



PUBLIC SCHOOL OPEN ENROLLMENT INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN

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Open Enrollment for Homeless Children and Youth

The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youth as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence. Homeless children have a right to be transported back to their school of origin. Alternatively, they may also choose to enroll in any public school that students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend.

Homeless children and youth are **not required to apply** for either open enrollment or tuition waivers in order to attend the school of origin or the public school they may attend based on where they are living.

However, there may be circumstances in which it is beneficial for homeless children to apply for open enrollment. Under an alternative application procedure, they may apply for open enrollment at any time during the school year if they have been homeless in the current or preceding school year. Some instances in which parents of homeless children may wish to apply for open enrollment include:

- *Preschool-aged children.* If a child is enrolled in preschool, the preschool is the child's school of origin. However, preschool-aged children who are not enrolled in preschool do not have a school of origin. Thus, while their older siblings may be entitled to attend (and be transported to) their school of origin, the preschool-aged child is not so entitled. If the school of origin is in another school district, the parent may apply for open enrollment for the preschool-aged child to attend.

There is a limitation on participation in open enrollment for preschool. If the school district in which the preschool-aged homeless child is living does not offer 4-year-old kindergarten, the child is not eligible for open enrollment.

- *Attendance in a third district.* Sometimes, the district the parents want their children to attend is neither the school of origin nor the attendance area school.

For example, a family may become homeless and may go to live with relatives in another part of the state or they may move into the state from elsewhere. The school of origin is too far away. The parents may not want their children to go to school where they live. Open enrollment would allow the parents to apply to send their children to a school they are not eligible to attend under McKinney-Vento.

- *Planning ahead.* Some school districts have limited open enrollment seats. While homeless children may apply for open enrollment at any time during the school year, they are not guaranteed approval based on being homeless. They are subject to the same criteria as all applicants. Usually, the best chance of getting a space is to apply during the regular application period for the following school year, especially if they are entitled to preference as currently-attending pupils. If the family is likely to find permanent housing outside a

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school district that has limited space, it may be desirable to apply for open enrollment for the following school year.

However, if the child is still homeless at the end of the school year, the child must be permitted to continue to attend the school of origin even if the open enrollment was denied. The homeless liaison and the open enrollment coordinator should work together to ensure that the child is not inadvertently withdrawn from school due to the denied open enrollment application.

- *Unaccompanied Youths.* An unaccompanied youth who wishes to apply for open enrollment may submit an application without a parental signature.

School district homeless liaisons should become aware of circumstances in which a homeless child may be served by applying for open enrollment. If they, or families, have any questions about open enrollment, they may contact an open enrollment consultant at 888-245-2732 or openenrollment@dpi.wi.gov. Information about applying for open enrollment may also be found on the open enrollment web site at <http://oe.dpi.wi.us>.

Further information about McKinney-Vento and services for homeless children may be found at <http://homeless.dpi.wi.gov>.