

Do's and Don'ts for District Homeless Liaisons and Enrollment Staff*

Local liaisons, enrollment staff, and other school personnel need to be sensitive and discreet when identifying families, children, and youth who may be homeless. Below are strategies about how to effectively identify and enroll children and youth experiencing homelessness.

DO

- Collaborate with local homeless educational liaisons from nearby school districts to identify children and youth who are or may be homeless and confirm eligibility.
- Talk with parents and youth about their living situation, focusing on basic questions such as “Why did you leave your last residence?” or “Where did you sleep last night?” Let them know you are asking these questions to determine if they are eligible for additional services.
- Keep inquiries positive and supportive rather than threatening or invasive.
- Avoid using the term “homeless” in initial conversations due to sensitivity and stigma. Instead, use terms such as “temporary living situation” or “transitional housing.”
- Talk to runaway youth about their home situation with care and sensitivity. Understand that the youth may hesitate to admit that their home may be an unhealthy or dangerous place to live.

DON'T

- Threaten or harass parents or students, violate privacy, or put their housing at risk.
- Contact landlords or housing agencies about a student or family because this may jeopardize their already tenuous living situation.
- Conduct invasive surveillance of students or families. School staff trained on issues of homelessness and the McKinney-Vento Act can conduct respectful home visits when necessary.
- Use police officers to conduct home visits.
- Force caregivers to obtain legal custody or guardianship to enroll children or youth. Custody and guardianship have legal consequences far beyond education and may not be appropriate for some caregiver relationships.
- Force people into shelters or onto the streets as a prerequisite for McKinney-Vento services.

When in doubt, enroll students first and obtain verification about housing status after enrollment. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act requires the immediate enrollment of students who are homeless. Attempts to verify a student's eligibility for McKinney-Vento services needs to be governed by respect, sensitivity, and reasonable limits.

For additional information about homeless issues, please go to <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/homeless> or contact DPIhomeless@dpi.wi.gov.

**Appreciation is extended to the National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE, www.serve.org/nche for their publication “Do's and Don'ts for Local Liaisons” from which the above information was obtained. Toll-free Helpline 1-800-308-2145.*