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Ten Strategies School Districts Can Use to Help Homeless Students

It is important for school districts and 2R charter schools to identify homeless children and youth, immediately enroll them, and help them feel welcome in school. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act requires the identification and immediate enrollment of homeless children and unaccompanied youth. The following is a list of ten strategies districts can implement to identify and work with homeless students and their families.

1. Each local school district and charter school must designate a staff member as their homeless liaison. Large school districts could consider assigning a “homeless contact person” for every school building.
2. In-service all district staff about requirements under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, especially staff who enroll new students into the district. A McKinney-Vento PowerPoint presentation is available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/ppt/mckinneyppt.pps>.
3. Initiate procedures for district staff to know how to identify and refer homeless students. Staff should know the possible indicators of being homeless and how to refer homeless students to the district liaison. Remember that this information should be kept confidential.
4. Post the educational rights of homeless children and youth in every school building. Free posters of the education rights of homeless students - English and Spanish - can be obtained by contacting the National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE (NCHE), 1-800-308-2145 or www.serve.org/nche.
5. Contact the community agencies that serve homelessness families and unaccompanied youth, introduce yourself as your district’s homeless liaison, ask them to post the educational rights of homeless children and youth in their building(s), and initiate a mutual referral process. If you are the liaison of a small rural district, you can at least contact your county’s social services department.
6. Provide information about community agency support services to homeless families and unaccompanied youth at the time of identification and/or enrollment. Know the community agencies that can assist with utilities, food, medical services, and rent assistance. Know the contact information for domestic abuse and runaway youth agencies in your community (see “Resources-Wisconsin Runaway Programs” and “Forms, Applications and Guidance-State Guidance-Homelessness due to Domestic Violence,” <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/homeless/>).
7. Know how to obtain free school meals (see “Free Lunch Program” upper right corner at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/homeless/>), student birth certificates, social security numbers, immunization records, etc. for homeless students.
8. Ensure school supplies are available for newly enrolled homeless students. Establish a process to waive student fees for homeless students if necessary.

9. At the request of the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth, provide transportation to the school of origin. If your district administers a preschool program and offers transportation to preschool students, a homeless preschool student should also receive transportation, usually within district boundaries.
10. Review your district's complaint procedures for timely resolution of homeless disputes. Districts are required to comply with parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth enrollment and transportation requests allowed under the Act until the dispute is resolved.

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