

**LEA**

**Homeless Plan and Needs Assessment**

**2022-2023**

**Lee County Schools**

**2410 Society Hill Road**

**Opelika, Alabama**

**(334) 705-6000**

**Dr. James E. Mccoy Superintendent**

 **Brad Hunter**

 **District Homeless Liaison**

**The Educational Rights of Homeless Children and Youth**

The *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2151* (ESSA) Title IX Part A, also known as The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, guarantees that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public

education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and

youths.

# McKinney-Vento Homeless Program Needs Assessment

**Title X, Part C**- assessing the need for this program has occurred over the past year as the staff and administration accumulated information in researching how to best ensure the success and achievement of students in meeting the State’s challenging content and performance standards.

Quantitative and qualitative measures of need were derived from:

* Surveys of current programs, services, and partners for effectiveness;
* Meetings and discussions with the, the local United Way organization, the Lee County Department of Human Resources, and faith-based organizations;
* Participation rates of homeless students and families in counseling programs and after-school programs;
* Assessment of scores and achievement standards to determine gaps;
* Analysis of enrollment and attendance data
* A needs survey targeting at-risk students and families and needs surveys for supplemental services;
* Research and study of information received through regional trainings, as well as past involvement with Homeless Education programs in other systems.

Findings from assessments indicate:

* Homeless students are much more prevalent than expected and are found in every situation as defined in Section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Act;
* Educational support and personal needs;
* Transportation to the school of origin (a need that the district is providing through the collaboration with the Supervisor of Transportation and cooperation with surrounding district transportation supervisors);
* More adequate means of identifying homeless children and youth are needed;
* Many teachers and other school personnel lack resources and training to deliver services and aid homeless students;
* Homeless students are more likely to not be meeting State standards, particularly in poverty and minority groups;
* Examination of school free and reduced lunch requests and enrollment records, as well as, interviews conducted by the district registrar;
* As we prepared to transition to 21-22 school year at the end of 20-21 school year and throughout the summer, the district identified and supported 18 homeless children and youth. As the 21-22 school year progresses, the district served 18

homeless students in 21-22 school year.

# Results of the Needs Assessment:

* In 21-22 LCS enrolled and served 18 homeless students closing the school year with 18 homeless students experiencing homelessness. Currently many returning homeless students and an increasing number of new homeless students are being verified to ensure proper placement, services, and removal of barriers for students experiencing homelessness is in place. The number of new homeless students is growing weekly with many new families experiencing homelessness due to COVID-related job and housing loss.
* Staff surveys revealed that 100% of the administrators and school counselors felt that the homeless students were appropriately identified and supported with needed services.
* Parent, school staff, district office staff, administrator, counselor, and teacher interviews revealed a need for continuing support for families and staff in the following areas:
	+ Transition to stability and sustaining stability
	+ A system of support and training for all staff as well as and new staff training for front office staff, counselors, school registrars, and district registration staff
	+ Continuation of frequent and ongoing communication between parents, district liaison, school counselors, administrators, teachers, and community members to ensure individual student needs are met
	+ Increase in mental health support for homeless students

their assessment scores continue to be a challenge aligning with grades showing a high need for support in math. These data will be shared with the schools for targeted FY23 planning.

* Homeless students were referred for tutoring, credit recovery, and/or summer programs as needed. Instead, students in need of support were invited to attend elementary and secondary district summer programs that offered instruction in reading/English and math instruction as well as outdoor activities and opportunities to win prizes for perfect attendance. Three McKinney-Vento students participated in the district academic summer programs that were offered June 6-30 from 8 am to 1 pm.
* At the end of the 21-22 school year, 80% of the homeless students had 0 discipline infractions with 6% of students having 1 infraction, 6% having 2 and only 8% of students having 3 or more discipline infractions with a total of 16 infractions. This represents a slight increase in infractions since 20-21 school year. These data will be shared with the district and school teams to develop a plan of action to address discipline challenges as they relate to homelessness with a goal of supporting students to remove barriers to successful education. Students identified with possible behavioral issues were referred to the RTI Team and behavior intervention plans were developed for each individual student. Homeless students at all 14 schools were referred to a mental health counselor at counseling with 16 homeless students receiving school-based professional counseling services throughout the 21-22 school year.
* District homeless liaison and social worker will work on analyzing detailed student data and will collaborate with the homeless liaison and student services coordinator to address the needs through ongoing collaboration and quarterly review meetings.

# McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act was authorized in 1987 and most recently re-authorized in December 2015 by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The McKinney-Vento is designed to address challenges that homeless children and youth face in enrolling, attending and succeeding in school. The new or changed requirements focus on;

1. Identification of homeless children and youth;
2. Preschool-aged homeless children and their families have access to and receive services under LEA preschool programs, including Head Start, Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Early Intervention Program for infants and toddlers with Disabilities and other programs administered by the LEA;
3. Collaboration and coordination with other service providers, including public and private child welfare and social services agencies; law enforcement agencies, juvenile and family courts, mental health services, domestic violence agencies, child care under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act; and providers of emergency, transitional and permanent housing, including public housing agencies, shelter operators, and operators of transitional housing facilities.
4. Professional development and technical assistance at both the State and local levels.
5. Removing enrollment barriers, including barriers related to missed application or enrollment deadlines, fines, or fees, records required for enrollment, including immunization or other required health records, proof of residency, or other documentation or academic records; including documentation of credit transfer:
6. School stability, including the expansion of school or origin to include preschools and receiving schools and the provision of transportation until the end of the school year, even if a student becomes permanently housed;
7. Privacy of student records, including information about a homeless child or youth’s living situation; and
8. The dispute resolution process

# Definition of Homeless

* Children and youth who are:
	+ sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as ***doubled-up***);
	+ living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
	+ living in emergency or transitional shelters; or
	+ abandoned in hospitals;
* Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is public or not ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for humans;
* Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
* Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.
* These definitions apply to preschool age children.

The McKinney-Vento Act also recognizes unaccompanied youth who are homeless. According to the Act, an unaccompanied youth is a youth who is not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian. This includes youth living in runaway shelters, abandoned buildings, cars, on the streets, or in other inadequate housing; children or youth denied housing by their families (sometimes called throwaways); and teen parents living in shelters or other facilities for pregnant and parenting teens who have no other housing available.

# The Homeless Education Liaison

The Lee County Schools will appoint a Homeless Education Liaison who will play a vital role in ensuring that homeless children and youth enroll and succeed in school. This individual will serve as a link between homeless families and school staff, district personnel, shelter workers, and social service providers.

Responsibilities of the Homeless Education Liaison will include:

* Assisting homeless children and youth with enrolling and accessing schools’ services.
* Obtaining immunization and medical records.
* Coordinating transportation services.
* Informing parents, school personnel, and others of the rights of homeless children and youth.
* Disseminating information about the programs for homeless children and youth by posting flyers with contact information in places where homeless children most often are found (shelters, motels, etc.). Collaborating with the Alabama State Department of Education Homeless Education Liaison, the community, and other school personnel.

In addition to the responsibilities listed above, the Lee County Schools Homeless Education Liaison will:

* Handle disputes over enrollment, school placement, and transportation.
* Facilitate the dispute resolution process. (Homeless children and youth will be immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of disputes).
* Ensure that children receive the educational and other services for which they are eligible.

**School Level Liaison’s Role and Responsibilities**

Each school will assign on staff member who will serve as the homeless liaison.

* Identify students that may be facing homeless situations.
* Ensure that all enrollment procedures are followed.
* Assist families in completing the McKinney-Vento Enrollment form.
* Monitor school attendance and academic achievement.
* Identify physical, emotional and mental needs and issues homeless students may have.

# Educational Rights

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, children in homeless situations have the right to:

* Go to school, no matter where they live or how long they have lived there.
* Attend either the local school or the school of origin, if this is in their best. interest; the school of origin is the school the child attended when he/she was permanently housed or the school in which the child was last enrolled.
* Receive transportation to and from the school of origin.
* Enroll in school immediately, even if missing records and documents normally required for enrollment such as a birth certificate, proof of residence, previous school records, or immunization/medical records.
* Enroll, attend classes, and participate fully in all school activities while the school arranges for the transfer of records.
* Have access to the same programs and services that are available to all other students including transportation and supplemental educational services.
* Attend school with children not experiencing homelessness; segregation based on a student’s status as homeless is prohibited.

# Enrollment in School

The McKinney-Vento Act requires immediate of homeless children and youth, even if the child or youth is unable to produce the records normally required for enrollment such as previous academic records, immunizations, proof of residency, birth certificates, or other documentation. Any student who claims to be homeless will be immediately enrolled even if they do not have the required documents such as:

* + Lack of birth certificate
	+ Lack of school records or transcripts
	+ Lack of immunization of health records
	+ Lack of proof of residency
	+ Lack of transportation
	+ Guardianship or custody requirements

Enrolling schools must obtain school records from the previous school, and students must be enrolled in school while records are obtained.

**Enrollment of Unaccompanied Youth**

Unaccompanied Youth experiencing homelessness will be enrolled in school immediately. The student will be informed of their rights to transportation and their right to appeal school or district decisions. The Liaison will ensure that the unaccompanied youth are immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of disputes that may arise over school enrollment or placement.

**Identification, Eligibility Procedures to identify and Verify Eligibility of McKinney-Vento Students**

The Lee County Homeless Plan for Children and Youth is based on the guidelines established by the State Department of Education as outlined in the Alabama Plan for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. The plan is designed to insure that all services are administered in compliance with The Act and the State Plan.

Each school has a designated Homeless Liaison that works with the District Homeless Liaison in identifying students that are homeless. Many students are identified as they enroll in the system and others are identified as the home situation changes during the school year. Our residency affidavit process is where most of Lee County Homeless Students are identified.

The liaison makes a decision based on family information whether the student is homeless or not. The District Homeless Liaison makes a determination of the status of the application. If it is determined by the liaison that the student meets the criteria for Homeless, notification is sent to the school liaison, student’s family/unaccompanied youth, and the Child Nutrition Program Department for immediate processing for access to the free meals program.

**Data Reporting**

Students are identified in the student data information program Powe schools at the Central Office. This process provides immediate access to a listing of the LEA’s Homeless students. The AIMS Portal from the ALSDE and PowerSchools is monitored monthly to determine any changes.

If assistance is needed in areas such as school supplies, medical, dental, vision, clothing, fees, extracurricular activities and transportation, are offered by, school staff, counselor and/or liaison.

School personnel are trained on identifying homeless students, procedures for enrolling homeless students, board policy concerning enrollment, dispute and complaint procedures. Dispute and complaint forms and other Homeless information are available on the district website.

# School of Best Interest Selection

The McKinney-Vento Act requires that a homeless child or youth attend the school that is in his or her best interest. The school chosen may be either the school of origin or the school of residency. The school of origin is the school the child attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled. The school of residency is the school that serves the area where the child or youth is currently physically dwelling. This may include the school that serves the community where a homeless shelter is located or where a child or youth is doubling-up with family or friends.

When making decisions concerning the school of best interest, a homeless child or youth should, to the extent possible, remain in the school of origin unless doing so is contrary to the wishes of the parent or guardian of the child or youth. Remaining in the school of origin must also be the wish of an unaccompanied youth. If Lee County Schools believes it is in the homeless child’s or youth’s best interest to enroll in a school other than the school of origin or the school of choice, the district will provide a written explanation of its decision to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth with a statement regarding the right to appeal the placement decision.

# Automatic Eligibility for Free School Meals

The *Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004* includes the provision that homeless children and youth and unaccompanied youth automatically become eligible for free school breakfast and lunch. A list of homeless children and youth will be acceptable in lieu of the school meal application usually submitted by the child's parent or guardian and will be sufficient for school officials to approve the child's eligibility for free school meals.

When a student has been certified as eligible for free meals, based on designation as homeless, the eligibility remains effective for the remainder of the school year and up to 30 days into the next school year. This will remain in effect even if the homeless child or youth moves into permanent housing and is no longer homeless.

# Additional Services and Opportunities

Homeless children and youth are entitled to educational services comparable to those offered to other students. These services include but are not limited to the following programs: Special Education, English Learners (EL), vocational and technical education, gifted and talented programs and extracurricular activities. Homeless children and youth are also eligible to receive Title I services that target students most at risk of failing in school.

Preschool Enrollment- the McKinney-Vento Act requires early care and education programs administered by the LEA’s enroll students experiencing homeless immediately. This does not require them to exceed legal capacity limits or to enroll a child once a class is full. If classes are full, the homeless child will be referred to the closest preschool program available. Students will be put on a waiting list if programs are at capacity.

**Appeal and Dispute Process**

If a dispute arises over qualification of McKinney-Vento services, the student shall receive all rights and services provided by Lee School District, pending resolution of the dispute. The child, youth, parent or guardian shall be referred to the District Homeless Liaison, who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as quickly as possible by ensuring that the unaccompanied youth have the right to:

* Remain in their school of origin
* Transportation to and from the school of origin
* Immediately enroll in a new school serving the area in which they are currently living even if they don’t have typically required documents
* Equal access to programs and services such as gifted, special education, vocational education and English Language Learner services.

\*\* All barriers to enrollment are removed for students experiencing homelessness.

**McKinney-Vento Professional Development Opportunities**

* District Staff will attend state professional development as it is provided each year.
* Professional Development is provided at the beginning of each school year, principals, school liaison, counselors, office staff and teachers on homeless definitions, enrollment procedures and policies.

**Partnerships**

Lee County School System is committed to meeting all the needs of homeless students through partnering with local agencies. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Grant has provided most of the services for homeless students. School supplies, doctor and dental visits, glasses, food and clothes are provided for students through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Grant.

The social worker, employed by Lee County School System, assists families in finding the right community resources available for them as needed.

**Local doctor, dental and vision offices** partner with the district and help students by reducing costs for services.

Counseling services are provided to homeless students through different partnerships. **East Alabama Mental Health provides** counseling for child abuse students as needed. A **licensed counselor** is contracted by Lee County to assist students with mental, emotional and social issues. This counselor works with many of the identified homeless students.

A number **of local churches** in each school community provide toys and food at Thanksgiving and Christmas to needy students and their families, while district funds are used for clothes and school supplies.

The local **American Red Cross** has and will continue to assist with families after a storm event.

Here is a list of our current partners: United Way 211 Connections, Helping Families Initiative (helps with housing, and all other resources), Family Resource Center (Housing and parenting education) , Community market, Food Pantry on LCBOE site (funded through Pharmvite), Cloth a Child (DHR) , United Way medical funds (previously Andrew Willis fund) , East Alabama Mental Health , School Based mental health services , Children’s Rehabilitation (children with disabilities) , Mercy Medical , Lee County Health Department , Domestic Violence Intervention Center , Esperanza House , Big House , One Voice shelter (Jean Causey, EAMC)

**Dissemination of Information**

The county’s social worker delivers posters to each school as they remind the schools of McKinney Vento. Information is placed on the Lee County Schools website under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Program link. This information includes the following:

* + LEA Homeless Plan
	+ Contact Information
	+ Information for Parents
	+ Policy
	+ Link to the National Center for Homeless Education (<https://nche.ed.gov/> )

**Lee County Schools**

**TRANSPORTATION MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

Dear Parent/Guardian/Unaccompanied Youth,

Your child(ren) or you, as an unaccompanied homeless youth, are currently eligible for services through the McKinney-Vento program. Per the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, transportation will be provided to your child(ren) or you, as an unaccompanied youth, to and from school.

The following describes our agreement with you regarding transportation:

**Pick-Up**

Students must be at the selected location at the time coordinated by the homeless liaison/transportation department.

**Drop-Off**

An adult pre-approved by parents and guardians must be present at the selected location to pick-up students too young to be left unsupervised. The homeless liaison/transportation department will provide the time that the adult must be present for pick-up of students; parents and guardians must notify the liaison if an adult other than the parent or guardian will be picking up the student.

**Communication of Absences**

If a student is going to be absent from school and therefore does not need transportation for part or all of a day, parents or guardians must call and inform the designated driver no later than 6:00 a.m. on the day of the absence so the driver can plan accordingly.

**Behavioral Expectations**

Students and parents are expected to follow Lee County Schools’ policies for student behavior. Disciplinary actions for students who violate the behavior policies will be followed as they are for any student enrolled in Lee County Schools

If a student’s residence changes, the homeless liaison/transportation department must be contacted for transportation to be arranged. The transportation department may be reached at 205-850-3001.

**Individual Transportation to and from the School of Origin**

Individuals transporting students to their school of origin from outside their attendance zone are eligible for mileage reimbursement. Mileage reimbursement is limited to the distance to and from the student’s current residence (address) and the school of origin . Mileage claims should be completed on the board approved travel form and turned in to the Homeless Liaison by the 10th of each month.

Driver’s Name:

Contact Phone Number:

If Lee County Schools fails to provide the agreed upon transportation services, the liaison should be contacted. Your liaison Brad Hunter and may be reached at 334-705-6000.

Please sign below to acknowledge that you understand and agree with these expectations and terms.

Parent/Guardian/UHY Name (Printed) Signature Date

Brad Hunter, Homeless Liaison

Signature Date

