



# Universal Charter Schools Policy Manual

Subject	Student Services
Classification	Students Experiencing Homelessness Policy
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## **Authority**

The Board of Trustees recognizes the need to promptly identify students experiencing homelessness within Universal schools, facilitate their immediate enrollment in Renaissance neighborhood charter schools, and eliminate existing barriers to their attendance and education, in compliance with federal and state laws and regulations.

The Board of Trustees shall ensure that students experiencing homelessness have equal access to the same educational programs and services provided to other Universal students.

The Board of Trustees authorizes the principal to waive District policies and administrative procedures that create barriers to the identification, enrollment, attendance, transportation, school stability and success in school of students experiencing homelessness.

*The Board authorizes the Principal (or designee), in coordination with the McKinney-Vento Liaison, to waive or modify school policies and procedures that create barriers to the identification, immediate enrollment, attendance, full participation, and school stability of students experiencing homelessness, including barriers related to immunization or other health records, proof of residency, lack of birth certificate or school records, guardianship documentation, missed application/enrollment deadlines due to homelessness, outstanding fees or fines, absences related to homelessness, and uniform or dress-code requirements*

It is the policy of the Board of Trustees that no student shall be discriminated against, segregated or stigmatized based on his/her homeless status.

## **Definitions**

*Enroll or enrollment* - attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

Students experiencing homelessness - individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, and includes:

1. Children and youths who are:
  - a. Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; Living in motels, hotels, other temporary locations due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
  - b. Living in emergency, transitional or domestic violence shelters; or
  - c. Abandoned in hospitals.
2. Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
3. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations or similar settings;



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4. Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above; and
5. School-aged parents living in houses for school-aged parents if they have no other available living accommodations.

School of origin - the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled, including preschool. When the child or youth completes the final grade level served by the school of origin, the school of origin shall include the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools.

Unaccompanied youth - a student experiencing homelessness not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. This includes youth who have run away from home; been abandoned or forced out of home by a parent, guardian or other caretaker; or separated from a parent or guardian for any other reason.

### **Delegation of Responsibility**

The principal shall designate a school McKinney-Vento liaison (“liaison”) for students experiencing homelessness, who shall have the duties and responsibilities imposed by law and the Board of Trustees’ policy.

The school’s liaison shall work with The School District of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Department of Education to ensure outreach and coordination with:

1. Local social service agencies and other entities that provide services to students experiencing homelessness and their families.
2. Other LEAs on issues of prompt identification, transfer of records, transportation and other school activities.
3. School staff responsible for the provision of services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
4. State and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies.
5. Law enforcement agencies, juvenile and family courts, and providers of services and programs funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

The school’s liaison shall ensure that public notice of the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness is disseminated in locations frequented by parents/guardians of students experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied youths. Such notice shall be provided in a manner and form understandable to the parents/guardians of students experiencing homelessness, and unaccompanied youths.

*The Homeless Liaison shall ensure that families and children experiencing homelessness, including children under age five, are identified and are referred to and supported in accessing early childhood educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, Early Intervention (IDEA Part C), and preschool programs administered by UCS or partner LEAs*

Upon request, the school’s liaison shall provide reliable, valid and comprehensive data to the Coordinator of Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program in accordance with federal and state laws and regulations.



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The school's liaison shall conduct an annual assessment of need in order to ensure that the school continues to provide optimal services and resources to meet the educational needs of students experiencing homelessness.

Upon request, the school's liaison will engage in ongoing progress monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the school's ECYEH program continues to meet the educational needs of students experiencing homelessness.

### ***Policy Review and Dissemination.***

*The McKinney-Vento Liaison, in consultation with school administration, shall review this policy and related administrative procedures at least annually and whenever federal, state, or Pennsylvania ECYEH guidance changes, to ensure the policy remains current and removes barriers to identification, enrollment, attendance, full participation, and school stability for students experiencing homelessness. The school shall disseminate this policy and a plain-language summary of rights at minimum through (a) the UCS website, (b) the parent handbook and staff handbook (or equivalent posted resources), and (c) building-level public notice postings. Documentation of dissemination shall be maintained for monitoring and audit purposes.*

### **Mandatory Regulatory Procedures**

The school's liaison shall propagate Administrative Procedures enacting this policy including procedures for:

1. Enrollment of Students
2. Best Interest Determination for Students
3. Homeless Status Dispute Resolution
4. Comparable Services

***Charter Enrollment Capacity.*** *Nothing in this policy requires enrollment into a class that is at capacity. However, to eliminate barriers to charter access for students experiencing homelessness, UCS shall implement procedures to ensure homeless students are not disadvantaged by missed deadlines due to homelessness and shall consider priority placement when waitlists exist, consistent with federal guidance. When UCS cannot enroll due to capacity, the Homeless Liaison shall provide timely assistance to secure immediate enrollment in an available public-school option consistent with McKinney Vento school selection rights*

***Education Records-*** Information about a student experiencing homelessness' living situation shall be treated as a student education record subject to the protections of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and shall not be deemed to be directory information. *UCS shall maintain confidentiality of homelessness status and shall implement administrative, technical, and physical safeguards, including role-based access controls, secure electronic storage, secure handling of paper records, and staff training on confidentiality and incident reporting.*

***Uniforms*** - No school shall create uniform and dress requirements that create financial hardships for students and their families experiencing homelessness. Nor shall any student in a homeless situation receive disciplinary actions for not having a uniform due to financial hardship. Every effort must be made to protect the privacy of students in this situation.



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***Transportation*** - The school shall provide transportation for students experiencing homelessness. If the school of origin is outside school's boundaries or students experiencing homelessness live in another district but will attend their school of origin, the school shall agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs of the transportation.

*If the involved LEAs cannot agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation to and from the school of origin, UCS shall follow federal guidance and share responsibility and costs equally, while ensuring transportation is arranged promptly so as not to delay immediate enrollment.*

### ***Fees and School Participation.***

*UCS shall waive or remove fees that create barriers to the full participation of students experiencing homelessness in the education process and school activities, including field trips, school projects, extracurricular participation, graduation activities, testing/lab fees, and other school-based charges. Eligibility for fee waivers shall be based on McKinney-Vento identification and shall not require additional documentation beyond the school's determination of eligibility. The process shall protect confidentiality and include a timely appeal pathway.*