



Homeless Children and Youth Policy

References: 42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq. (McKinney - Vento Homeless Act)

McKinney-Vento/ Homeless Student Liaison

Tara Henson

855-337-8243 X 7712

thenson@highpointva.org

Definition: The Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan defines any homeless children and youth according to the Federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Definition, as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

The term includes children and youth who are:

- Sharing housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- Abandoned in hospitals;
- Awaiting foster care placement;
- Children and youth who have a primary residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public space, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

Homeless Children and Youth Services

Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will ensure that homeless students are provided services including but not limited to the following:

- A. transportation services;
- B. public preschool programs and other educational programs and services for which the homeless student meets eligibility criteria including:
 - programs for children with disabilities;
 - programs for English Learners (ELs) (i.e., students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP));
 - programs in career and technical education;
 - programs for gifted and talented students;
 - school nutrition programs; and
 - before - and after-school programs.

The Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan Liaison for Homeless Children and Youth is, Mary Moorman. Ms. Moorman will coordinate and collaborate with the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth as well as with community and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to homeless children and youths.



Maintaining a Stable School Environment

To ensure stability for homeless students, Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will make school placement determinations based on the “best interest” of the homeless student based on student-centered factors. The Academy will:

- 1.) continue the student’s education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness when a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year; and for the remainder of the academic year even if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year; or
- 2.) enroll the student in any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.

When determining a student’s best interest, Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will assume that keeping the homeless student in the school of origin is in that student’s best interest, except when doing so is contrary to the request of the student’s parent or guardian, or the student if he or she is an unaccompanied youth. The school of origin is the school the student attended or enrolled in when permanently housed, including a public preschool. The school of origin also includes the designated receiving school at the next level for feeder school patterns, when the student completes the final grade level at the school of origin.

When determining the student’s best interest, Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will also consider student-centered factors, including the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless students and give priority to the request of the student’s parent or guardian, or youth (if an unaccompanied youth). Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan also considers the school placement of siblings when making this determination.

If Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan finds that it is not in the student’s best interest to attend the school of origin or the school requested by the parent or guardian, or unaccompanied youth, Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will provide the individual with a written explanation and reason for the determination in a manner and form understandable to the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth. This written explanation will include appeal rights and be provided in a timely manner.

Immediate Enrollment for Homeless Students

Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan has an obligation to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless students. A school chosen on the basis of a best interest determination shall enroll the homeless student, even if the student does not have the documentation typically necessary for enrollment, such as immunization and other required health records, proof of residency, proof of guardianship, birth certificate or previous academic records. The homeless student shall be enrolled immediately regardless of whether the student missed application or enrollment deadlines during the period of homelessness or has outstanding fines or fees.

The enrolling school shall contact the school last attended by the homeless student to obtain relevant academic or other records. If the student needs immunization or other health records, the enrolling school shall refer the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth to the local liaison, who will help obtain the immunizations, screenings or other required health records. Records usually maintained by the



school must be kept so that they are available in a timely fashion if the child enters a new school or Academy. These records include immunization or other required health records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, and evaluations for special services or programs. Procedures for inter-State records transfer between schools should be taken into account in order to facilitate immediate enrollment.

Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will also make sure that, once identified for services, the homeless student is attending classes and not facing barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities, including magnet school, summer school, career and technical education, advanced placement, online learning, and charter school programs (if available). In addition, Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan may consider giving homeless children and youth's priority if there is a waitlist for these schools, programs, and activities.

Transportation Services for Homeless Students

Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will provide homeless students with transportation services that are comparable to those available to non-homeless students. Additionally, Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will provide for, or arrange for transportation to and from the school of origin at the parent or guardian's request, or the liaison's request in the case of an unaccompanied youth. Transportation is arranged promptly to allow for immediate enrollment and will not create barriers to a homeless student's attendance, retention, and success. The following procedures also apply subject to a determination of the student's best interest:

- 1.) If the homeless student moves but continues to live within the area covered by the Academy's charter the Academy is considered the school of origin and the school of residence and, therefore, transportation will be provided or arranged for the student's transportation to or from the school of origin by the Academy.
- 2.) If the homeless student moves to an area outside of the Academy's charter, though continuing his/her education at the school of origin, the Academy and the public school district in which the student resides must agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation to the school of origin. If the Academy and the public school district cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs will be shared equally.
- 3.) When the student obtains permanent housing, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin until the end of the school year.

Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan shall determine the mode of transportation in consultation with the parent or guardian based on the best interest of the student.

In accordance with Federal law, the above transportation requirements still apply during the resolution of any dispute. Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will work with the State to resolve transportation disputes with other Academies. If the disputing Academy is in another State, the Academy will turn to the State for assistance as Federal guidance says that both States should try to arrange an agreement for the Academies.



Dispute Resolution Procedure

Homeless families and youths have the right to challenge placement and enrollment decisions. If a dispute arises between a school and a parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth regarding eligibility, school selection, or enrollment of a homeless student, the Academy must follow its dispute resolution procedures, consistent with the State's procedures. If such a dispute occurs, the Academy will immediately enroll the homeless student in the school in which enrollment is sought pending final resolution of the dispute, including all appeals. The student will receive all services for which they are eligible until all disputes and appeals are resolved.

Pursuant to State, Academy and Board of Directors policies, Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will provide the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of all decisions regarding school selection and enrollment made by the Academy or State, along with a written explanation of appeal rights.

Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan's notice and written explanation about the reason for its decision will include, at a minimum, an explanation of how the school reached its decision regarding eligibility, school selection, or enrollment, including 1) a description of the proposed or refused action by the school, 2) an explanation of why the action is proposed or refused, 3) a description of other options the school considered and why those options were rejected, 4) a description of any other relevant factors to the school's decision and information related to the eligibility or best interest determination such as the facts, witnesses, and evidence relied upon and their sources, and 5) an appropriate timeline to ensure deadlines are not missed. The Academy must also include contact information for the Liaison and the State Coordinator, and a brief description of their roles. Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will also refer the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth to the Liaison, who will carry out the dispute resolution process.

Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan ensures that all decisions and notices are drafted in a language and format appropriate for low-literacy, limited vision readers, and individuals with disabilities. For children and youth and/or parents or guardians who are English learners or whose dominant language is not English, the Academy will provide translation and interpretation services in connection with all phases of the dispute resolution process pursuant to federal laws. Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will also provide electronic notices via email if the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth has access to email followed by a written notice provided in person or sent by mail.

Preschool-Aged Homeless Children

Homeless preschool-aged children and their families shall be provided equal access to the educational services for which they are eligible, including preschool programs, including Head Start programs, administered by the Academy. Additionally, the homeless child must remain in the public preschool of origin, unless a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest. When making such a decision on the student's best interest, the Academy takes into account the same factors as it does for any student, regardless of age. It also considers pre-school age specific factors, such as 1) the child's attachment to preschool teachers and staff; 2) the impact of school climate on the child, including school safety; the quality and availability of services to meet the child's needs, including health, developmental, and social-emotional needs; and 3) travel time to and from school.



HIGHPOINT VIRTUAL ACADEMY OF MICHIGAN

Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will also provide transportation services to the school of origin for a homeless child attending preschool. Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will provide the child with transportation to the school of origin even if the homeless preschooler who is enrolled in a public preschool in the Academy moves to another Academy that does not provide widely available or universal preschool.

Public Notice of Educational Rights

In addition to notifying the parent or guardian of the homeless student or the unaccompanied youth of the applicable rights described above, Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan post public notice of educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness in each school. In addition, Highpoint Virtual Academy of Michigan will post public notice of the McKinney-Vento rights in places that homeless populations frequent, such as shelters, soup kitchens, and libraries in a manner and form understandable to the parents and guardians and unaccompanied youths.

Homeless Student Records

The local liaison will assist the homeless students and their parent(s) or guardian(s) or unaccompanied homeless students in their efforts to provide documentation to meet State and local requirements for entry into school.

All records for homeless students shall be maintained, subject to the protections of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and in such a manner so that they are available in a timely fashion and can be transferred promptly to the appropriate parties, as required. Pursuant to the McKinney-Vento Act, information regarding a homeless student's living situation is not considered directory information and must be provided the same protections as other non-directory personally identifiable information (PII) contained in student education records under FERPA.

No Board policy, administrative procedure, or practice will be interpreted or applied in such a way as to inhibit the enrollment, attendance, or school success of homeless children.