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North Adams Community Schools Homeless Education Policy Guidelines

This policy is intended to be in direct compliance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act. It is the policy of North Adams Community Schools to ensure that homeless children and youth are provided with equal access to its educational programs, have the opportunity to meet the same rigorous academic standards, are not segregated on the basis of their status as homeless and to establish safeguards that protect homeless students from discrimination on the basis of their homelessness.

Definitions

The term “homeless students” means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes:

- Students 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 ground 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.
- Students 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
- Students who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
- Migratory students who qualify as homeless because the children are living in circumstances described above.
- The term “unaccompanied youth” includes a youth who is not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian.

Liaison for Homeless Students

A *Liaison for Homeless Students* will be appointed each year by the North Adams Community Schools Superintendent and will carry out pertinent duties. Such duties include:

- Identifying homeless children and youths as identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies.
- Keeping school personnel aware of pertinent issues.
- Ensuring that identified homeless children and youths are enrolled in school and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed.
- Ensuring that identified homeless families, children, and youths receive educational services for which they are eligible including referrals to health care services, dental services, and mental health services; and referral to Head Start and preschool programs.
- Ensuring that the parents or guardians of homeless children and youths are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
- Ensure that homeless students are integrated into existing services with peers to avoid isolation and stigmatization.
- Disseminating public notice of the educational rights of homeless children/youth.
- Mediating enrollment disputes.

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- Informing the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth of all transportation services to the school and assisting with providing these services.
- Reporting to the State Coordinator for Homeless Education necessary information to assess the educational needs of homeless children and youths at North Adams Community Schools.

Best Interest of the Homeless Student

In determining the best interest of the homeless student, the school shall:

- To the extent feasible, keep a homeless student at the school of origin except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the student's parent or guardian.
- Provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal, to the homeless student's parent or guardian if the homeless student is sent to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian.
- In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the liaison for homeless students shall assist in placement or enrollment decisions, considering the views of such unaccompanied youth, and providing notice to such student of the right of appeal.
- Provide free breakfast and lunch, Title 1 services, and transportation to/from school of origin or school requested by the parent, if feasible and in the best interest of the student.
- Provide a quality education to homeless children and youths and include such students in all educational activities.

Admission

North Adams Schools shall immediately admit the homeless student even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of residency, or other documentation.

North Adams Schools shall immediately contact the school last attended by the student to obtain relevant academic and other records.

If the student needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, North Adams Schools shall immediately refer the parent or guardian of the student to the Liaison for Homeless Students who shall assist in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records.

Homeless Education Dispute Resolution Process

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school:

- The student shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute.
- The parent or guardian of the student shall be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or student to appeal the decision at the state level.
- The student, parent, or guardian shall be referred to the Liaison for Homeless Students, who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute.
- In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the Liaison for Homeless Students shall ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.