Students Experiencing Homelessness

I. The Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 (§ 11432, reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Title IX, Part A) helps ensure full and equal educational access to homeless children and youth who are defined as lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

A. Such persons shall include:

1. Children and youth, including unaccompanied youths who are not in the physical custody of their parents, who:
   a. 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 camp grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; living in emergency, or transitional shelters; or abandoned in hospitals;
   b. Have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; or
   c. Are living in parked cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.

2. Migratory children, as defined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, who are deemed homeless because they are living in circumstances set forth in Section I.A.1.

II. Schools are required to:

A. Immediately enroll children and youth experiencing homelessness, regardless of custody issues and availability of previous school records, medical records, proof of residency, or other documentation.

B. Immediately contact the school last attended by the student to obtain relevant academic and other records and, if necessary, refer the parent of the student or the
youth to the homeless education liaison who shall assist in obtaining the necessary records for enrollment. If assistance is needed in regard to immunizations, physical examination, and the State Health Information Form, the school nurse shall be contacted.

C. Discuss placement options with parents, allowing students to stay in their school of origin (last school in which the student was enrolled, or the last school attended prior to experiencing homelessness), if in the child's best interest.

D. Post public notice of the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

E. Provide educational access to unaccompanied homeless youth.

F. Provide children and youth experiencing homelessness services comparable to those of housed students, including transportation services, educational services, and meals through school meals programs.

G. Promote high school or general education development completion.

H. Collaborate with social service agencies to serve homeless students.

I. Inform parents and unaccompanied youth of available enrollment options and educational opportunities.

III. School districts must:

A. Comply with the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001, reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Title IX, Part A, to ensure that homeless children and youth shall receive educational services comparable, and in some cases services in addition to those offered to other public school students.

B. Provide transportation to ensure access to the school of origin even if the student no longer resides in the attendance area, or if the child or youth is living in one school district but wants to remain at his or her previous school. The school division of residence will share the cost of transportation with the school division where the student is enrolled.

C. Provide parents/guardians with a written explanation of school placement decisions (Attachment I), and parents' appeal rights (Attachment II).
D. Immediately admit the child or youth to the school in which enrollment is sought, which is an option under the McKinney-Vento Act, pending resolution of a dispute over school eligibility selection, or enrollment in a school.

E. Coordinate the identification and provision of services to such students as defined in Section I. A. with relevant local social services agencies and other agencies and programs providing services to such students, and with other school divisions as may be necessary to resolve interdivisional issues.

IV. The following procedures are in place within Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS) to address the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness and to serve as a reference for school staff. For additional information, or to address specific situations, please contact the office indicated.

A. School Registration

1. Custody issues are not a barrier to enrollment per Regulation 794-1, “Resolution of Conflicts Between Parents Over School Issues.”

2. Students who are experiencing homelessness are allowed to remain in their school of origin per Regulation 718-1, “Students Experiencing Homelessness.”

3. The Office of Student Services will assist in arranging transportation for children in transition. Schools shall contact this office immediately upon learning of a transportation need.

4. The parent/guardian will complete the PWCS Residency Information Form (Attachment III), PWCS Rights and Responsibilities Form (Attachment IV), and PWCS Transportation Request and Agreement Form (Attachment V), during the registration process.

B. Transportation Services

1. When schools become aware that a child is in transition, school staff should contact the Office of Student Services with the following information:

   a. Student name, age, and grade;
   b. Parent name and contact information;
c. Name and address of residence, hotel, or shelter;
d. Telephone number of residence, hotel, or shelter;
e. School(s) child(ren) will attend;
f. Special requirements, i.e., special needs student, English Learner (EL) student; and
g. Date leaving residence, hotel, or shelter, if known.

2. Transportation shall be provided either by PWCS or by another school division in cooperation with PWCS. Transportation services can usually be initiated in three to five business days from the date the PWCS Transportation Request and Agreement Form is received by the Office of Student Services.

3. Schools shall coordinate the level of transportation support for their after-school activity runs in conjunction with the Office of Transportation Services. Individual schools should contact the Office of Student Services if special arrangements need to be made.

C. School Health Services

1. Children experiencing homelessness must be enrolled immediately pending resolution of all health requirements. Schools shall contact the school nurse in order to expedite appointments for physicals and immunizations as needed for school registration.

2. School nurses shall monitor information received regarding children experiencing homelessness and shall work with school counselors and families to schedule appointments and/or referrals for other health services.

3. The Office of School Health Services shall compile a list of contacts at the health district offices, and community health resources for utilization by school nurses to ensure continuity for families who may be referred for physicals or other screenings.

4. The parent/guardian must provide proof of immunization or physical examination (if required) within 60 days of the initial enrollment. The school nurse and/or staff member should document efforts to assist parents/guardians in obtaining these records.
D. Special Education

1. Children and youth experiencing homelessness who are students with disabilities shall continue to be provided services according to their Individualized Education Plan, regardless of their housing situation.

2. It is important that school staff inquire of adults registering a student as to the student’s eligibility and the need for special education services.

3. Records of students who leave PWCS shall be sent to the Records Center at the end of the subsequent grading period following the student withdrawal. Receiving schools in other counties may contact the Records Center to verify that the student was receiving special education services while enrolled in PWCS.

E. Eligibility for Athletics

1. Students experiencing homelessness shall have no eligibility issues if they remain enrolled in their school of origin and meet established eligibility rules set forth by the Virginia High School League and PWCS.

2. Students who change schools due to homelessness shall alert school staff of their status and request a waiver for eligibility. Each situation shall be reviewed by the Supervisor of Student Activities on a case-by-case basis.

F. Comprehensive Child Study (CCS)

1. CCS is an early intervention program that is active in all elementary, middle, and high schools.

2. A strong collaboration process exists between CCS and several community agencies.

3. While CCS is not able to directly serve all students/families experiencing homelessness, the CCS staff is available to school staff for consultation regarding community resources.

G. EL

1. Any EL student in grades kindergarten-12 who is in transition will continue to receive EL services through any school in the School Division
since the procedures for identification and exiting are a Divisionwide process.

2. EL information is part of the Student Educational Record which contains all of the program documentation and is accessible to any receiving school. A student’s transition between schools, if necessary, should be seamless.

H. Gifted Program

1. Any student identified as gifted in grades kindergarten-12 who is in transition may continue to receive gifted services through any school in the School Division since the procedures for identification and exiting are a Divisionwide process.

2. Gifted services information is part of the Student Educational Record which contains all of the program documentation and is accessible to any receiving school. The transition between schools, if necessary, should be seamless.

I. Title I

1. Homeless children are entitled to participate in Title I programs and services as a result of their housing situation if the parent wishes to take advantage of this availability.

2. Homeless children in non-Title I schools are also eligible for Title I-paid services, similar to those offered to students in Title I schools. School administrators are encouraged to contact the Title I office if an enrolled child experiencing homelessness needs academic assistance.

J. School Food and Nutrition Services

1. Students experiencing homelessness are categorically eligible for free meals at school.

2. School Food and Nutrition Services will code the student for free meals as soon as the student is coded as “homeless” in the student information system.
The Associate Superintendent for Student Learning and Accountability (or designee) is responsible for implementing and monitoring this regulation.

This regulation and related policy shall be reviewed at least every five years and revised as needed.