

## HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The St. Tammany Parish School Board recognizes that homelessness alone should not be sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment. Therefore, the School Board, in accordance with state and federal law, shall give special attention to ensure that homeless children in the school district have access to a free and appropriate public education and to hopefully ensure that there are no barriers to the enrollment, transportation, attendance and success in school of homeless children and youth.

### DEFINITION

Homeless *children and youths* means individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence and include the following:

- Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a 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.
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designated for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations or similar settings.
- Migratory children who meet one of the above-described circumstances are also recognized under this definition.

### ENROLLMENT/PLACEMENT

The best interest of the child, with parental involvement, shall be considered in determining whether the child should be enrolled in the school of origin or the school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the homeless child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend. To the extent feasible, and in accordance with the child or youth's best interest, the child or youth should continue his or her education in the school of origin. If the youth is unaccompanied by a parent or guardian, the homeless coordinator shall consider the views of the youth in deciding where the youth shall be educated. The choice regarding placement shall be made regardless of whether the child or youth lives with the homeless parents or has been temporarily placed elsewhere.

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, proof of residency or other documentation.

However, the School Board may require a parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth to submit contact information, such as medical emergency information, contact information regarding the parent, guardian, or caregiver.

The School Board shall provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right of appeal, to the homeless child or youth's parent or guardian, or to the homeless youth if unaccompanied, if the School Board 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.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school, the child, youth, parent or guardian shall be referred to the School Board's homeless coordinator, who will carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible.

For the purposes of this policy, *school of origin* is defined as the school that the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled.

#### Children in Foster Care

The School Board shall ensure that a student who is in foster care pursuant to placement through the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services shall be allowed to remain enrolled in the public school in which the child was enrolled at the time he/she entered foster care for the duration of the child's stay in the custody of the state or until he/she completes the highest grade offered at the school if the Department of Children and Family Services determines that remaining in that school is in the best interest of the child.

If foster care placement is outside the jurisdictional boundaries of the public school in which the student is enrolled, the School Board shall be responsible for providing free transportation for the student to and from a designated location which is within that school district and is located nearest to the child's residence and is determined to be appropriate by the School Board and the Department of Children and Family Services.

#### SERVICES

Each homeless child or youth shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the district including, but not limited to, transportation services; educational services for which the child meets the eligibility criteria, such as educational programs for disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and gifted and talented students; vocational programs and technical education; school nutrition programs; preschool programs; before- and after-school care programs; and programs for students with limited English proficiency. Homeless students shall not be segregated in a separate school or in a separate program within a school based on the students' status as homeless.

## TRANSPORTATION

In the event that it is in the best interest of the homeless child or youth to attend the school of origin, transportation to and from that school shall be provided at the request of the parent or guardian or, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the homeless coordinator. If the student begins living in an area served by another School Board, both School Boards shall agree on a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for transporting the child to and from the school of origin. If an agreement cannot be reached, the costs will be shared equally.

## RECORDS

Any records ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records and evaluations for special services or programs of each homeless child or youth shall be maintained so that appropriate services may be given the student, so that necessary referrals can be made, and so that records may be transferred in a timely fashion when a homeless child or youth enters a new school district. Copies of records shall be made available upon request to students or parents in accordance with the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* and School Board policy.

## ENROLLMENT DISPUTES

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school:

1. Unless otherwise provided for in any desegregation order, the child or youth shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute;
2. The parent or guardian of the child or youth shall be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or youth to appeal the decision;
3. The child, youth, parent, or guardian shall be referred to the School Board's homeless liaison, who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute; and
4. In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the homeless liaison shall ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

## LIAISON

One individual shall be appointed by the School Board to act as its homeless liaison. The School Board shall inform school personnel, service providers and advocates working with homeless families of the duties of the district homeless liaison.

DISCIPLINE – NOT REQUIRED TO ENROLL

Nothing in this policy shall require the enrollment of any child not permitted by another school system to attend school, either permanently or temporarily, as a result of disciplinary actions.

Except as provided under Louisiana State Law with regard to students who have been expelled, no provision in this or any other School Board policy shall be interpreted to impede the immediate or continued enrollment of homeless youth.

New Policy: November, 2021

Ref: 42 USC 11431 et seq. (*Education of Homeless Children*); 34 CFR Part 200 (Title I - *Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged*); Plyler v. Doe 457 U.S. 202 (1982); La. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§17:81, 17:151.3, 17:221, 17:221.2, 17:222, 17:235.1, 17:238, 17:416; Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators, Bulletin 741, Louisiana Department of Education.