

Tree of Life Charter School
Homeless (Students in Transition) Education Policy

Homelessness exists in our community and has many causes, including high housing costs, poverty, family conflict, and youth leaving their homes due to abuse and neglect. Children and youth who have lost their housing live in a variety of places, including motels, shelters, shared residences, cars, campgrounds, and transitional housing. Their lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious physical, emotional, and psychological consequences. Tree of Life Charter School will ensure that all children enrolled in our school receive a free appropriate public education and are given meaning opportunities to succeed. We will also follow the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

It is the philosophy of our school to view children as individuals. Therefore, this policy will not refer to children as homeless; it will instead use the term children and youth in transition. Under federal law, children and youth in transition must have access to free and appropriate public education and be given a full opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards. Our school will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation, and harassment.

Information regarding this policy will be printed in the school's Family Handbook and distributed to all families upon enrollment of their student.

Definitions:

Children and youth in transition means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, and who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

- ▲ 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, campgrounds, or trailer parks due to 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 private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
- ▲ Children and youth who are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting.
- ▲ Migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.
- ▲ Unaccompanied youth who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

A child or youth will be considered to be in transition for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above.

Unaccompanied youth means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is in transition as defined above. The more general term youth also includes unaccompanied youth.

Enroll and *enrollment* mean attending school and participating fully in all school activities.

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Immediate means without delay.

Parent means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

School of origin means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

Local liaison is the staff person designated by our LEA and each LEA in the state as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the local homeless education liaison by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Identification

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the local liaison will identify children and youth in transition enrolled in the school. The local liaison will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth as in transition, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the local liaison. Community partners in identification may include: family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels, campgrounds, welfare departments and other social service agencies, faith-based organizations, foster children service agencies, local homeless coalitions, and legal services.

When there are at least 15 children in transition in the school, the school's local control and accountability plan (LCAP) shall include goals and specific actions to improve student achievement and other outcomes of students in transition. (California Education Code [EC] sections 52052, 52060)

The local liaison will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the school, where they are living, their academic achievement, and the reasons for any enrollment delays, interruptions in their education, or school transfers. The liaison will report annually to the Board on outcomes for homeless students, which may include, but are not limited to, school attendance, student achievement test results, and other outcomes related to any goals and specific actions identified in the LCAP. Based on the evaluation data, the school shall revise its strategies as needed to better support the education of students in transition.

School Selection

Each child and youth in transition has the right to remain at his or her school of origin or to attend any school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both the school and our school district. Students who change schools have been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools.

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Therefore, in selecting a school, children and youth in transition will remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent or youth's wishes. Students may remain at their schools of origin the entire time they are in transition and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing between academic years.

Feasibility will be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent or youth's wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

- ▲ The age of the child or youth
- ▲ The distance of a commute and the impact it may have on the student's education ▲ Personal safety issues
- ▲ A student's need for special instruction (e.g. special education and related services)
- ▲ The length of the anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location
- ▲ The time remaining in the school year

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin and services under federal and other programs, will not be considered in determining feasibility.

Enrollment

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students in transition may not have school enrollment documents available readily. Nonetheless, the school must enroll any child or youth in transition immediately. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:

- ▲ Proof of residency
- ▲ Transcripts/school records (The enrolling school must contact the student's previous school to obtain school records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the student's age and information gathered from the student, parent, and previous schools or teachers.)
- ▲ Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records (If necessary, the school must refer students to the local liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunization and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from previous schools or state registries, and community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed.)
- ▲ Proof of guardianship
- ▲ Birth certificate
- ▲ Any other document requirements
- ▲ Unpaid school fees
- ▲ Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes ▲ Any factor related to the student's living situation

Unaccompanied youth must also be enrolled immediately in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or local liaison.

Transportation

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent's request, transportation will be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition. Transportation will be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes. The local liaison will request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will be considered only in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.

Services

Children and youth in transition will be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the selected school, including:

- ▲ Transportation
- ▲ Title I, Part A services
- ▲ Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners ▲
Before- and after-school programs

The school recognizes that children and youth in transition suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability will be given priority and coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary to ensure the timely completion of a full evaluation. When necessary, the school will designate a surrogate parent for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability. If participation of a surrogate parent is needed prior to the appointment of a surrogate parent, the school will designate a temporary surrogate in accordance with the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school will implement it immediately. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations will then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

When applying any school policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation will be excused. School personnel will refer children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The local liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

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School personnel must also inform parents of all educational and related opportunities available to their children and provide parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education. All parent information required by any provision of this policy must be provided in a form, manner, and language understandable to each parent.

Disputes

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth in transition will be admitted immediately to the school, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student will also have the rights of a student in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I, Part A services while the dispute is pending. The school will provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and will refer the parent or youth to the local liaison immediately. The local liaison will ensure that the student is enrolled in the school and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and will resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth will be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute.

Free Meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. If the school has a meal program, the child or youth in transition will be immediately placed in the free meal program upon enrollment.

Title I, Part A

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I, Part A services. The trauma and instability of homelessness put students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. Our school's Title I plan will be coordinated with our McKinney-Vento services. Children and youth in transition will be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems, as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education Regulations and Policy Guidance. Training

The local liaison will conduct training and sensitivity/awareness activities for the school staff at least once each year. The trainings and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with this policy, and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition.

Coordination

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The local liaison will coordinate with and seek support from the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, public and private service providers in the community, housing and placement agencies, the pupil transportation department, local liaisons in neighboring districts, and other organizations and agencies.

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References

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 11431-11436

Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 6311-6315

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.

Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, 42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.

June 5, 1992 Policy of the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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