate staff person to serve as the local homeless education liaison. Federal programs, such as Title I, Part A; Even Start; or Migrant Education, are good programs with which to collaborate in supporting the local liaison position. Perhaps most importantly, after reviewing the responsibilities of the local liaison position, the LEA should appoint the person who has the time ability to carry them out.
- LEAs and State Coordinators should create opportunities for local liaisons to receive training focused on homelessness awareness, key provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act, and the legal responsibilities of the local liaison. Training opportunities may be facilitated by State Coordinators for Homeless Education through attendance at local, state, and national conferences; through neighboring school districts that have established local liaison positions; and through materials such as NCHE's *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit* (see *Resources*, page 3). NCHE also hosts homeless education webinars regularly, where participants can train conveniently from their office; visit <http://www.serve.org/nche/webinars.php> to learn more.
- Local liaisons should join local homeless task forces, homeless coalitions, and their local homeless assistance Continuum of Care (visit <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/programs/coc/index.cfm> for more information). A directory of state and local homeless coalitions may be found on the NCHE website at [http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state\\_resources.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php).

## Local Homeless Education Liaisons (continued)

- State Coordinators should provide the local liaison with sample forms, policies, procedures, awareness materials (for example, brochures and posters), and fact sheets so that he or she will be well equipped for his or her job and does not have to “reinvent the wheel”. Sample materials may be found in the *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit* (see below), and on the website of the National Center for Homeless Education at <http://www.serve.org/nche>.
- Local liaisons should develop collaborative relationships with community social service providers, including shelters, soup kitchens, food banks, transitional living projects for youth, street outreach teams, youth drop-in centers, community action agencies, welfare departments, housing departments, public health departments, and faith-based organizations. They should inform these agencies of the duties of the local liaison and the responsibilities of the school district in enrolling and serving homeless children and youth.
- Local liaisons should develop relationships with key school district personnel, including administrators, principals, secretaries, registrars, counselors, social workers, transportation staff, food services staff, school nurses, truancy officers, and teachers. They should inform these personnel about the causes and struggles of homelessness, common signs of homelessness, the duties of the local liaison, the responsibilities of the school district, and the rights of students and families in homeless situations.
- Local liaisons should develop relationships with local directors of other school programs, such as preschool; Special Education; Child Nutrition; Title I, Part A; Migrant Education; Neglected and Delinquent; and Even Start to ensure that students in homeless situations can access these services as needed.
- Local liaisons should appoint a school-level point of contact at each school in the LEA. This person can assist the local liaison with school-level tasks and refer issues that need further attention to the local liaison.
- Local liaisons should disseminate posters, brochures, and other awareness materials explaining educational rights, programs, and related services in schools and other locations where homeless children and youth receive services (such as soup kitchens, health clinics, shelters, transitional living projects for youth, street outreach teams, youth drop-in centers, motels, campgrounds, public laundries, and faith-based organizations). Educational rights posters may be ordered free of charge from the NCHE website at <http://www.serve.org/nche/products.php>.
- Local liaisons should seek program support from Title I programs, other education programs, and public and private community organizations.
- LEA staff should communicate with parents, guardians, caregivers, and youth in a manner and language that they can understand.

### Resources

*Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*, published as a collaborative effort between the National Center for Homeless Education and the staff of Project HOPE-Virginia. The *Toolkit*, which was updated in September 2007, may be ordered or downloaded from NCHE’s website at <http://www.serve.org/nche/products.php>.

NCHE issue briefs on school selection, enrollment, transportation, dispute resolution, identification, and unaccompanied youth are also particularly useful for local liaisons. NCHE briefs can be downloaded at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.

This brief was developed cooperatively by:

National Center for Homeless Education  
800-308-2145 (Toll-free Helpline)  
<http://www.serve.org/nche>

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

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

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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:

# Youth Rights and Resources

for Connecticut youth in unstable housing situations

# www.youth-help.org

## What is youth-help.org?

A project of the Connecticut State Department of Education, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, Institute for Community Research, Center for Children's Advocacy, and the Partnership for Strong Communities, [youth-help.org](http://youth-help.org) educates youth, front-line school staff, and community partners about some of their rights under McKinney-Vento Act and provides steps to address these specific issues.

The toolkit includes a variety of online resources to raise awareness of youth housing instability, laws that protect youth rights, and the available resources for unstably housed youth in Connecticut.

Find more at [www.youth-help.org/about](http://www.youth-help.org/about).



### Voices of Homeless Youth

Awareness & Information Video Toolkit

❖ Data ❖ Classroom Guide ❖ Stories

## Connecticut Youth Count Statistics

### Data snapshot

- 3000 youth identified through enhanced coordination and recruitment methods
- Over 40% indicated having no permanent place to live for over a year
- 30% of females indicated they were pregnant or parenting
- 25% of “literally homeless” youth self-designated as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or questioning

Learn more by visiting [youth-help.org](http://youth-help.org) and clicking “Data.”