

ADMISSION & EDUCATION OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

The Windham School Committee recognizes that homelessness alone should not be a sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment. The Windham School Department will strive to ensure that homeless students are identified and provided access to the same free and appropriate public education provided to other students in the school system. In accordance with federal and state law and regulations, the Windham School Department will provide homeless students with access to the instructional programming that supports achievement of the content standards of Maine's system of Learning Results and to other services for which they are eligible. Students shall not be segregated into a separate school or program based on their status as homeless, nor shall they be stigmatized in any way.

I. DEFINITIONS

- A. **"Homeless"** students are those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and include the following:
1. Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.
 2. Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designated for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
 3. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
 4. Migrant children who meet one of the above-described circumstances.
- B. **"School of origin"** means the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.
- C. **"Unaccompanied youth"** refers to a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (e.g., runaway and "throw away" children and youth).

II. BEST INTERESTS

The Windham School Department, working in conjunction with the child and/or youth and the parents/guardians, will determine what is in the best interest of the student. In determining the best interest of

the child or youth, the Windham School Department shall, to the extent feasible, keep a homeless child or youth in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the child's or youth's parent or guardian.

If the youth is unaccompanied by a parent or guardian, the Homeless Liaison will assist in placement and enrollment decisions, with the views of the youth taken into consideration. The school selected shall immediately enroll the homeless child or youth, even if the child or youth is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, immunization records, evidence of residency, or other documentation.

The Windham School Department shall require a parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, or the homeless child or youth, to provide contact information, or the previous school's records.

The Windham School Department must provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal, to the parent or guardian of the homeless child or youth if the Windham School Department sends the child or youth to a school other than the school of origin or other than a school requested by the parent or guardian.

In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the Homeless Liaison will provide notice of the right to appeal to the Homeless Coordinator for the State of Maine.

The enrolling school shall contact the school last attended by the child or youth to obtain relevant academic and other records. If the child or youth needs to obtain immunizations or immunization or medical records, the parent or guardian of the homeless child or youth will be referred to the Homeless Liaison for assistance.

III. ENROLLMENT DISPUTES

If there is a dispute concerning enrollment, the child or youth shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent or guardian will be provided, in writing, with a written explanation of the Windham School Department's decision and the right to appeal the decision.

The Homeless Liaison and the Homeless Coordinator for the State of Maine shall ensure that an unaccompanied youth is enrolled in school, pending resolution of a dispute.

IV. SERVICES

Homeless students shall be provided services comparable to services available to other students in the school system, including, but not limited to, transportation services; educational services for which the student meets the eligibility criteria, such as educational programs for disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, gifted and talented students, and students with limited English proficiency; vocational

and technical programs; preschool programs; before and after school-care programs; and school meals/nutrition programs.

V. TRANSPORTATION

Homeless students are entitled to transportation to their school of origin or the school where they are to be enrolled, if the school is within a reasonable distance (within an hour ride). The school systems will coordinate the transportation services necessary for the student, or will share the responsibilities and costs equally.

VI. RECORDS

The Windham school will contact the school of origin's Homeless Liaison to obtain student data. Any records ordinarily kept by the Windham schools, including immunization records, medical records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, and evaluations for special services programs, regarding each homeless student, shall be maintained so that records may be transferred when a student enters a new school system. Access to records will be available to parents and students in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

VII. HOMELESS STUDENT LIAISON

- A. The Superintendent shall designate an individual to act as the School Department's Homeless Student Liaison. The School Department shall inform school personnel, service providers and advocates working with homeless families of the duties of the Windham School Department's Homeless Student Liaison.
- B. The Homeless Student Liaison will be responsible for ensuring that:
 1. Homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
 2. Homeless children and youths enroll in and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in schools within the school district;
 3. Homeless families, children, and youths receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, Even Start, and preschool programs administered by the school district, and referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services;
 4. The parents or guardians of homeless children and youths 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;

5. Public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youths is disseminated where such children and youths receive services, such as schools, family shelters, and soup kitchens.
6. Enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with law;
7. The parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and is assisted in accessing transportation to the school the student will be attending;
8. Unaccompanied youths are assisted in placement or enrollment decisions and provided notice of the right to appeal; and
9. Children or youths who need to obtain immunizations or immunization medical records receive assistance.

Legal references: 42 U.S.C. § 11431-11435
 20-A M.R.S.A. §§ 261, 5205(7)
 Ch. 14 (Maine Department of Education Rules)
 Maine State Plan for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

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