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# UNDERSTANDING EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS FOR HOMELESS AND UNSTABLY HOUSED STUDENTS

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, STUDENTS, TEACHERS,  
AND SOCIAL WORKERS



**BROUGHT TO YOU BY  
SEATTLE/KING COUNTY  
COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS**

**HOMELESSINFO.ORG**

Each school district in the nation must appoint a "Homeless Education Liaison" who helps homeless students and families access supports and services. Sometimes more than one person carries out these responsibilities. The Liaison for your district may have changed since this brochure was published (August 2018). A list of all Homeless Education Liaisons in Washington state is maintained by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI): [www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/ContactList.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/ContactList.aspx)

**We want to hear from you! Please tell us:** How have you used this guide to assist students? What would improve it? Tell us about your experience as a student or parent, or a staff person working to support homeless students' success in school. Write to [speakup@homelessinfo.org](mailto:speakup@homelessinfo.org) or call the Coalition: **(206) 204-8350**.



This brochure was prepared by the **SEATTLE/KING COUNTY COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS**. Download a printable version, learn more, and support our work at our website: **WWW.HOMELESSINFO.ORG**

85 S. WASHINGTON STREET, SUITE 310, SEATTLE, WA 98104

Students who are homeless have **educational rights** under the McKinney-Vento Act, an important federal law.

If you think a student might be eligible for support under the McKinney-Vento Act, speak with your Liaison!



Many children and families who are eligible for help do not consider themselves homeless.

**When are students considered homeless?** The McKinney-Vento Act protects the educational rights of homeless children and youth. The definition of homelessness under the Act includes, but is not limited to, children or youth in these circumstances or settings:

- **Children or youth** in shelters or transitional housing.
- **Children or youth** living in parks, public spaces, vehicles, abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for people to live.
- **Children or youth** sharing housing (doubled up or couch-surfing) due to loss of housing or economic hardship.
- **Children or youth** living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camp grounds due to lack of alternative accommodations.
- **Unaccompanied children or youth** (i.e. not in the physical custody of their parents or guardians).

## Homeless students' rights include:

- To remain enrolled in, and be transported to a student's School of Origin when feasible, even if a student moves across or outside the district. ('School of Origin' means the school last attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.)
- To be enrolled immediately (even without medical or school records) in the neighborhood school.
- To receive FREE breakfast and lunch in schools that serve both.
- To have barriers addressed so that they can participate in athletics, field trips, and afterschool activities (this could include having certain school fees waived). Parents or guardians should contact school staff for help.
- To get help with basic school supplies, including uniforms, shoes, textbooks, and notebooks. If a student's family cannot afford required supplies, parents or guardians should contact school staff for help.
- To ask for more academic support if a student is struggling with classwork. Parents or guardians should contact school staff for assistance.
- To use the school district's Dispute Resolution Process to appeal a school's decision when there is a disagreement about school selection or enrollment (attending class and participating fully in school activities).

## About the Coalition

**The Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness** is an independent county-wide coalition of housing and homeless service providers, advocates, and community groups. We encourage active collaboration among homeless service providers, school staff, parents, and students. Coalition members and volunteers help hundreds of homeless students each year through Project Cool for Back-to-School. We speak up for the smart policies, robust budgets, and strong partnerships needed to help and house our neighbors who are homeless.

### LEARN MORE AND JOIN US!

[www.homelessinfo.org](http://www.homelessinfo.org) | [@Homeless2Housed](https://www.facebook.com/SKCCH)  
[facebook.com/SKCCH](https://www.facebook.com/SKCCH)

## Resources

The **Education for Homeless Children and Youth** program is part of the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Staff provide trainings for Homeless Education Liaisons and help resolve problems that cannot be resolved within the district. <http://www.k12.wa.us/homelessed>

Melinda Dyer heads this program and Ella Deverse is the McKinney-Vento Program Specialist. Contact them at: (360) 725-6505 or [HomelessEd@k12.wa.us](mailto:HomelessEd@k12.wa.us)

The **National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)** operates the Homeless Education Helpline for parents, shelter staff, and school personnel who need help and information about enrollment, transportation, and access to appropriate educational opportunities. Assistance is available in English and Spanish. *Ayuda está disponible en inglés y español.*

1-800-308-2145 (ext. 3)  
[homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org)  
<http://nche.ed.gov/>

**Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO)** is a free, confidential resource for students and families. Staff can help resolve complaints, disputes, and problems between families and public schools or districts in matters that affect student learning. *Interpretation available. Interpretación disponible.*

Toll-free: (866) 297-2597  
[OEOinfo@gov.wa.gov](mailto:OEOinfo@gov.wa.gov)  
[www.oeo.wa.gov](http://www.oeo.wa.gov)

**Columbia Legal Services'** Children and Youth Project works to remove barriers to homeless students' enrollment and retention in Washington public schools. If you are a student or a student's representative with a question related to homeless students' education, please email the Children and Youth Project.

[CYP@columbialegal.org](mailto:CYP@columbialegal.org)

**SchoolHouseWA.org** is a partnership to improve housing stability and advance educational success for the over 40,000 students in our state who experience homelessness. Find training materials, best practices, and policy analysis at [www.SchoolHouseWA.org](http://www.SchoolHouseWA.org).

