

Homeless Students – Enrollment Rights & Services

The Olympia School District is committed to addressing the challenges that homeless children and youths face in enrolling, attending and succeeding in school. This particularly vulnerable population of children must have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as other children and youths. Homeless children and youths must have access to the educational and related services that they need to enable them to meet the same challenging State academic standards to which all students are held. Because of this, the District will work with homeless students and their families to provide stability in school attendance and other services.

Special attention will be given to ensuring the identification, enrollment and attendance of homeless students not currently attending school, as well as mitigating educational barriers to their academic success. Additionally, the district will take reasonable steps to ensure that homeless students are not stigmatized or segregated in a separate school or in a separate program within a school based on their homeless status.

Homeless students will be provided District services for which they are eligible, including Head Start and comparable pre-school programs, Title I, similar state programs, special education, bilingual education, vocational and technical education programs, gifted and talented programs, and school nutrition programs.

Homeless students are defined as lacking a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, including:

1. Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship;
2. Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
3. Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
4. Abandoned in hospitals;
5. Living in public or private places not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings;
6. Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, transportation stations or similar settings; and,
7. Migratory children living in conditions described in the previous examples.

The Superintendent will designate an appropriate staff person to be the District's liaison for homeless students and their families. The Liaison may simultaneously serve as a coordinator for other federal programs, provided they are able to carry out the duties listed in the procedures that accompany this policy.

If the district has identified more than ten unaccompanied youth, meaning youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and including youth living on their own in any of the homeless situations described in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act, the principal of each middle and high school building will establish a point of contact for such youth. The point of contact is responsible for identifying homeless and unaccompanied youth and connecting them with the district's homeless student liaison. The district's homeless student liaison is responsible for training the building points of contact.

Best Interest Determination

In making a determination as to which school is in the homeless student's best interest to attend, the district will presume that it is in the student's best interest to remain enrolled in their school of origin, unless such enrollment is against the wishes of a parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth.

Attendance options will be made available to homeless families on the same terms as families resident in the district, including attendance rights acquired by living attendance areas, other student assignment policies and intra- and inter-district choice options.

If there is an enrollment dispute, the student will be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent or guardian will be informed of the District's decision, and the reasons therefor, (or informed if the student does not qualify for McKinney Vento, if applicable) and their appeal rights, in writing and in a language they can understand. The District's liaison will carry out dispute resolution as provided by state law. Unaccompanied youth will also be enrolled pending resolution of the dispute.

Once the enrollment decision is made, the school will immediately enroll the student, pursuant to District policies. However, enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including academic records, medical records, proof of residency, mailing address or other documentation, or denied or delayed due to missed application deadlines or fees, fines or absences at previous schools.

If the student does not have immediate access to immunization records, the student will be admitted under a personal exception. Students and families should be encouraged to obtain current immunization records or immunizations as soon as possible, and the District liaison is directed to assist. Records from the student's previous school will be requested from the previous school pursuant to District policies. Emergency contact information is required at the time of enrollment, consistent with District policies, including compliance with the state's address confidentiality program, when necessary. However, emergency contact information cannot be demanded in a form or manner that constructs a barrier to enrollment and/or attendance at school.

Homeless students are entitled to transportation to their school of origin or the school where they are to be enrolled. If the school of origin is in a different district, or a homeless student is living in another district but will attend his or her school of origin in this District, the districts will coordinate the transportation services necessary for the student, or will divide the costs equally.

The District's liaison for homeless students and their families will coordinate with local social service agencies that provide services to homeless children and youths and their families; other school districts on issues of transportation and records transfers; and state and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies. This coordination includes providing public notice of the educational rights of homeless students where such children and youth receive services under the McKinney-Vento Act, such as schools, family shelters and soup kitchens. The notice must be disseminated in a manner and form the parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth receiving such services can understand, including, if necessary and to the extent feasible, in their native language. The District's liaison will also review and recommend amendments to District policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless students and will participate in professional development and other technical assistance activities, as determined by the state-level (OSPI) coordinator for homeless children and youth programs. .

The Superintendent will:

- Strongly encourage district staff, including substitute and regular bus drivers to annually review the video posted on the OSPI website on identification of student homelessness;
- Strongly encourage every district-designated homeless student liaison to attend trainings provided by the state on identification and serving homeless youth. Ensure that the district includes in materials provided to all students at the beginning of the school year or at enrollment, information about services and support for homeless students (i.e., the brochure posted on the OSPI website).

- Use a variety of communications each year to notify students and families about services and support available to them if they experience homelessness (e.g., distributing and collecting an annual housing intake survey, providing parent brochures directly to students and families, announcing the information at school-wide assemblies, posting information on the district's website).

Facilitating On-Time Grade Level Progression

The district will:

- 1) waive specific courses required for graduation for students experiencing homelessness if similar coursework has been satisfactorily completed in another school district; or
- 2) provide reasonable justification for denial of the waiver. In the event the district denies a waiver and the student would have qualified to graduate from their sending school district, the district will provide an alternative process of obtaining the required coursework so that the student may graduate on time.

The district will consolidate partial credit, unresolved, or incomplete coursework and will provide a student experiencing homelessness with an opportunity to accrue credit in a manner that eliminates academic and nonacademic barriers for the student.

For students who have been unable to complete an academic course and receive full credit due withdrawal or transfer, the district will grant partial credit for coursework completed before the date of the withdrawal or transfer. When the district receives a transfer student in these circumstances, it will accept the student's partial credits, apply them to the student's academic progress or graduation or both, and allow the student earn credits regardless of the student's date of enrollment in the district.

In the event a student is transferring at the beginning of or during their junior or senior year of high school and is ineligible to graduate after all alternatives have been considered, the district will work with the sending district to ensure the awarding of a diploma from the sending district if the student meets the graduation requirements of the sending district.

In the event a student enrolled in three or more school districts as a high school student, has met state requirements, has transferred to the district, but is ineligible to graduate from the district after alternatives have been considered, the district will waive its local requirements and ensure that the student receives a diploma.

Cross References:

Policy 3110 Enrollment Attendance
Policy 3231 Student Records
Policy 3413 Student Immunization & Life Threatening Conditions

Legal References:

RCW 28A.225.215 Enrollment of children without legal residence
RCW 28A.320.145 Support for homeless students
20 USC 6301 et seq. Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as amended by ESSA
42 UCS 11431 et seq. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
RCW 28A.320 Provisions applicable to all districts

Adoption Date: 03.08.2004

Olympia School District

Classification: Priority

Revised Dates: 05.23.11; 03.25.13; 02.06.17; 02.26.2018