

Homeless Students Policy

Match Charter Public School

Match Charter Public School (“Match”) recognizes its obligation to ensure that homeless children and youths (as defined below) have access to the same free and appropriate public education provided to other students. Match shall remove barriers to enrollment and provide homeless children and youths (as defined below) with access to education and other services necessary for these students to meet the same performance standards as other students. Students shall not be segregated into a separate school or program based on their status as homeless, nor shall such students be stigmatized in any way. This Policy will be implemented consistent with the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act and current Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education guidance.

Definition of Homeless Children and Youth

A student is considered a "homeless child or youth" if the student lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence due to economic hardship, including children and youths who:

- are temporarily sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- are living in motels, hotels, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- are living in emergency shelters
- are abandoned in hospitals
- have a nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
- are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- runaway children or children who are abandoned
- migratory children who are homeless because they are living in the circumstances described above

There is no time limit on homelessness and there are situations where families/students may be in a shelter for years.

Determining Homelessness

School staff who suspect that a student is homeless or struggling with housing instability should refer the family to the Homeless Liaison or designee. The Homeless Liaison or designee will have a private conversation with the family/student about their living arrangements. Information about a student’s housing status will be limited to personnel with a legitimate educational interest and documentation related to a student’s homelessness status, best-interest decisions and disputes will be maintained in the student record (for more information about the identification of homelessness in student records, refer to the Student Records Policy). Information learned from that conversation should be evaluated against the definition of homelessness. In no event should school staff contact or communicate with landlords, housing authorities or neighbors without prior written consent from the parent/guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth) to verify or discuss the residency or homelessness of a

student/family. Any such consent must specify the parties to be contacted and the information to be disclosed. If a living arrangement is unclear, and the family is in another district, the Homeless Liaison may consult with the local homeless liaison to learn more information about the situation.

Best Interest Determination

Homeless children and youths may attend either the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled (“School of Origin”) or the school in the attendance area where the child or youth is currently temporarily living (“School of Residence”) (but not where the student or family intends to reside in the future). In making a school placement determination, Match will consider the student’s best interests in accordance with the law. Match will presume that keeping the child in the School of Origin is in the student’s best interest unless this is contrary to the request of the parent/guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth). Match will consider student-centered factors including: the age of the child or youth; the impact of mobility on the student’s education, achievement, health and safety; the student’s need for special instructional programs or services; the length of anticipated stay in a temporary location; the likely area of future permanent housing; school placement of siblings; the time remaining in the school year; the distance of the commute and its impact on the student’s education; personal safety; and the student’s ties to the school including meaningful relationships with staff and peers. Match will give priority to the request of the student’s parent/guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth).

If the student is placed in the School of Origin, the student will remain in that placement for the duration of homelessness and for the remainder of the academic year even if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year.

Enrollment Procedure

Enrollment

Upon being accepted to Match, Match will immediately enroll homeless children and youth even if the parent/guardian does not have school records, immunization records or other required documentation available to share with the school. Match will immediately assist the parent/guardian in requesting these records directly from the School of Origin, and will facilitate the transfer of any such records that it has in its possession when a homeless child or youth is enrolled at another school in accordance with all applicable laws and procedures. If records are unattainable (for migrant students or otherwise), Match will work with families to seek alternative means to fill any gaps, which may include, but not be limited to:

- Requesting a release from the parent/guardian to speak with the child’s pediatrician to determine health and age;
- Referring the parent/guardian to a local pediatrician to facilitate acquiring the records, where possible;
- Checking the Massachusetts Immunization Information System to see if enrolling students have records entered in the system from vaccines administered;
- Obtaining an affidavit from the parent indicating the child’s date of birth;
- Communicating with parents/guardians about a student’s academic standing; and/or
- Conducting classroom observations and assessments to determine appropriate placement and/or services. Such evaluations should be selected and administered so as not to be

discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis and administered in the child’s native language or other mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally and functionally.

If a homeless student is unaccompanied, Massachusetts state law allows for a Caregiver Authorization Affidavit to be utilized for the child’s medical and educational decision-making rights, so long as it identifies the student (name and date of birth), is signed by both the parent and caregiver, and is notarized. The Caregiver Authorization Affidavit is valid for up to two (2) years and can be revoked or overridden by the parent at any time.

Residency

A homeless child or youth will meet residency requirements if the child or youth is living in the district with a parent, guardian, or person in loco parentis not solely for school purposes or for participation in extra-curricular activities. For unaccompanied youth, residency is established where the youth is actually living, and lack of a fixed address shall not be a barrier to enrollment. The child shall be immediately enrolled even if the parent/guardian does not have immediate proof of residency, and the address listed on the enrollment form or a signed affidavit shall become proof of residency.

Comparable Services

Each homeless child or youth shall have access to all services they need to meet the academic achievement standards to which all students are held, including:

- Transportation services
- Educational services for which the child or youth meets eligibility criteria such as ESL or special education programs
- School nutrition programs
- Title I services
- Translation and interpretation services for parents/guardians
- After-school programs
- Academic supports funded through Title I, Part A set-aside reserves, including tutoring, transportation to educational programs, school supplies, hygiene items, and other allowable services to remove barriers to success

Match will ensure that homeless children and youths are attending classes and participating fully in school activities, including extracurriculars and school-sponsored events immediately upon the student being identified as a homeless child or youth, and that fees or costs do not create barriers to participation.

Transportation

Match will ensure that transportation is promptly provided to homeless children and youths. If the student lives in an area served by another local educational agency but continues to be educated at Match as the School of Origin, Match will come to an agreement with the local educational agency for apportioning the responsibility and costs for providing transportation. If an agreement cannot be made, the responsibilities and costs for such transportation will be shared equally. Transportation services will continue for formerly homeless children and youths who become permanently housed for the remainder of the academic year

during which the student or youth becomes permanently housed. Transportation services for homeless children and youth will be comparable to the transportation provided to a student's peers within the district and meet state pupil transportation requirements.

Homeless Liaison

Match's Homeless Liaison shall be the Director of Network Operations or designee. The Homeless Liaison shall ensure that:

- homeless children and youths are voluntarily identified by school personnel and through coordination with other entities and agencies.
- homeless children and youths enroll in and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed at Match.
- homeless families, children, and youths receive educational services for which they are eligible and referrals to other appropriate services.
- the parents or guardians of homeless children and youths are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to them and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of the child/youth.
- public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youths is disseminated in such public places as schools, meal sites, shelters and other locations frequented by low income families.
- compliance with all policies and procedures and mediate enrollment disputes.
- the parents or guardians of a homeless child or youth, and unaccompanied youth, are informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the School of Origin or to the school that is selected.
- coordination of services between Match and other homeless family service providers.
- assistance is provided to children and youths who do not have immunizations, or immunization or medical records, to obtain necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records.
- students are not segregated on the basis of their status as homeless.
- programs for homeless students are coordinated with other federal and local programs.
- school staff is trained on the identification of students who are homeless and the Homeless Liaison is monitoring them on an ongoing basis.
- ensure that unaccompanied homeless youth are informed, and receive verification, of their status as independent students for postsecondary financial aid.
- each year, and upon request, make and document determinations and provide verification to postsecondary institutions and financial aid administrators regarding a youth's status as an unaccompanied homeless youth or a self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness, for purposes of FAFSA and financial aid eligibility.
- maintain documentation of best-interest determinations, services offered, transportation arrangements, and dispute notices.

Disputes

In the event the parent/guardian or the unaccompanied youth (as the case may be) disagrees with Match's determination regarding school selection, enrollment, transportation, or eligibility for services under McKinney-Vento, the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth has the right to appeal the decision by filing a written complaint with Match's Homeless Liaison. The Homeless Liaison shall carry out the dispute process promptly after receiving the notice of the dispute. In the event that Match selects a school that is not the preference of the child's parent/guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the

youth), Match will provide the parent, guardian or youth with a written explanation of the decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or youth to appeal the decision. Such notice will be sent by email and in hard copy via mail or in person, and shall be provided in the primary language of the student’s parent/guardian, and using language and formatting appropriate for low-literacy, limited vision readers and individuals with disabilities.

During the dispute, the student will be enrolled in the school selected by the student’s parent/guardian (or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth) and provided transportation and all comparable services until the matter is resolved. The Homeless Liaison will assist the family in the decision-making process, provide notice of the appeals process, and assist the completion of any dispute forms.

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