

Early Learning Coordination Guidance: Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness **(a companion to NC's LEA/Head Start Coordination Guidance for Developing MOUs)**

The ESEA, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), reauthorized the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youths program, which protects and serves homeless students. The amended McKinney-Vento Act adds protections for preschool children and equips local partners with an essential tool for implementing the new provisions in ESSA.

ESSA and Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) share the McKinney Vento [definition](#) of homeless children and require LEAs and Head Start programs to coordinate and establish collaborative relationships and partnerships with community organizations. Children are automatically eligible for Head Start and Title 1 Preschool and Head Start programs are able to [reserve](#) slots for pregnant women and children experiencing homelessness when a vacancy occurs. Coordination to determine eligibility and to identify and enroll children consistently across programs, as well as coordinate referrals for services, is necessary to improve education and other outcomes for children and their families.

Agreements should be tailored to suit the community's unique needs and reflect a comprehensive approach, rooted in best practice. The following Head Start and ESSA requirements relate specifically to the coordination of services for children experiencing homelessness and are aligned with the [NC's LEA/Head Start Coordination Guidance](#) document. LEAs, Head Start, and other early learning partners should use the following activities to coordinate services for children and families experiencing homelessness.

Enrollment/Eligibility

- Maintain educational placement, regardless of whether the family or child moves, if it is in the child's best interest.
- Provide for transition and immediate enrollment to a preschool or Head Start program with openings if remaining in the preschool of origin is not in the child's best interest.
- Review and revise practices, or policies that may act as barriers to the identification, enrollment, attendance, and success of preschool children, such as requiring birth certificates and mailing addresses to complete enrollment.

Data and Records Sharing

- Conduct a community needs assessment including current data, data analysis, analysis of major strategies, and current needs, including information about children and families experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.
- Develop a process for sharing student records and additional relevant information.

Coordinating Services/Communication

- Provide services and activities to improve the identification of homeless children, including preschool-aged homeless children.
- Ensure homeless children have access to early childhood services, including child care subsidy, home visiting, and parenting support programs, Head Start and Early Head Start, Title 1 Preschool, NC Pre-K, as well as early intervention and special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Establish ongoing channels of communication to facilitate coordination between Head Start, McKinney-Vento Liaisons, and other partners, including a point of contact among programs.
- Establish collaborative relationships and partnerships with community organizations to facilitate access for families to community services and referrals to health care, dental, housing, mental health and substance abuse, and other appropriate services.
- Provide information on the education rights of homeless children in all programs.
- Develop a program and community resource directory for assisting families in accessing services.

Transition

- Establish policies and procedures, such as developing forms and communication tools in a variety of languages and methods for direct family engagement, for transition and immediate enrollment to a preschool or Head Start program with openings if remaining in the preschool of origin is not in the child's best interest.

Professional Development

- Conduct joint training in programs for the staff to understand the McKinney-Vento Act and strategies for understanding the needs and rights of children and families experiencing homelessness as well as supporting the educational needs of young children experiencing homelessness.

Family Engagement

- Develop and implement a family outreach and support program.
- Conduct joint activities to provide meaningful opportunities for families to engage in their child's learning and to be informed of available educational and related opportunities to support their child's success in school.

Facilities and Transportation

- Ensure transportation is offered by the LEA to and from the preschool of origin at a parent/guardian's request comparable to those provided to other children.
- Ensure Head Start uses community resources, where possible, to provide transportation if a child experiencing homelessness is unable to attend regularly because the family does not have transportation.

Activities to Support Coordination and Collaboration

- Conduct a [self-assessment](#).
- Include homelessness in current MOUs or create a coordination agreement to address services for children and families experiencing homelessness.
- Develop collaborative plans for supporting children and families experiencing homelessness, including enrollment in an early childhood program where space is available.
- Develop joint procedures to simplify and expedite referrals.
- Offer screening and Child Find activities in shelters and other community settings.
- Simplify enrollment practices such as developing a common application across programs or assisting families in obtaining documentation.
- Differentiate instruction to meet the unique needs of children experiencing homelessness.
- Transition into and out of programs and schools is supported by Homeless Liaisons.
- Include housing providers in coordination activities.
- Provide joint training, including trauma-informed approaches.
- Ensure homeless representatives participate on early education task forces.
- Address the needs of children and families experiencing homelessness in extended closure plans.

Resources

[NC Homeless Education Program-Local Liaisons](#)
[Engaging Community Partners to Strengthen Family Services](#)
[Caring for the Health and Wellness of Children Experiencing Homelessness](#)
[Give Every Child a Home at Head Start flyer](#)
[Building Partnerships to Support Homelessness](#)
[National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youths: Early Childhood ECE Crosswalk](#)



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Refer to [NC's guidance](#) document for additional coordination requirements related to serving all children, including children and families experiencing homelessness.

**Not to be considered legal advice. Some content edited for clarity and brevity. See Coordination Requirements for specific language. Follow the procedures of the organization/LEA for developing and approving MOUs.*