

McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program

Strategies for assisting homeless youth participate in athletics

Many homeless youth, whether unaccompanied or not, want to participate in athletics for the many benefits it brings including a sense of achievement, belonging, and success. However, there can be many obstacles in the way of full participation. These include:

- inability to obtain a parental permission signature,
- getting a physical (this has monetary and logistical hurdles),
- covering the cost of equipment and clothing, and
- transportation to and from practices and games, and
- the cost of medical insurance

For many students these barriers can be impossible to participate in athletics. The definition of enrollment in the McKinney-Vento Act includes “attending classes and participating fully in school activities.” Therefore, LEAs need to help homeless youth overcome these barriers. Below are some strategies that school districts around the country have implemented to assist homeless youth, whether unaccompanied or not, participate in athletics.

1. Build awareness about homelessness in your district. Local liaisons can talk to coaches, faculty activity advisors, and teachers about homelessness, the educational and other barriers homeless students face, and the importance of ensuring full school participation for students experiencing homelessness.
2. Educate the school community about the specific definition of homelessness. Local liaisons have the legal responsibility to identify children and youth in the school district who meet the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homeless. Other members of the school community may not be aware of the definition or how to apply it. Local liaisons can share this information with athletic/ activity association administrators, coaches, teachers, faculty activity advisors, principals, and other school staff.
3. Advocate for state or local policies to expedite full participation in extra-curricular activities for students experiencing homelessness. It is often helpful to have state or local policies and procedures in place to implement the McKinney-Vento Act’s requirements.
4. Develop resources to pay for equipment and fees. Some ways school districts ensure that costs do not prevent students from participating in activities include:
 - ✓ Waiving fees;
 - ✓ Using funds and strategies for homeless students comparable to those used to allow other low-income students to participate;
 - ✓ Paying for equipment and fees with school district funds or appropriate federal funds, such as McKinney-Vento grant funds;
 - ✓ Seeking sponsorships from the PTA, civic organizations, and local businesses; and
 - ✓ Using donations or holding fundraisers.
5. Employ strategies to obtain documents such as birth certificates. Since the McKinney Vento Act mandates immediate enrollment, students must be allowed to participate fully in school activities while necessary documents are gathered. Many documents will be part of the student’s educational records, which must be requested immediately by the enrolling school and forwarded in a timely fashion by the previous school.

6. Build relationships with local health care providers to help youth obtain required health insurance and examinations. Most children and youth experiencing homelessness will be eligible for their state's free child health insurance program. School nurses may be able to assist with administering physical examinations and coordinating necessary health services.

Administrative

- Build a relationship with the Athletic Director at the school district.
- Build a relationship with your state level Athletic Director.
- Read and become familiar with the athletic student handbook; identify possible barriers to homeless student and discuss with the Athletic Director.
- Find out about the state level athletic organization, read their handbook, become aware of the rules under which they operate, identify possible barriers, and discuss with the Athletic Director.

Medical/case management

- Arrange for the school to offer physicals and other services.
- Have mobile health vans from Public Health come to your schools.
- Schools should consider using a college intern or other support person to help case manage to make sure that students are able to get the health resources they need.
- Create MOUs with local health agencies.

Transportation

- Ask parents and coaches to help provide transportation to and from practices and games.
- Ask parents if they would be willing to transport students experiencing homelessness.
- The law states that transportation has to be provided to and from the school of origin, it doesn't state what time or right at the end of the day. Therefore, some schools treat the after athletic practice the same way they do after school transportation.
- McKinney-Vento subgrant funds allows for the provision of assistance to defray the excess cost of transportation for students under section 722(g)(4)(A), not otherwise provided through Federal, State, or local funding, where necessary to enable students to attend the school selected under section 722(g)(3).

Food

- Provide snack foods to be eaten after practice.
- Approach the athletic booster organization to ask for funds for money for students to have dinner on the way back from away games (when the team would stop for dinner at a restaurant).

Financial

- Waive participation fees.
- Set up a donation program to help purchase uniforms and equipment for homeless students to participate in athletics and extra-curricular activities.
- Assist with in-kind monetary donations from your Success for Students on the Move Fund (or other fund similar to this in your LEA) to offset costs.
- Ask what LEAs do for students who do not have the economic means to participate – most districts will provide, especially if the student is a stellar athlete or musician; same level of support should be available to homeless children and youth under McKinney-Vento comparable services.
- Many schools have a School Foundation, benevolent funds, unrestricted dollars, Needy Child funds, etc. that can be used to provide services beyond MV or Title I funds. Find out what is available in your LEA.
- McKinney-Vento subgrant funds may be used if the cost is reasonable and the item is necessary for athletic participation.

Conclusion: In addition to meeting the legal requirements for immediate school enrollment, ensuring the full participation in extra-curricular activities of students experiencing homelessness provides children and youth with a world of opportunity. Participation in these activities is critical in keeping youth engaged and successful in school, and in opening doors to higher education and instilling an outlook on leadership and teamwork that carries on into their adult lives. By using the strategies listed in this brief, school districts can ensure that they are complying with federal law and are affording valuable opportunities to students especially in need of the stability and sense of belonging that full participation in school can provide.

Here is Federal Guidance:

I-6. What are an LEA's responsibilities to ensure that homeless children and youths have access to special programs and other activities?

LEAs must have procedures to ensure that homeless children and youths who meet the relevant eligibility criteria do not face 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 such programs are available at the State or local levels. (Section 722(g)(1)(F)(iii)). Additionally, outstanding fines or fees or absences must not present barriers to enrollment for homeless students. (See section 722(g)(1)(I)). LEAs should anticipate and accommodate the needs of McKinney-Vento-eligible students to enter charter schools, magnet schools, and other schools, programs, and activities despite missing application and enrollment deadlines due to a period of homelessness. In addition, LEAs should consider giving homeless children and youths priority if there is a waitlist for these schools, programs, and activities. Local liaisons must assist homeless children and youths with activities such as enrolling in school and accessing school services, including free meals through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.

Tips on Ensuring Access to Extracurricular Activities

Homelessness can create barriers to participation in extracurricular activities. Homeless students who change schools during the school year may not meet residency requirements related to sports or may enter school in the middle of the season. He or she may lack a birth certificate, proof of physical examinations, or other documents normally required prior to participation and may not be able to pay for equipment or fees. The McKinney-Vento Act provides legal rights and support to help ensure that students experiencing homelessness can participate fully in extracurricular school activities.

To assist LEAs should:

- Build awareness about homelessness across districts. Local liaisons can talk to coaches, faculty advisors, and teachers about homelessness, the educational and other barriers homeless students face, and the importance of ensuring full school participation for students experiencing homelessness.
- Develop State or local policies that expedite full participation in extracurricular activities for homeless students.
- Form cooperative relationships with athletic associations to identify ways they can adjust policies to facilitate participation of homeless students in sports.
- Ensure that costs do not prevent students from participating in activities by waiving fees; using funds and strategies for homeless students comparable to those used to allow other low-income students to participate; paying for equipment and fees with school district funds or appropriate Federal funds, such as McKinney-Vento grant funds; seeking sponsorships from parent groups, civic organizations, and local businesses; using donations; or holding fundraisers.
- Employ strategies to obtain documents such as birth certificates. Since the McKinney-Vento Act mandates immediate enrollment, students must be allowed to participate fully in school activities while necessary documents are gathered. (See section 722(g)(3)(C)).

- Build relationships with local health care providers to help youths obtain required health insurance and examinations. School nurses may be able to assist with administering physical examinations and coordinating necessary health services.
- Contact colleagues and national partners in homeless education for help. Many local homeless education liaisons and State Coordinators for homeless education have worked successfully to ensure that students experiencing homelessness can participate fully in extracurricular activities. They can provide strategies, creative thinking, sample forms, and other supports to their colleagues.