



WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT
OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

DESIGNATING A LOCAL HOMELESS EDUCATION LIAISON A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS IN WASHINGTON

INTRODUCTION

During the 2012-2013 school year, local educational agencies (LEAs or school districts) in the state of Washington reported 30,609 children and youth experiencing homelessness enrolled in schools. This number represents a 276% increase in ten years in the state. Homeless children and youth experience many challenges in enrolling and attending school and achieving educational success. The 2001 reauthorization of Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (reauthorized by Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and hereafter referred to as *the McKinney-Vento Act*) ensures rights and services for homeless children and youth to remove barriers to their education.

School districts are responsible for identifying homeless children and youth and ensuring that they receive the educational and other services for which they are eligible. Washington House Bill SSB 6074, passed in March 2014, requires increased data reporting, training, and awareness activities in order to improve the capacity of school districts to serve homeless children and youth.

One of the key provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act is that every school district must appoint a local homeless education liaison (hereafter referred to as *local liaison*) [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)]. Getting the right person for the position will enable homeless children and youth to receive all protections and services necessary for them to succeed in school. The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is committed to ensuring that every LEA has the most qualified person serving as the local liaison.

This brief will assist school district administrators in

1. understanding key qualifications necessary to carry out the many and complex responsibilities required of the local liaison; and
2. ensuring the local liaison will have the time, authority, and support to carry out the responsibilities of the position.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL LIAISON

Every LEA, whether or not it receives McKinney-Vento subgrant funds, is required to carry out the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act. The local liaison is key to the implementation of the law.

In 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(6)(A), the McKinney-Vento Act states that LEAs must ensure that

- ◇ homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through coordination with other agencies;
- ◇ homeless children and youth enroll in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, school;
- ◇ homeless families, children, and youth receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start and preschool programs administered by the LEA, as well as referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services;
- ◇ the parents or guardians of homeless children and youth are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
- ◇ public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youth is disseminated where they receive services, such as schools, family shelters, and soup kitchens;
- ◇ enrollment disputes are mediated according to the McKinney-Vento Act; and
- ◇ the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any unaccompanied homeless youth, is fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and is assisted in accessing transportation to and from the school of origin.

The Non-Regulatory Guidance (U.S. Department of Education, 2004) lists the following activities that local liaisons must conduct in carrying out their responsibilities:

- ◇ assisting homeless children and youth with enrolling in school and accessing school services;
- ◇ helping homeless children and youth obtain immunization or medical records;
- ◇ informing parents, school personnel, and others of the rights of homeless

children and youth;

- ◇ working with school staff to make sure that homeless children and youth are immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of disputes that might arise over school enrollment or placement;
- ◇ helping to coordinate transportation services for homeless children and youth; and,
- ◇ collaborating and coordinating with the State Coordinator for Homeless Education (hereafter referred to as *State Coordinator*) and with community and school personnel responsible for providing education and related support services to homeless children and youth.

See *Appendix A. Responsibilities of the Local Liaison* for more information.

The local liaison position requires a high level of commitment, energy, intelligence, and experience with working with at-risk students. Following are considerations for the experience, knowledge, skills, and attitude needed for the position.

TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL LOCAL LIAISON

EXPERIENCE

Educational institutions are complex systems with a myriad of procedures, policies, and priorities. The local liaison should have experience working within the state or school district educational system in order to minimize the learning curve for understanding how the McKinney-Vento program is situated within the broader educational context. The person considered for the position should also have experience in program coordination and in working with parents, children, and youth who are facing difficult circumstances.

KNOWLEDGE

The local liaison should understand the challenges faced by impoverished and homeless children, youth, and families, as well as the rights and services provided to homeless children and youth through the McKinney-Vento Act and other federal and state laws and programs. The local liaison must have a clear understanding of the requirements of the position and of the OSPI and LEA systems that will implement these requirements, such as the budgeting system and state student data collection system. In addition, an effective local liaison is one who is very familiar with community resources so that he or she can arrange services for needy students and their families efficiently.

SKILLS

The local liaison position requires a broad set of professional skills. Clear oral and written communication is central to the work. The local liaison must provide leadership and guidance to administrators and staff in the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in the form of professional development and technical assistance with case-specific situations. The local liaison also will need the ability to exercise skill and good judgment in diffusing disagreements and resolving disputes between homeless parents or guardians and school or district staff over school enrollment or other perceived barriers to the education of homeless

children and youth. Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with community agencies are important skills to ensure that homeless children and youth are linked efficiently to needed services beyond what the school or LEA provides. Finally, it is critical that the local liaison be capable of managing multiple tasks and keeping clear records.

ATTITUDE

Many school districts across the nation report that the one factor that makes the difference between a strong and weak homeless education program is having a local liaison with a heart for the position. Local liaisons who are passionate about ensuring that homeless children and youth are able to succeed in school will dedicate themselves to their work and do what is necessary to build trust with the children, youth, and families they serve; navigate complex systems to get services in place; and inspire others to go above and beyond for children and youth. They are not only administrators; they are advocates.

In evaluating the appropriateness of a candidate for the position, determining the person's perspectives on children and youth who are homeless, impoverished, or at risk is essential. It is critical for the person to believe that

- ◇ at-risk children need and deserve support to succeed; decisions related to homeless children should be child-centered, keeping their best interest as the highest priority;
- ◇ services provided to vulnerable students, such as homeless children and youth, may need to extend beyond what is provided for other children and youth when necessary; and
- ◇ compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act and other laws that offer rights and services for homeless children and youth is paramount.

See *Appendix B. Qualifications Checklist for Local Liaisons* for more information. The checklist therein may be used as a tool to assist in determining if the person under consideration is suited for the position.

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With the prevalence of homelessness on the rise in our state and nationally, the importance of having a liaison who is compassionate, committed, works well under pressure, can effectively share knowledge with staff, and has common sense is essential.

*Ann Galvas
HOPE Program Coordinator/
Homeless Liaison
Vancouver School District*

ROLE GROUPS TO CONSIDER FOR THE POSITION OF LOCAL LIAISON

The local liaison must be an employee of the school district. The position frequently is assigned to an existing staff person or administrator. There are several role groups that are well suited for the position and several that are not.

Table 1 below lists the types of role groups to consider for the local liaison, including the advantages and disadvantages of each group. Note that there may be exceptions, based on the qualifications of the person. However, good practice suggests reviewing carefully the current responsibilities of the person under consideration for the position to ensure that he or she will have sufficient time, experience, and authority to carry out all local liaison responsibilities and will not have any conflicts of interest in identifying and serving homeless students.

TABLE 1. ROLE GROUPS TO CONSIDER

ROLE GROUP	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Federal programs administrator	Familiarity with other programs that serve homeless children and youth; understanding of how federal programs operate; better coordination across programs; may have sufficient authority from an administrator's position	May have other job responsibilities that impact time to serve homeless children and youth; may not have background working with homeless and other at-risk students and families
School social worker, school counselor	Background in dealing with families, children, and youth who are homeless or at-risk; familiarity with trauma-informed care	May lack the authority to enforce the law; may not have background in educational strategies
Educator	Background in academic strategies to increase school success of homeless students	May lack the authority to enforce the law; may not have background working with homeless and other at-risk students and families
Superintendent, assistant superintendent	Has authority to implement the law	Other job responsibilities could interfere with time needed to serve homeless students; may not have direct experience in addressing the needs of homeless and other at-risk students and families; possible conflict of interest in identifying children who require significant LEA resources to serve
Pupil transportation director	Knows the policies, procedures, and strategies for arranging transportation for homeless students; has administrative skills	May lack background in working with at-risk students and linking them to educational and other services; may lack experience in addressing the needs of homeless and other at-risk students and families; may lack authority to enforce the law; possible conflict of interest in making school selection decisions where serving the best interest of the student may require significant pupil transportation funds
School secretary, support staff	May have direct experience with and insight into working with homeless and other at-risk students and families	May lack background in social work or education for identifying and addressing needs of at-risk students; may lack sufficient authority or standing to require professional staff and administrators to implement the law

Role groups most appropriate for the position are those that possess experience in education and/or social services. This type of experience is essential to help identify needs and appropriate services for homeless children and youth. The main challenges for school social workers, counselors, and educators serving as local liaisons have to do with not having sufficient authority to enforce the provisions of the law. Districts should address these challenges by establishing and implementing policies and procedures to ensure commitment to and accountability for carrying out the law among all school and district staff and administrators.

Having a superintendent or assistant superintendent serve as the local liaison is strongly discouraged. While high-level administrators may have the authority to enforce the law, they generally have full plates in overseeing the functioning of the entire district and do not have sufficient time to devote to the many tasks required of the local liaison. Moreover, these individuals, along with pupil transportation directors, may feel pressed at some point to choose between implementing services for homeless students that come at significant cost to the school district and allocating resources that fit within budgetary priorities, creating a conflict of interest.

The LEA also should not assign the position of local liaison to a role group that lacks sufficient experience to identify appropriate services or authority to enforce the law. School secretaries and support staff, for example, quite frequently have great compassion for homeless children and youth, but may not be able to effectively ensure that these youth get the services and rights to which they are entitled.

A PROCESS FOR DESIGNATING A LOCAL LIAISON

In most cases, the local liaison position is assigned to an existing administrator or staff member. In some cases, an LEA will hire someone for the position. Regardless of how the district fills the position, there should be a formal process to review and document the appropriateness of the candidate under consideration. LEAs are encouraged to develop a job description that includes qualifications, required duties, and time allocated to the position. See *Appendix C. Sample Local Liaison Position Description* for more information.

LEA administrators should not merely assign someone to carry out the position of the local liaison, especially if that person already has a full plate. The local liaison should be considered a professional position; and the person who fills the position should have the needed qualifications, time, and desire to carry out the required responsibilities.

CREATING THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

While getting the right person for the position of local liaison is essential, ensuring that person is able to work under conditions in which he or she can be successful is equally critical.

TIME

One of the most common complaints among local liaisons is that they do not have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities to serve homeless children and youth. Administrators should review the legal requirements for the position along with the number of homeless children and youth the school district typically serves in a year, and allocate time for the position to ensure that the local liaison can do his or her job effectively. Administrators may wish to discuss the time allocation with former local liaisons in the LEA, local liaisons from other LEAs, or the State Coordinator to determine what is realistic.

AUTHORITY

Local liaisons often feel that they do not have the authority they need to enforce the law. When school staff or administrators are resistant, local liaisons need to know that the administration will support them and hold others accountable for compliance.

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

A wealth of knowledge exists to assist local liaisons with understanding the responsibilities of their position and implementing policies and services for homeless children and youth. Administrators should encourage local liaisons to attend all trainings offered by the OSPI Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program and should make them aware of national conferences and training resources, such as those provided by the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) and the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY). See *Appendix D. Resources for Local Liaisons* for a description of resources offered through these national organizations.

The Washington State Coordinator is a key resource for local liaisons. The State Coordinator provides trainings and updates on laws and policies. In addition, the State Coordinator provides assistance with case-specific situations to help local liaisons understand nuances of the law and effective ways to address LEA-level challenges with serving homeless children and youth. The school district should encourage the local liaison to contact the State Coordinator for assistance, as needed. See *Appendix D. Resources for Local Liaisons* for contact information for the Washington State Coordinator for Homeless Education.

“Liaisons need to have tremendous empathy for the difficult situations in which families find themselves, the ability to reassure people who are distraught and despairing, the knowledge of the community to connect them to resources, and the backbone to fight for the services families need. The right liaison is someone who has the ear of the community, both within the school district and outside of it, and who can build a network of support.

Cynthia Jones
Director, Categorical Programs
Everett Public Schools

CONNECTION TO OTHER PROGRAMS

Many LEA programs serve homeless students, including pupil transportation, child nutrition, preschool, Title IA, Title III, migrant education, and special education. Administrators should encourage all program coordinators, including the local liaison, to coordinate services for homeless students. Periodic cross-program meetings and joint trainings are effective ways to ensure that the needs of homeless students are considered in all programs.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FOR SELECTING LOCAL LIAISONS

LEA administrators in every school district must appoint a local liaison to implement the McKinney-Vento Act. A qualified and committed local liaison will ensure that homeless children and youth are identified and provided the services they need to be successful in school. The recommendations below summarize key points to consider when selecting the right person to carry out the responsibilities of the local liaison position.

1. LEA administrators should be familiar with all the requirements of the local liaison position as specified in the McKinney-Vento Act.
2. The local liaison should possess the appropriate experience, knowledge, skills, and attitude to carry out the responsibilities of the position effectively.
3. A local liaison who is passionate about serving homeless children and youth is key in implementing the program successfully.
4. The LEA should have a formal process for selecting the best candidate for the local liaison position.
5. LEA administrators are responsible for ensuring that the local liaison has sufficient time allocated to carry out his or her duties and the authority to enforce the law.
6. The State Coordinator is a key contact to assist the local liaison in understanding the role and carrying out the duties off the position.

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Liaisons should be well trained on the issues, uncertainties, struggles, and fears surrounding homelessness. Their compassion, understanding, and willingness to advocate for the rights of homeless students and families may, indeed, be the only voice the student or family has in the entire educational system of the district.

*Patty Hoff
Homeless Liaison and Homeless
Support Program Coordinator
Bellingham School District*

REFERENCES

- Bowman, D., Endres, C., & Moore, J. (2013). *Local liaison toolkit*. Retrieved <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit2/toolkit.pdf>
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001. 42 USC §§11431–11435. Retrieved from <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/mv-full-text.docx>
- U. S. Department of Education. (2004). *Education for Homeless Children and Youth program non-regulatory guidance*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf>

*This brief was produced by the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro through a contract with the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.
July 2014*

APPENDIX A. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL LIAISON

The following chart, taken from Appendix 2.A of the National Center for Homeless Education's *Homeless Liaison Toolkit*, lists the responsibilities of the local liaison by category.

LEGALLY REQUIRED ACTIVITIES
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
Review local policies and procedures that impact homeless children and youth, such as school enrollment and access to school programs. (This is an LEA requirement that the local liaison may assume.)
Revise local policies and procedures determined to be potential barriers for homeless children and youth. (This is an LEA requirement that the local liaison may assume.)
Ensure that homeless students are identified by school personnel and community partners.
ENROLLMENT AND ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
Ensure that homeless students enroll in and receive equal opportunity to succeed in school.
Assist children and youth who do not have immunizations or medical records in obtaining the necessary immunizations or records.
Ensure that homeless families, children, and youth receive educational services for which they are eligible, including free school meals; Head Start, Even Start, and preschool programs administered by the LEA; and referrals to health, mental health, dental, and other appropriate services.
Ensure that parents or guardians are informed of educational and related opportunities that are available to their children and are provided meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education.
Carry out the resolution of disputes, ensuring that they are mediated in accordance with the state's dispute resolution process.
Facilitate transportation arrangements, including the provision of transportation to and from the school of origin, and transportation comparable to what is provided to housed students.
OUTREACH

Ensure that the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed of all educational rights, including the right to remain in, and receive transportation to, the school of origin.

Post the educational rights of homeless children and youth in all schools in the district.

Post the educational rights of homeless children and youth in the community in places where homeless families and youth may receive services (e.g., shelters, public health clinics, libraries, and soup kitchens).

Inform school personnel, service providers, and advocates who work with homeless families and youth about the duties of the local liaison.

Collaborate and coordinate with State Coordinators, community service providers, Title I Coordinators, and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to homeless children and youth.

UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

Assist unaccompanied homeless youth in school enrollment and placement decisions, while considering the youth's wishes, and providing notice to the youth of the right to appeal such decisions through the dispute resolution process.

Ensure that unaccompanied homeless youth are enrolled in school immediately pending the resolution of any dispute that arises over school enrollment and placement.

DATA COLLECTION

Collect data on homeless children and youth and submit it to the SEA for the Consolidated State Performance Report.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES*

Provide professional development for school district staff to build awareness of the educational needs of homeless students, legal responsibilities of the school and LEA, and local policies and procedures to remove barriers and expedite services for homeless students.

Maintain ongoing communication with LEA programs, such as pupil transportation and Title I, to work collaboratively across programs to serve homeless children and youth.

Provide outreach to community service providers through presentations, announcements, and dissemination of relevant resources.

Provide training for parents on McKinney-Vento rights and services and ways they can support their children's education while experiencing homelessness.

Obtain school supplies, clothing, and other helpful resources through community partnerships, and distribute them to schools.

Conduct a needs assessment to prioritize activities and services to support the educational needs of homeless children and youth.

Conduct an evaluation of the LEA's homeless education program.

Participate in community task forces and agency advisory committees to create awareness of the needs of homeless children and youth, identify opportunities for collaboration, and share resources.

* Suggested activities are those that are not specifically required in the law but are considered good practice in order to facilitate activities that are legally required. Moreover, many of these activities are reviewed when the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction monitors LEAs for compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act.

APPENDIX B. QUALIFICATIONS CHECKLIST FOR LOCAL LIAISONS

Rate the applicant for the local liaison position on each of the following items from 5-0, with 5 being highly qualified and 0 being no qualifications.

QUALIFICATION	RATING
EXPERIENCE	
Program coordination	
Working in the school system as a teacher, administrator, counselor, or social worker	
Working with at-risk students	
Working with parents	
Cross-program or cross-agency collaboration	
KNOWLEDGE	
Homelessness and its challenges for families, children, and youth	
The McKinney-Vento Act	
State specific laws and policies that impact homeless children and youth	
Responsibilities of the LEA and local liaison to serve homeless children and youth	
LEA, SEA, and federal education programs that serve homeless children and youth	
Community resources for homeless children and families	
LEA budgeting system	
OSPI data collection system	
SKILLS	
Communicating clearly orally and in writing	

Developing clear and effective procedures and protocols related to homeless students' school enrollment, transportation, and referrals to services	
Establishing trust and communication with homeless children and families	
Demonstrating leadership in enforcing the law and communicating clear expectations for school and LEA staff and administrators	
Diffusing or resolving conflicts	
Organizing and managing multiple tasks	
Keeping clear records	
TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	
Initiating and maintaining collaborative relationships with LEA and community programs and services	
ATTITUDES AND VALUES	
At-risk children need and deserve support to succeed	
Decisions should be child-centered determinations, focusing on the best interest of each individual child	
Services provided to vulnerable students may need to extend beyond what is provided for other children and youth when necessary	
Homeless children and youth should be protected under the rights and services offered through the McKinney-Vento Act	

APPENDIX C. SAMPLE LOCAL LIAISON POSITION DESCRIPTION*

TITLE I SPECIALIST / MCKINNEY-VENTO LIAISON

LOCATION: EDUCATION CENTER

EMPLOYMENT TERM: FULL TIME – 12 MONTHS

QUALIFICATIONS

- ◇ Master's degree required; MSW preferred
- ◇ 5-7 years of teaching/counseling experience required
- ◇ 3 years of administrative responsibility preferred
- ◇ Previous experience working in a Title I program or school preferred
- ◇ Possession of, or ability to obtain, a valid N.C. Curriculum/Instruction Specialist Certification or Education Specialist Certification
- ◇ Strong oral, written, and interpersonal communication skills required
- ◇ Bilingual in Spanish preferred
- ◇ Experience with NC Wise [NC's state data collection system] preferred

RESPONSIBILITIES

- ◇ Works collaboratively within the Title I office and with schools and area offices to provide technical and compliance support to Title I schools
- ◇ Works collaboratively within the Title I office and with schools and area offices to provide technical and compliance support to schools regarding the education and support of homeless children
- ◇ Assures that children and youth experiencing homelessness have stability in school and receive specialized services when eligible
- ◇ Prepares and submits reports to the U.S. Education Department and the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, as needed
- ◇ Responds to and resolves difficult and sensitive inquiries and complaints regarding Title I and McKinney-Vento compliance issues
- ◇ Collaborates with community agencies providing services to the homeless, as needed
- ◇ Interprets and monitors compliance with federal and state laws, rules and regulations for Title I, and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act; provides written guidance as appropriate
- ◇ Provides appropriate training and professional development related to the education and support of homeless children
- ◇ Provides appropriate training and professional development related to the education and support of schools offering supplemental education services
- ◇ Participates on school system committees, as required; attends and participates in professional groups and committees, as appropriate
- ◇ Provides timely, accurate, and responsive customer support to schools, programs, and other departments
- ◇ Performs related duties as assigned by the Title I director

**Example provided by an LEA in North Carolina*

APPENDIX D. RESOURCES FOR LOCAL LIAISONS

STATE RESOURCES

Ms. Melinda Dyer, Supervisor
Education of Homeless Children and Youth
Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
Old Capitol Building, PO Box 47200
Olympia, WA 98504-7200
Phone: (360) 725-6050
Fax: (360) 664-3575
Email: Melinda.Dyer@k12.wa.us
Website: <http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/default.aspx>

NATIONAL RESOURCES

National Center for Homeless Education

Website: <http://center.serve.org/nche>

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) operates the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. NCHE provides a comprehensive website, webinars, onsite trainings, and publications that are updated regularly to reflect the growing body of knowledge regarding homeless education. Updates, announcements, and links to resources also are provided via the NCHE homeless education listserv. The NCHE helpline (800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org) provides assistance with understanding and implementing the law to parents, caregivers, and those who serve homeless children and youth.

NCHE developed the *Homeless Liaison Toolkit* (http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/liaison_toolkit.php) as a comprehensive resource to help local liaisons understand the laws that related to the education of homeless children and youth and learn effective strategies for their implementation.

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

Website: <http://www.naehcy.org>

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) is the voice and social conscience for the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. NAEHCY accomplishes this through advocacy, partnerships, and education. NAEHCY hosts an annual conference that brings together over 1,000 homeless education practitioners, including State Coordinators, local liaisons, shelter and service providers, researchers, and advocates to learn and network.

Publication Number: 14-0036