

Recommendations for Awarding Partial Credits to Students Experiencing Homelessness

Statement of Need:

In the 2019-20 school year, public and independent charter schools in Wisconsin identified 17,179 students experiencing homelessness, including 4,561 high school students. These students face many challenges to credit accrual and staying on track for graduation. The central issue or problem is situated in institutions and systems, rather than with individuals. In collaboration with the homeless liaison, districts should consider how policies and practices prevent students from earning credit for coursework completed and keeping credit they have earned when students experience the following challenges:

- frequent school changes
- loss of credits due to mid-term transfers
- inconsistent graduation requirements among districts
- frequent absences
- incomplete records
- difficulty navigating the complicated systems that provide basic needs and support
- lack of support and advocacy
- trauma and other mental and physical health challenges

During the 2019-20 school year, these challenges resulted in a graduation rate of 67.2% for students experiencing homelessness, well below the state average of 90.4%.

Research has shown that a high school diploma is the single greatest factor in preventing young adult homelessness. Chapin Hall (2019) [Missed Opportunities: Education Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness in America](#).

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act addresses barriers to credit accrual and graduation by requiring states to have procedures to “identify and remove barriers that prevent students experiencing homelessness from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with state, local, and school policies”. McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons are required to implement those procedures in collaboration with other school and district staff.

The recommendations in this document are guidance for homeless liaisons to adapt to meet the needs of their individual district. While some states have laws that address awarding partial credits to students experiencing homelessness, Wisconsin does not. This document is a tool to ensure equitable practices for honoring partial credit are developed and implemented to reduce barriers to on-time graduation.

Recommended Responsibilities for Sending Schools:

When the school receives records requests:

- Immediately send all records, including, but not limited to, the following: exiting/transfer grades, transcripts, IEPs and other SPED records, language plans for ELs, enrollment history, copy of current schedule, attendance, discipline records if needed, description of progress, and/or any other academic information.
- Award partial credit if the full course has not been completed or give an 'exiting grade' if unable to award partial credit.
- Homeless liaison should contact the receiving district's homeless liaison to assist in a successful transition.
- Homeless liaison should contact the family/student to ensure that they are fully and adequately enrolled in school.

When the school is aware of a transfer before the student leaves:

- Give the student/family a copy of the student's unofficial transcript, schedule, current grade book, verification of McKinney-Vento identification and anything that may be helpful in the enrollment and scheduling process.
- Include a 'check-out form' completed by the student's current teachers. This form could include the following: comments, any useful information, course description, grades, college and career exploration, and partial credit/exiting grade.
- Homeless liaisons should assist the receiving district with enrollment and provide records as needed.
- Notify the parent/student that their Family Access through the Student Information System will remain active until the enrollment end date, so they can access and view their grades, information, etc. from the sending school.

Recommended Responsibilities for Receiving Schools:

Enrollment and Scheduling:

- Immediately enroll the student and request records from previous school, if partial credits or transfer grades are missing, send a request to the sending school and copy the homeless liaison on the request.
- Immediately meet with the student to review records and create a schedule.
- Review records and partial credits and strive to enroll the student in equivalent courses. If the same course is not available, enroll the student in equivalent credit type (see [Accepting Partial Credit](#) below).
- In the absence of records, enroll the student in courses based on graduation requirements and age equivalent grade-level courses (See Awarding Previous Credit below).
- If records have not been sent, the homeless liaison or school counselor must contact the sending school to obtain records.
- Provide teachers with transfer grades. If transfer grades are unavailable, begin grading at the date of enrollment. 'No-count' previous assignments that are dated prior to the enrollment start date.
- Meet with the student after a few weeks to ensure course placements and teachers are working for them and are appropriate. Make adjustments as needed.
- If updated records arrive and if credits are discovered, move the student into appropriate courses immediately without having a grade or work penalty for coursework completed.

Accepting Partial Credit:

- Honor and accept partial credits awarded by sending school even if your school does not offer the same/equivalent courses.
- Convert credits to your system, if needed.
- Check transcripts at course completion to ensure full credit was awarded.
- Award credit for repeated courses.
- Exempt students from end of year assessments if they completed a course in a prior school.

Honoring Previous Credit:

- Use professional judgement while focusing on the best immediate and long-term interests of the student.
- If the sending school does not award partial credit, the receiving school should ensure any work completed in the previous school is recognized and counted in their new courses.

- Award credit based on proficiency. Work with the teachers to utilize formative and summative assessments. Consider alternate avenues for demonstrating proficiency.
- Award credit for work experience, language proficiency, community service, project-based learning, portfolios, independent study, working with appropriate programs such as career and technical education (CTE), alternative education, and with administration, pupil services and special education (SPED) team, or other [work-based learning](#) experiences.
- Award multiple credits in cases where the student had to retake a course in previous districts they've already passed.
- Consider awarding retroactive credit for passing an advanced course (e.g., award Algebra I and Algebra II credits if the student takes and passes Algebra II with no record of an Algebra I class).
- Pass/Fail grade can be used to award credit.

Additional Resources:

- SchoolHouse Connection: [Awarding and Accepting Partial Credits for Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [California's Partial Credit Model Policy](#)
- National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) [Credit Accrual](#)