

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act is a federal law that protects the educational rights of students in temporary housing.

It defines “**homeless** children and youths” as any student who **lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence**.



**School and district leaders set the tone for how students and families in temporary housing will experience school. Keeping in mind that students may be experiencing chronic stress or trauma due to unstable housing, administrators have an important role to play in creating a positive school climate that is safe, supportive, and trauma-sensitive.**

**1. KNOW THE SIGNS:**

- Be familiar with common characteristics of children in temporary housing including enrollment at multiple schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, attendance problems, lack of preparedness for class, etc.
- Be aware of new or ongoing behavior challenges. They may be a result of chronic stress related to housing instability.

**2. INFORM FAMILIES OF THEIR RIGHTS:**

- Inform parents about their child’s educational rights, including immediate enrollment, free meals, and transportation.
- Refer families to the McKinney-Vento Liaison for the school district.
- Make sure that all school-based staff, including enrollment secretaries and bus drivers, know about the educational rights of students in temporary housing.
- Post information about school events and services in local shelters and local community service organizations.

**3. EDUCATE YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY:**

- Encourage all staff to use phrases like “temporarily housed” or “temporary living situation” rather than “homeless” or “shelter.”
- Help all staff understand the impact of unstable housing - such as chronic stress and trauma - on a child by providing training on trauma-sensitivity.
- Make appropriate staff aware of any student living in a temporary housing situation so they can assist with any health/social/academic needs. Please note that a student’s housing status is protected by FERPA and may only be shared in within an educational context.

**4. OFFER SUPPORT AND EMPATHY:**

- Be discreet and make the student/family feel safe. Speak privately and with sensitivity about the family’s living situation.
- Connect the student to the school community (e.g., refer the student to a tutoring/mentoring program; help coordinate transportation to before or after-school activities) as well as the school social worker or counselor.
- Ensure that students have the opportunity to participate in school activities. Consider using Title I funds to provide school supplies, uniforms, field trip fees, etc.

Remember, **all students**, not just those in temporary housing, benefit greatly from a positive school environment that is both safe and supportive. The time and energy put into creating this type of school environment will result in higher levels of success for everyone.



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*This tip sheet was adapted from materials from the Illinois, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia Departments of Education and the National Center for Homeless Education.*