

Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School
McKinney Vento Homeless and Foster Care Education

Homeless Education and Foster Care Liaison

Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School (PFSJCS) will designate one or more staff persons to serve as liaison for homeless and Foster Care students who is/are able to carry out the described duties.

Regulations/Definition

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has adopted Section 725(2) of Act regarding the definition of homeless children and youth:

- *individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or have a primary nighttime residence in a supervised, publicly or privately, operated shelter for temporary accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill), an institution providing temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.*

This definition shall include:

- 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, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the 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 public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above; and
- unaccompanied youth a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

In addition, according to McKinney-Vento, a **fixed residence** is one that is stationary, permanent, and not subject to change. A **regular residence** is one which is used on a regular (i.e., nightly) basis. An **adequate residence** is one that is sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments. Therefore, **children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate residence will be considered homeless.**

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

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

Foster Care: placement by DCF of a student into 24-hour out-of-home care, away from his/her parents or guardians. These placements include, among others:

- foster family homes;
- foster homes of relatives;
- emergency shelters (including STARR programs and Transitional Care units);
- residential facilities;
- child care institutions;
- group homes; and
- pre-adoptive homes.

Enrollment

- Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School shall immediately enroll homeless/foster student in school, even if they do not have the documents usually required for enrollment, such as school records, medical records or proof of residency.
- PFSJCS will immediately contact the school last attended by the child or youth to obtain relevant academic and other records.
- If the homeless/foster student needs to obtain immunizations or other required health records, PFSJCS shall immediately refer the parent or guardian (or the student, if an unaccompanied youth) to the homeless education liaison who shall assist in obtaining necessary immunizations or screenings, or immunization or other required health records.
- If a homeless/foster student arrives without records, the school district's designated Homeless Education Liaison must assist the family and contact the previously attended school system to obtain the required records.

Student Rights

- Homeless/foster students have a right to either remain in their school of origin or to attend school where they are temporarily residing;
- Students who choose to remain in their school of origin have the right to remain there until the end of the school year in which they get permanent housing;
- Students who chose to enroll in school where they are temporarily residing must be enrolled immediately, even if they do not bring the records usually required for enrollment with them; and

Best Interest

Best Interest Determination

Best interest determinations are conducted to make decisions about the school a student will attend following a placement or change in placement (to a new city/town). These decisions should be made collaboratively by the parties who are best situated to understand the student's unique needs. These parties often include DCF; some combination of the student, the student's family, and any EDM; the district and school of origin; and the local school district (as appropriate). All appropriate parties should have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the decision making process. Every effort should be made to reach consensus regarding the appropriate school placement of a student in foster care. However, if there is disagreement regarding school placement for a student in foster care, DCF is considered the final decision maker in making the best interest determination. Under ESSA, to promote educational stability, students should continue to attend their schools of origin while best interest determinations are being made.

Best interest determinations must involve deliberate consideration of the student's unique needs and account for the benefits of educational stability. Specific factors to consider when making best interest determinations include, but are not limited to:

- student's age and grade level;
- student's preference, when age appropriate;
- preferences of the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) or EDM(s);
- student's attachment to the school, including meaningful relationships with staff and peers;
- placement of the student's sibling(s);
- distance/length of time to travel to/from school;
- time of academic year, academic performance, and skills;
- current educational goals and services;
- individual skills, needs, and social connections;
- anticipated length of time in placement, and whether reunification is the family goal;
- number of placements to date;
- ability to maintain family relationships and engagement (including in extracurricular activities, where appropriate);
- clinical/behavioral issues;
- influence of the school climate on the student, including safety issues;
- availability and quality of the services in the school to meet the student's educational and social emotional needs;
- whether the student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and is receiving special education and related services, or the student is receiving special education or related aids and services under Section 504, and, if so, the availability of those required services in a school other than the school of origin; and
- if the school of origin is in the best interest but only for a limited duration of time (e.g., until the end of the school year, the end of a testing or grading period, or the end of a particular grade).
Additionally, the parties involved in the decision may wish to determine a time to revisit the question of whether it is in the student's best interest to remain in the school of origin or enroll locally.

Note that transportation costs should not be a factor in determining the best interest of the student for the purposes of school selection.

Transportation

- PFSJCS will provide transportation services to homeless/foster children and youth that are comparable to those received by other students.
- PFSJCS Homeless/Foster Education Liaison must ensure that the parent or guardian of a homeless student, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed, in the language of the home, of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and is assisted in accessing transportation to the school selected.
- Homeless/foster students will be allowed to remain in their school of origin despite their residential instability and to receive the transportation services that will help provide that educational stability. either continue the student's education in the school of origin until the end of the year in which the student obtains permanent housing;
- if the homeless or foster student continues to live in the area served by PFSJCS in which the school of origin is located, PFSJCS will arrange transportation;
- if the homeless or foster student moves to an area served by another district outside of PFSJCS region, though continuing his or her education at PFSJCS, then PFSJCS will collaborate with the district in which the student resides must agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation to PFSJCS; and
- if the districts cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs must be shared equally.

Nutrition

The determination of eligibility for free meal benefits has been revised to allow benefits to be made available to homeless students as soon as possible:

- To expedite the delivery of nutritional benefits, school officials may accept documentation that students are homeless from the local educational liaison or the director of homeless shelter where the students reside.
- Documentation to substantiate free meal eligibility that is acceptable in lieu of a free and reduced price meal application may consist of the child's name or list of names, effective date (s), and the signature of the Homeless Education Liaison or the director of the homeless shelter.
- School officials must ensure that the school food service department is promptly advised when children leave the school or are no longer considered homeless. (When the student is no longer homeless, school officials must provide the household with an application for free and reduced price meals.)

Homeless Education and Foster Care Policies and Procedures

PFSJCS will ensure the review and revision of policies to remove barriers to the identification of homeless/Foster care children and youth and the enrollment and retention of homeless and Foster care children and youth, including:

- a) barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences;
- b) issues concerning transportation, immunization, residency, birth certificates, school records, and other documentation and guardianship; and
- c) identification, enrollment and attendance of homeless and foster care children and youths who are not currently attending school.
- d) That PFSJCS Board of Trustees will ensure policies and practices are adopted to ensure that homeless and foster care children and youths are not stigmatized or segregated on the basis of their status as homeless.

Dispute Resolution

If after conducting a best interest determination based on consideration of the presumption clause, and student-centered factors, PFSJCS determines it is not in the best interest to attend the school of origin or the school requested by the parent or guardian or (in the case of an unaccompanied youth) the youth:

1. The student is immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals;
2. PFSJCS will provide the parent or guardian of the student, or unaccompanied homeless youth is provided with a written explanation of any decision related to school selection or enrollment made by the school, the district, or the state educational agency, including the right of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth to appeal the decision;
3. The student, parent, or guardian is referred to the homeless education liaison, who carries out the dispute resolution process prescribed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, ensures that the youth is immediately enrolled in the school the youth seeks enrollment pending resolution of the dispute;
4. In the case of an unaccompanied youth, ensure that the local homeless liaison assists in placement or enrollment decisions giving priority to the views of the unaccompanied youth and provides notice to the youth of the right to appeal.