

## Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Homeless is a devastating circumstance for any child or youth, but for youth on their own, the stresses of homelessness are multiplied. The myriad of challenges faced by youth experiencing homelessness on their own puts these students at risk of dropping out or school failure. Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (reauthorized under Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act) guarantees rights and services for homeless students, including specific supports for unaccompanied homeless youth.

Unaccompanied homeless youth is a youth who meets the definitions of unaccompanied youth and homeless included in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The Act defines unaccompanied youth as, "a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian". This means that the youth is not living with a parent or guardian, and includes youth who are residing with a caregiver who does not have legal guardianship and youth who are living on their own.

The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children or youth as, "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence". While many unaccompanied youth are homeless, not all are. To be considered eligible for McKinney-Vento services, an unaccompanied youth's living arrangement must meet the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless. To be eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act as an unaccompanied homeless youth, the student must lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and not be in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

The McKinney-Vento Act includes no program-specific age requirements to qualify as an unaccompanied homeless youth. Thus, if a youth is eligible for K-12 public education in the state, he or she may be enrolled and served as an unaccompanied homeless youth.

The primary responsibility of students is to enroll and educate homeless children and youth in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Act, which neither authorizes nor requires schools to make judgments about the validity of why a student is not living with a parent or guardian. Rather, determinations of program eligibility are to be based solely on the definition of unaccompanied and homeless included in the law. A student's eligibility should be evaluated based on the nature of his or her current nighttime living arrangement, not the circumstances that caused him or her to leave home.