

## CMI Policy on Children and Youth in Transition (Homelessness Policy)

Homelessness exists in our community. A combination of high housing costs and poverty causes many families to lose their housing. Many young people leave their homes due to abuse, neglect, and family conflict. Children and youth who have lost their housing live in a variety of places, including motels, shelters, shared residences, transitional housing programs, cars, campgrounds, and others. Their lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious physical, emotional, and mental consequences. Creative Minds International Public Charter School will ensure that all children and youth receive a free and appropriate public education and are given meaningful opportunities to succeed in our school. We will also follow the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

It is our policy 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 appropriate public education, including preschool, and be given a full opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards. They must be included in state- and district-wide assessments and accountability systems. Creative Minds International Public Charter School will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation, and harassment. Information regarding this policy will be distributed to all students upon enrollment and twice during the school year, provided to students who seek to withdraw from school, and posted in the school.

### **Definitions:**

*Children and youth in transition* means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, 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.

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. 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 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 at CMI, both in and out of 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. The local liaison will also instruct designated school personnel to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student and to forward information indicating homelessness to the local liaison. Community partners in identification may include the following: family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels, campgrounds, drop-in centers, welfare departments and other social service agencies, street outreach teams, faith-based organizations, truancy and attendance officers, local homeless coalitions, and legal services. 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 (including performance on state- and district-wide assessments); and the reasons for any enrollment delays, interruptions in their education, or school transfers.

## **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 houses 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 student 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. High mobility rates also have been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting our schools to benefit from the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity. 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 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 (see next page) 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, CMI 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 (CMI 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 school- or 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

## **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 may be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition on a case-by-case basis. Transportation may 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 may 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. Schools and local liaisons will use the district transportation form to process transportation requests. Requests will be processed and transportation arranged without delay. If the student in transition is living and attending school in the District of Columbia, CMI will arrange transportation. In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition may also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to housed students.

## **Services**

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

- Transportation (as described above)
- Title I, Part A, services (as described below)
- Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners
- Vocational and technical education programs
- Gifted and talented programs
- Before- and after-school programs

CMI 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. If a student has an 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 district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation will be excused. CMI will follow state procedures to ensure that youth in transition and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. 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. 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 in which enrollment is sought, 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 where the dispute arises 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 requested 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. The local liaison will keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth in transition repeatedly. The parent, unaccompanied youth, or school district may appeal the school district's decision as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

## **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. On the day a child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the district nutrition office for immediate processing.

## **Title I, Part A**

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I, Part A services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness put students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The district will reserve such funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title I students to children and youth in transition attending non-participating schools. The amount reserved will be determined by a formula based upon the per-pupil Title I, Part A, expenditure and developed jointly by the local liaison and the Title I director. Reserved funds will be used to provide education-related support services to children and youth in transition, both in school and outside of school, and to remove barriers that prevent regular attendance. Our district's Title I plan will be coordinated with our McKinney-Vento services, through collaboration between the Title I director and the local liaison. 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 following LEA and school staff at least once each year: the School Director, Principal, assistant principals, federal program administrators, registrars, school secretaries, school counselors, school social workers, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, school nurses, and/or teachers. 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. The local liaison will also obtain from every school the name and contact information of a building liaison. Building liaisons will lead and coordinate their schools' compliance with this policy and will receive training from the local liaison annually.

## **Coordination**

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. Coordination will include conducting outreach and training to those agencies and participating in the local continuum of care, homeless coalition, homeless steering committee, and other relevant groups. Both public and private agencies will be encouraged to support the local liaison and our schools in implementing this policy.

## **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.