

I. Education for Homeless Children and Youth program, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Title VII, Subtitle B

1. Student Identification

(722(g)(1)(B) of the McKinney-Vento Act): Describe the procedures the SEA will use to identify homeless children and youth in the State and to assess their needs.

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) views the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program as a framework for supporting students and families experiencing homelessness across the state. Due to the rural and frontier nature of many local education agencies (LEAs), it can be a daunting challenge for under-resourced communities to create a robust program. The OPI encourages all communities to view EHCY through the lens of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. By creating a systemic approach to meeting the needs of all students, students experiencing homelessness will be able to access interventions designed to increase their academic success and positively impact their social and emotional well-being. LEA homeless liaisons shall coordinate with other entities and agencies to identify children and youth who may be homeless in an effort to better understand the challenges of all students within their schools. Accurate and prompt identification of students experiencing homelessness allows LEAs to work with community partners to provide supports and resources.

The OPI will rely on LEAs to identify, serve, and enroll children and youth experiencing homelessness in public schools, or to refer them to local Head Start, Tribal Head Start, or other educational programs where appropriate, including IDEA Part C. All children and youth identified as homeless who are enrolled in a public school in Montana will be identified in the Achievement in Montana (AIM) database, including the student's living situation at the time of identification as homeless. Children and youth who are unaccompanied will also be marked as such in the AIM system. The OPI's EHCY program, in conjunction with the National Center for Homeless Education, will provide training, technical assistance, and written guidance to all LEAs regarding the need to identify and provide services to such children and youth.

Upon enrollment, all LEAs will assess the needs of each eligible child or youth. LEAs applying for or receiving sub-grants will conduct community-wide assessments to determine the needs of all families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness who reside in the geographic area served by the sub-grant. Through regular communication with liaisons, the state coordinator will assess the needs of children and youth across the state who are experiencing homelessness. The state coordinator will respond to inquiries from parents, families, caregivers, and unaccompanied homeless youth to ensure that each child or youth receives the full protections and services provided by this subtitle.

The state coordinator will work with the OPI Indian Education Division and with Tribal Governments across the state to create culturally appropriate programs that meet the needs of both rural and urban American Indian populations. The state coordinator will provide focused technical assistance and training to schools located on or near reservations with high

populations of American Indian students to ensure that students experiencing homelessness within these schools are appropriately identified and provided with services.

2. Dispute Resolution

(722(g)(1)(C) of the McKinney-Vento Act): Describe procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding the educational placement of homeless children and youth.

All LEAs are required to adopt a policy and procedure for resolving disputes regarding the educational placement of children and youth identified as homeless. Such policies and procedures may be the same process used to address other disputes or grievances within the district. The OPI provides plain language documents to all LEAs to assist them in informing families and youth experiencing homelessness of their right to file a dispute. Documents are available on the OPI website and are also available to all LEAs in the state through TransACT.com, under a contract with the OPI. Parents, guardians, or unaccompanied youth may file a dispute with the OPI based on the following process:

Notice by Local Education Agency (LEA)

Each LEA must have a dispute resolution policy specifically addressing the right of a student experiencing homelessness to appeal decisions regarding a student's eligibility, school placement, or provision of services.

LEA Homeless Liaison

In any dispute regarding eligibility, placement, or provision of services to a student identified as homeless, the school must refer the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth to the LEA's homeless liaison to assist in carrying out the dispute resolution as quickly as possible.

LEA Decision

LEAs and liaisons should make every attempt to resolve disputes at the local level using the LEA dispute/grievance process. The LEA homeless liaison will work with the state coordinator or with the National Center for Homeless Education, as appropriate, to resolve the dispute.

SEA State Coordinator

Upon receipt of a completed dispute resolution form and related documentation, the state coordinator will, within 15 calendar days, convene a panel of three OPI staff to investigate and resolve the dispute. The decisions of the panel will be final.

3. Support or School Personnel

(722(g)(1)(D) of the McKinney-Vento Act): Describe programs for school personnel (including the LEA liaisons for homeless children and youth, principals and other school leaders, attendance officers, teachers, enrollment personnel, and specialized instructional support personnel) to heighten the awareness of such school personnel of the specific needs of homeless children and youth, including runaway and homeless children and youth.

All school personnel providing services to children and youth impacted by homelessness must receive professional development and other support on a yearly basis to ensure compliance with all legal requirements and best practices regarding the support of these students. Professional development topics may include homelessness, poverty, special education topics, trauma, child abuse, and other issues relevant to students and families in crisis.

The OPI requires liaisons in all LEAs participating in the sub-grant program to participate in at least seven hours of professional development addressing the needs of homeless children and youth on an annual basis. The state coordinator provides trainings on topics related to the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth on a yearly basis.

Liaisons in LEAs not funded by a sub-grant will be required to obtain a minimum of three hours of professional development addressing the needs of children and youth identified as homeless on a yearly basis. All professional development may be obtained through webinars offered by the federal technical assistance provider, through other organizations advocating for homeless children and youth, through the state coordinator, or through other recognized experts in the field of child and youth homelessness.

4. Access to Services

(722(g)(1)(F) of the McKinney-Vento Act): Describe procedures that ensure that:

- i. Homeless children have access to public preschool programs, administered by the SEA or LEA, as provided to other children in the State;*
- ii. Homeless youth and youth separated from public schools are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services, including by identifying and removing barriers that prevent youth described in this clause from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with State, local, and school policies; and*
- iii. Homeless children and youth 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 and local levels.*

i. The SEA state coordinator will collaborate and coordinate efforts with Montana's Best Beginnings Advisory Council and offer input to member agencies regarding the need to provide services to preschool children identified as homeless. The state coordinator will work with the Head Start Collaboration Coordinator to ensure that children identified as homeless are prioritized for services within Head Start and Tribal Head Start programs. Approximately 10 percent of all children served in Montana Head Start programs are identified as homeless each year. The state coordinator will collaborate with the federal, state, and locally funded

preschool programs to prioritize services to children identified as homeless who live in communities offering such programs. Upon request the state coordinator will provide training and technical assistance to Head Start and other state or federally funded preschool programs.

ii. The state coordinator will collaborate with Alternative Education Centers across the state to increase awareness of the need to provide outreach and drop-out recovery programs to youth identified as homeless. These efforts will include credit recovery and alternative methods of meeting graduation requirements.

The state coordinator will collaborate with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, with state and tribal colleges and universities, and with other state agencies providing financial aid and educational opportunities to students seeking a post-secondary education.

Each LEA with a school serving students in Grades 9-12 must have clear procedures in place to ensure that homeless students receive appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school (Section 722(g)(1)(F)(ii)).

iii. The state coordinator communicates with the Montana High School Association (MHSA) to ensure that students identified as homeless are granted waivers to eligibility requirements based on residency. The state coordinator also works with state and local programs that provide extracurricular activities to children and youth experiencing homelessness, including the YMCA, United Way, and other organizations.

The state coordinator collaborates with the Career and Technical Education Division to ensure access to CTE activities including BPA, FFA, FCCLA, HOSA, SkillsUSA, ProStart, and other similar career-based programs. LEA homeless liaisons will coordinate with CTE advisors to provide students with items required to participate, including fees, equipment, tools, uniforms, or other clothing items.

The state coordinator encourages LEAs to provide opportunities for students identified as homeless to enroll in Advanced Placement Courses, International Baccalaureate Programs, Dual Enrollment Programs, Gifted and Talented Programs, and other academic programs.

LEAs will assist students identified as homeless in participating in Fine Arts programs. Through collaborative efforts with non-profits and other community agencies, LEAs are encouraged to reach out to the local community to provide items needed for participation in extra-curricular activities, including athletic gear, participation fees, musical instruments, and other tools or equipment as necessary.

5. Strategies to Address Other Problems

(722(g)(1)(H) of the McKinney-Vento Act): Provide strategies to address other problems with respect to the education of homeless children and youth, including problems resulting from enrollment delays that are caused by—

- i. requirements of immunization and other required health records;*
- ii. residency requirements;*
- iii. lack of birth certificates, school records, or other documentation;*

- iv. *guardianship issues; or*
- v. *uniform or dress code requirements.*

- i. LEA homeless liaisons will assist students and families identified as homeless in obtaining required immunizations through County Health Offices or other medical providers including outreach to community service organizations that provide medical services and supplies, such as glasses or hearing aids. LEA homeless liaisons will assist unaccompanied homeless youth in enrolling in any available Medicaid programs and in accessing health care services under state statute.
- ii. LEA homeless liaisons will inform all staff, with particular attention to staff responsible for enrollment or registration of students, that students or families who may be homeless are not required to provide proof of residency.
- iii. Upon request for enrollment, LEA homeless liaisons will assist the student or family in obtaining birth certificates or other necessary documentation, including payment of any fees to obtain state or county records. Upon request from the enrolling school, all LEAs will release student records within five days per Montana code.
- iv. LEA homeless liaisons will inform all staff, with particular attention to staff responsible for enrollment or registration of students, that students who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian have the right to self-enroll in any public school. Family members providing care to a child without legal guardianship will be encouraged to complete a Caretaker-Relative Affidavit per Montana code. Such an affidavit will not alter a student's designation as homeless.
- v. LEA homeless liaisons will work with local organizations to provide students with uniforms or clothing items to meet school dress code policies or class participation guidelines.

6. *Policies to Remove Barriers*

(722(g)(1)(I) of the McKinney-Vento Act): Demonstrate that the SEA and LEAs in the State have developed, and will review and revise, policies to remove barriers to the identification of homeless children and youth, and the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth in schools in the State, including barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences.

The state coordinator will annually review and recommend revisions to state-level policies or procedures that may create barriers to the identification, enrollment, and retention of students identified as homeless. This review will be conducted in collaboration and coordination with other state and federally funded programs including Title I, Title III, Migrant Education, IDEA, and Indian Education. Such review will be conducted with input from LEAs receiving sub-grant funds, including urban, rural, and reservation communities.

The OPI will provide written guidance documents regarding the needs to enroll and retain children and youth who are homeless, including the unique needs of various at-risk and diverse subgroups of students.

The state coordinator will collaborate with other divisions within the OPI which provide specific support, such as Migrant Education, Indian Education, Special Education, Gifted and Talented Education, Preschool Programs, Career and Technical Education, and other programs and initiatives relevant to the needs of children and youth identified as homeless.

Montana Code prohibits all public schools from holding student records for fines or fees.

7. Assistance from Counselors

(722(g)(1)(K)): A description of how youths described in section 725(2) will receive assistance from counselors to advise such youth, and prepare and improve the readiness of such youth for college.

The state coordinator will work with the Montana School Counseling Association (MSCA) to increase awareness among school counselors of the need to assist high school students identified as homeless in receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework. The state coordinator will also work with the MSCA to provide all school counselors in the state with training regarding the need to assist students identified as homeless in preparing for college, careers, or community across the K-12 continuum. It is recommended that all school counselors participate in professional development to increase awareness of the unique needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Webinars are available through the federal technical assistance provider, the American School Counseling Association, and the Teacher Learning Hub.