

## School Administrators

### Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- Be familiar with common characteristics of children and youth who are homeless. Common signals are attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class. For more information, visit [http://www.serve.org/nche/nche\\_web/warning.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/nche_web/warning.php).
- Welcome the student and the family and let them know that the school is a safe and secure place.
- Make sure the student enrolls in your school's free meal program. Homeless students are automatically eligible for free school meals. For more information, visit [http://www.serve.org/nche/legis\\_other.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/legis_other.php).
- Ensure that the student has every opportunity that a non-homeless student has for participation in after-school activities and in-school programs.
- Inform parents about their child's educational rights.
- Know your attendance zone, visit shelters to make contact with the shelter director, and reinforce that students will find the school safe and supportive.
- Hold school meetings, such as the PTA meeting, in neighborhood centers to increase accessibility of homeless parents to school events.
- Provide city bus tokens or other transportation assistance to get parents to school for conferences, school events, or PTA meetings.
- Encourage parents to volunteer. Discuss their interests and offer suggestions that allow them to use their expertise. Many parents will help if invited to do so.
- Support the school staff as they work with the student.
- Contact the school district's local homeless education liaison for additional support.
- Show that you care about the student!



*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. For more information about helping homeless students succeed in school, visit the National Center for Homeless Education website at <http://www.serve.org/nche>.*

## Guidance Counselors

### Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

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- Introduce yourself as someone who will work as an advocate for the student's success in school.
- Ask if the student participated in any after-school activities or had special classes at a previous school, then work to connect the student with similar resources, if they are available; ensure that the student has every opportunity that a non-homeless student has for participation in after-school activities and in-school programs.
- Make sure the student enrolls in your school's free meal program. Homeless students are automatically eligible for free school meals. For more information, visit [http://www.serve.org/nche/legis\\_other.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/legis_other.php).
- Inform parents about their child's educational rights.
- Know your attendance zone, visit shelters to make contact with the shelter director, and reinforce that students will find the school safe and supportive.
- Offer support for the physiological needs of the student (food, clothing) as well as the social/emotional needs (safety, security, and belonging).
- Train peer buddies to orient students to the school.
- Arrange a follow-up meeting with parents a couple of weeks after enrollment; you may need to conduct the meeting by phone or visit the parent outside of the school.
- Show that you care about the student!



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## School Nurses

### Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

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- Verify immunization records and, if necessary, refer the student to the local health department for any needed immunizations.
- Observe and alert the principal to any serious medical concern.
- Ask about glasses; the child may need them but not have any.
- Make sure the student enrolls in your school's free meal program. Homeless students are automatically eligible for free school meals. For more information, visit [http://www.serve.org/nche/legis\\_other.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/legis_other.php).
- Assist parents with the completion of medical records.
- Remember that sending a sick student "home" may not be a safe or stable place for a child or youth who is experiencing homelessness. Help families determine options for their children, should they become ill.
- Contact the school district's local homeless education liaison so that additional services can be coordinated.
- Follow-up with students sent to obtain immunizations or physicals.
- Contact the parent or shelter if a student is absent for three or more days.
- Develop reliable, accessible resources for medical, dental, and eye care.
- Sponsor a PTA health night.
- Show that you care about the student!



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## Teachers

### Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

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- Assist other students in being sensitive to stereotypes of homeless people.
- Adjust assignments so that students not living in permanent settings can complete them. (For example, such students may not have a place to perform a science experiment or the resources to bring in an article about current events.)
- Make sure the student enrolls in your school's free meal program. Homeless students are automatically eligible for free school meals. For more information, visit [http://www.serve.org/nche/legis\\_other.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/legis_other.php).
- Ensure that the student has every opportunity that a non-homeless student has for participation in after-school activities and in-school programs.
- Communicate with the parents about school performance.
- Connect the student with tutoring and remediation services, if needed.
- If you have a snack break, keep a store of snacks for students who don't bring one.
- Do not take away possessions. Students may need their "stuff" nearby for security.
- Hold the student accountable for what she or he can control (e.g., behavior or attitude) not what is not under the student's control (e.g., inability to watch a news program or purchase a poster board for a project).
- Discuss concerns with the guidance counselor, school social worker, school nurse, or local homeless education liaison.
- Before you receive a new student:
  - Prepare a list of your class routines and procedures.
  - Prepare a new student file with information for parents and guardians.
  - Maintain a supply of materials for students to use at school.
  - Prepare a "getting-to-know-you" activity for the class to do when a new student arrives.
  - Have the class schedule visible.

## Teachers (cont.)

### Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- When a new student enters the class:
  - Introduce the student to the class.
  - Assign a class buddy to assist with routines.
  - Review the academic record and closely monitor the educational progress of the student.
- When a student leaves:
  - Support the class and the student by discussing the move and having classmates write letters to the departing student.
  - Give the student a copy of the school's contact information so that letters can be written back either via e-mail or traditional mail.
- Show that you care about the student!



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## **Secretaries and Enrollment Personnel**

### **Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

- Learn to identify the following tell-tale signs of homelessness:
  - Chronic hunger or fatigue
  - Erratic school attendance
  - Attendance at multiple schools
  - Poor grooming and/or clothing that draws attention
  - Lack of records such as birth certificate, proof of residence, proof of guardianship, immunization or other medical records, or previous academic records; or incomplete records
  - Parent who seems confused when asked about the last school attended by the student
  - Low-income motel address on enrollment form
  - Statements from family when enrolling, such as:
    - "We've been having a hard time lately."
    - "It's a new address. I can't remember it."
    - "We move a lot and are staying with friends until we find a place."
- For more information on identifying signs of homelessness, visit [http://www.serve.org/nche/nche\\_web/warning.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/nche_web/warning.php).
- Assure families that their children can enroll if you think that they are experiencing homelessness.
- Enroll the child immediately, even if they lack records normally required for enrollment. The immediate enrollment of homeless students without records is mandated under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, P.L. 107-110. For more information, visit [http://www.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc\\_enroll.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc_enroll.php).
- Ask for the name and city of the last school attended; then call that school and ask to have the student's academic records forwarded to your school.
- Arrange for the student to take a placement test if records are not available. For more information, download the NCHE brief entitled Prompt and Proper Placement: Enrolling Students Without Records at <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/assessment.pdf>.
- Take the family to a private place to fill out enrollment forms.
- Offer to assist with filling out the enrollment forms. hesitation may indicate an inability to read.

## **Secretaries and Enrollment Personnel (cont.)**

### **Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

- Make sure the student enrolls in your school's free meal program. Homeless students are automatically eligible for free school meals. For more information, visit [http://www.serve.org/nche/legis\\_other.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/legis_other.php).
- Have copies of the school/class supply lists available.
- Provide a welcome pack with paper, a pencil, a pen, and crayons (younger grades).
- Privately and confidentially alert the child's teacher and guidance counselor of the student's living situation.
- Should the student transfer to another school, prepare a "parent pack", a 9" x 12" (laminated, if possible) mailing envelope with photocopies of the student's records (academic, social security, immunization, etc.). Share a copy with the family and be prepared to transfer the student's records to the new school quickly to expedite his/her appropriate classroom placement. Visit [http://www.serve.org/nche/online\\_order.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/online_order.php) to order NCHE Parent Pack Pocket Folders.
- Be sensitive, patient, calm, and reassuring. You can make a difference!
- For more information, contact the school district's local homeless education liaison.



*This tip sheet was adapted from materials from the Maryland Department of Education. For more information about helping homeless students succeed in school, visit the National Center for Homeless Education website at <http://www.serve.org/nche>.*

## Parents

### Helping Your Child Succeed in School, Even When Dealing with Homelessness

- Know your child's educational rights:
  - Enroll your child in school. You can enroll your child even if you are missing documents normally required for enrollment such as immunization records, previous school records, birth certificates, and proof of residency.
  - Let the school know where you want your child to attend school. The McKinney-Vento Act gives your child the right to stay at the same school even if the family's homeless situation means you are no longer living in the same area. This school would be called the school of origin, and school districts must let students continue attending if this is in the student's best interest. Your child also may attend any public school that nonhomeless students who live in the attendance area where you're currently living are eligible to attend.
- Keep copies of critical records such as immunizations, Social Security number, health physicals, and individualized education programs (IEPs). Ask someone you trust to keep a set of records for you if your current living arrangements make this difficult.
- Maintain high expectations for your child.
- Ask questions, such as the following:
  - Who is the local homeless education liaison? How can I contact him or her?
  - What transportation is available for my child to stay in the same school (the school of origin)?
  - If my child changes schools, who can help us transfer records quickly?
  - How can my child receive free meals at school?
  - How can my child receive free school supplies, if needed?
  - Who can help if my child needs special education services? How quickly can these services be set up?
  - What academic help is available for my child, such as Title I, Part A, programs or after-school tutoring?
  - What programs can help develop my child's talents and address his/her unique needs?
  - Are there sports, music, or other activities available for my child?
  - How can my child go on class field trips or participate in other school activities if I can't pay for them?
  - Is there a preschool program for my younger children?



*For more information about helping your child succeed in school, visit the National Center for Homeless Education website at <http://www.serve.org/nche>, or contact the local homeless education liaison for your school district:*

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## **Pupil Transportation Directors**

### **Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

- Ensure that all transportation staff members, including bus drivers and dispatchers, are familiar with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
- Train pupil transportation staff about the law and the needs of homeless children; invite input on strategies for addressing homeless children's transportation needs.
- Allow all transportation staff to express their concerns and then work to address these concerns. Unaddressed issues become barriers once you implement a system.
- Develop formal or informal interdistrict agreements for school districts that share homeless students. Convene a meeting of local homeless education liaisons and pupil transportation personnel to establish procedures; consider having quarterly meetings until the procedures are in place firmly. Conduct the meeting with a solution-based approach.
- Develop procedures that address questions such as:
  - Who will make the referral to transportation within each district?
  - Will the referral be made by phone, fax, or e-mail?
  - Who in each district transportation office will be the point person for interdistrict coordination?
  - How will varying school calendars be handled?
  - Which district discipline plan does the student follow?
  - What are the timelines for scheduling alternative routes, etc.?
- Build on existing relationships and encourage sharing ideas about how to meet the challenges of transporting homeless students. Many transportation personnel from nearby districts know one another because they attend trainings and coordinate special education routes.
- Arrange interdistrict transportation by involving dispatchers and transportation directors across districts.
- Keep track of system requirements for the pupil transportation system. For instance, if the funding for the year is based on service being performed early in the school year, work to make sure homeless students are identified prior to that funding window.
- Investigate all possibilities for funding, including from agencies outside of the school system; check with your state's department of transportation regarding your state's coordinated transportation program.
- Look into using special education and/or magnet school buses.

## **Pupil Transportation Directors**

### **Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

- Ensure that bus pick-up and drop-off does not stigmatize homeless students by disclosing to their peers that they are staying in shelters. Pick up students at the shelters or hotels first and drop them off last so that their peers will not see where they are staying, or consider alternate pick-up and drop-off points nearby where the students are staying.
- Be careful in domestic violence situations to minimize the risk that an abuser will be able to trace the child to the shelter or other location where he or she is staying.
- Consider electronic means for facilitating communication; for example, a web-based transportation log on a confidential website will allow key staff to have access to alternative transportation routes and changes.
- Develop a handbook for homeless parents to assist them in understanding policies regarding transportation and student rules of conduct; develop forms that parents must agree to and sign regarding expectations for them.
- Ensure that all agree that the safety of the students is paramount; transportation safety for homeless students must be comparable to that for all other students.
- Keep good data on the methods of transportation used for homeless children and the costs.



*For more information about helping students experiencing homelessness succeed in school, visit the National Center for Homeless Education website at <http://www.serve.org/nche>, or contact the local homeless education liaison for your school district:*

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