



McKinney-Vento and Refugee and Other Newcomer Students: Providing Support During Enrollment and Beyond

To effectively implement the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and assist refugee and other newcomer students, local education agencies (LEAs) and McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaisons must adopt holistic approaches that go beyond identification and enrollment. The strategies listed below, drawn from LEAs nationwide, have demonstrated effectiveness in supporting refugee and newcomer students experiencing homelessness to achieve success in their education and beyond. This list is not exhaustive, but highlights key approaches:

1. Consider and accommodate the unique needs of refugee and other newcomer students

- Recognize that many youth, particularly unaccompanied youth, may work long hours at their jobs in order to remain living with their sponsors, send money to their families, and pay off debts incurred when immigrating to the U.S.
- Consider ways to support youth in both, such as by providing attendance agreements so that youth who regularly attend have the option to leave school early to get to their jobs.
- Look for ways to offer full or partial credit to youth who are working, leveraging apprenticeship, work experience, or other credit opportunities.

2. Remove literacy roadblocks and language barriers

- Provide LEA translators and interpreters during enrollment process and to explain McKinney-Vento in a language the youth and family can understand.
- Translate brochures, outreach materials, and McKinney-Vento rights into the main languages spoken by families.
- Recognize that sometimes families may speak an indigenous language as a first language, so they may struggle with literacy in a common language.
- Recognize that some families may struggle with literacy skills in general. Consider other ways to provide information, including QR codes with audio files to explain McKinney-Vento information.

3. Support youth and families in understanding a new education system

- Youth and families may not understand the process to enroll, including what documentation is typically required. Walk families through the process, supporting their understanding of enrolling under McKinney-Vento.
- Explain to youth and families that their McKinney-Vento identification is confidential.



- Communicate regularly with families about attendance expectations, transportation plans, and other available services and supports.
- Reach out to youth and families to share positive feedback from school!

4. Leverage technology

- Consider using language devices to let youth and families know that you will find an LEA interpreter or multilingual staff member to assist in enrollment and identification.
- Gather information from youth and families on the best mode of communication to ensure that youth and families receive information about McKinney-Vento services and other school supports.
- Use other modes of communication, such as WhatsApp or other messaging platforms, to communicate important McKinney-Vento and school information to families.

5. Build trust

- Be aware that services for families may be off-putting or inaccessible to students who do not have a legal guardian.
- Do not rely on children to provide translation or interpretation. Always use an interpreter when speaking with a family.
- Listen carefully to determine their needs and wishes.
- Work with families using a trauma-informed lens. School staff may never know the extent of the trauma that students and families have experienced and the effects it can have.
- Be aware that an immigrant student or family may have concerns about privacy. Students and families of various immigration statuses may be scared or hesitant to share information about their living situation. Providing clear information about privacy rights can build trust to ensure identification and provision of needed services and supports.

6. Follow clear and strict procedures to communicate with families about their rights under the McKinney-Vento Act

- Develop a common process for everyone in the district to follow so that all families have the same McKinney-Vento experience, including how McKinney-Vento rights are communicated.
- Recognize that communication about McKinney-Vento rights may have to go through an interpreter or other staff. Having clear and strict procedures will ensure that despite language barriers, families receive their rights at the time of identification and when they move. Train staff on this process.
- Offer to include students in conversations about McKinney-Vento rights, as this can be helpful for families who are unfamiliar with the educational system. Ensure that translation and interpretation services are provided, as necessary.