

# Jasper District Homeless Policy

For

Children and Youth in Transition

Homelessness exists in many communities. A combination of high housing costs and poverty causes many families to lose their housing. Many young people leave their homes due to abuse, neglect and family conflict. Children and youth who lost their housing live in a variety of places, including motel, shelters, shared residences, transitional housing programs, cars, campgrounds and others. Their lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious physical, emotional and mental consequences. Jasper school district will ensure that all children and youth receive a free and appropriate public education and are given meaningful opportunities to succeed in our schools. This district will also follow the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.

It's the policy of our district to view children as individuals. Therefore, this Policy will not refer to children as homeless; it will instead use the term "children and youth in transition." Under federal law, children and youth in transition must have access to appropriate public education, including preschool, and be given a full opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards. They must be included in state-and district- wide assessments and accountability systems. Our schools will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation and harassment.

Information regarding this policy will be: distributed to all students upon enrollment; provided to students who seek to withdraw from school; and posted in every school in the district, as well as other places where children, youth and families in transition receive services, including family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels, camping grounds, welfare departments, health departments and other social service agencies.

## Definitions

*Children and youth in transition* means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, and lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence including:

children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, camping grounds of trailer parks due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public

place not designed for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;

Children and youth who are living in a car, park, public place, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting; and

migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.

A child or youth shall be considered to be in transition for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above.

*Unaccompanied youth* means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is in transition as defined above. The more general term youth also includes unaccompanied youth.

*Enroll and enrollment* mean attending school and participating fully in school activities.

*Immediate* means without delay.

*Parent* means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

*School of Origin* means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

*District Liaison* is the staff person designated by our LEA, as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act.

*School Contact Person/Liaison* is the responsible individual at the local school/building site who may identify and enroll children and youth in transition into their school, and has agreed to be the contact person at their school. Often this person may be the school counselor and/or school secretary, or principal.

## **Identification**

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the liaison will identify children and youth in transition in the district, both in and out of school. The liaison will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth as in transition, and procedures *for* forwarding information indicating homelessness to the liaison. The liaison will also instruct school registrars and secretaries to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of students, and to forward information indicating homelessness to the liaison. Community partners in identification may include: family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels, campgrounds, drop-in-centers, welfare departments and other social service agencies, street outreach teams, faith-based organizations, truancy and attendance officers, local homeless coalitions and legal services.

The liaison will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the district, where they are living, and the reasons for any enrollment delays, interruptions in their education or school transfers.

## **School Selection**

Each child and youth in transition has the right to remain at his or her school of origin, or to attend any school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both the student and our school district. Students who change schools have been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. High mobility rates have also been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting our schools to benefit from the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity.

Therefore, in selecting a school, children and youth in transition shall remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent's or youth's wishes. Students may remain at their schools of origin the entire time they are in transition, and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing between academic years.

Feasibility shall be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent's or youth's wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

Safety of the student; Continuity of instruction;

Likely area of family's or youth future housing; Time remaining in the academic year;

Anticipated length of stay in temporary living situation; School placement of siblings; and

Whether the student has special needs that would render the commute harmful.

**Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin and services under federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.**

## **Enrollment**

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students in transition may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth in

transition. **Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:**

*Proof of residency;*

Transcripts/school records (The enrolling school must contact the student's previous school to obtain school records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the students age and information gathered from the student, parent, and previous schools or teachers.);

Immunizations or, immunization/health/medical/physical records. (If necessary, the school must refer students to the liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and or/immunization and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from previous schools or state registries, and school or community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed,);

Proof of guardianship;

Birth certificate;

Any other document requirements;

Unpaid school fees;

Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes; and

Any factor related to the student's living situation.

Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling or liaison.

## **Transportation**

**Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent's request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition.** Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during the pendency of disputes. The liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will only be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. *Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.*

Requests for transportation shall be processed and arranged without delay. If the student in transition is living and attending school in this district, this district shall arrange transportation. If the student in transition is living in this district, but attending school in another, or attending school in this district but living in another, this district will consult with adjoining district's to make transportation arrangements. It is this district's policy that inter-district disputes shall not result in a student in transition missing school. If such a dispute arises, this district will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention of the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered housed students.

## **Services**

Children and youth in transition shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected, including:

Transportation (as described above); Title 1 (as described above);

Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners; Vocational and technical education programs; School nutrition programs; and

Before and after school programs.

## **Counseling Services**

The district recognizes that children and youth in transition suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability shall be given priority and coordinated with student's prior and subsequent schools as necessary, to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school shall immediately implement. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child's or youth's living situation shall be excused. Our school will follow state procedures to ensure that youth in transition and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. School personnel shall refer children and youth in

transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

## **Disputes**

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth in transition shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the rights of a student in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals and Title 1 services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or youth to the liaison. The liaison shall ensure the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice and receiving other service to which he or she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible.

The parent or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The liaison shall keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are repeatedly delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth in transition. The parent, unaccompanied youth or school district may appeal the liaison's decision as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

## **Free meals**

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. *To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals.* On the day a child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the district nutrition office for immediate processing.

## **Title 1**

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title 1 services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness puts students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The district shall reserve such funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title 1 students to children and youth in transition attending non-participating schools. The amount reserved shall be determined by the Title 1 per pupil expenditure for the district. Reserved funds will be used to provide educationally related support services to children and youth in transition, both in school and outside of school and to remove barriers that prevent regular attendance. Children and youth in transition shall be assessed, reported on and included in accountability systems, as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance.

## **Training**

Activities will be implemented to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment: ensure compliance with this policy, and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition.

## **Coordination**

The liaison shall coordinate with and seek support from the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, public and private service providers in the community, housing and placement agencies, the pupil transportation department, liaisons in neighboring districts and other organizations and agencies.

## **Preschool**

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Children in transition have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. To facilitate preschool enrollment and attendance, the provisions of this policy will apply to preschools. *Our district will ensure that children in transition receive priority in preschool enrollment in preschool programs operated by the district, including exempting children in transition from waiting lists.*

Children in transition with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Children in transition under age three will be referred for at-risk-services under Part C of (IDEA). The liaison will collaborate with Head Start and other pre-school programs to ensure that children in transition can access those programs.

## **References:**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 11431 - 11436

Title 1, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 6311'-6315 The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.

April 6, 2000 Policy of the Child Nutrition Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, June 5, 1992 Policy of the administration for Children and Families of the: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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