



# **LEA Homeless Plan and Needs Assessment 2023-2024**

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**Edwin C. Nichols  
Superintendent**

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Homeless Liaison  
Federal Programs Coordinator**

## **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 Madison County Early Care and Education Committee, the local "We Care" organization, the Madison City Council, the local United Way organization, the Enrichment Center, 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 23-24 school year at the end of 23-22 school year and throughout the summer, the district identified and supported 67 homeless children and youth. The district served 90 homeless students in the 22-23 school

year. Due to rigorous differentiated and individualized support and efforts to transition to and sustain homeless families' stability, 52 of our former homeless families transitioned to stability. Many of these families were able to overcome long-term situations of homelessness transitioning to stable employment and housing.

### **Results of the Needs Assessment:**

- In the previous 22-23 MCS enrolled and served 90 homeless students closing the school year with 47 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 pandemic and post-pandemic 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
- Surveys from school staff and local school homeless liaisons showed that 100% of the homeless students were appropriately identified and supported. 95% of survey participants agreed that appropriate transportation was provided to homeless students. The challenges with staffing among bus drivers affected transportation options for complicated homeless routes. The feedback regarding transportation will be discussed with the transportation director to brainstorm possible ways to eliminate this challenge in 23-24. 100% of respondents indicated that homeless students in their school received appropriate services when needed or requested. 100% of the respondents felt appropriate access to training was provided. Surveys offered additional comments to improve the Homeless Program. The feedback and surveys pointed to offering additional awareness training for the registration department, improving transportation, offering more counseling hours through the Enrichment Center, and considering adding another social worker to address growth in needs. These comments will be considered during FY24 planning to insure best services for the McKinney-Vento students and their families.
- iReady and STAR reading and math assessments were used to measure growth for homeless students. 78% of elementary (iReady) and 50% of secondary (STAR)

homeless students showed adequate growth on the district reading assessment. 87% of elementary (iReady) and 46% of secondary (STAR) homeless students showed adequate growth on the district math assessment. Data indicated a continuous need for more targeted support for secondary homeless students as 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 FY24 planning.

- In 22-23 student final grades demonstrated 76% (vs. 84% in 21-22) of homeless students passed math, 85% (compared to 87% in 21-22) passed reading/ELA, and 92% (vs. 90% in 21-22) passed science classes in both elementary and secondary schools. Pre-pandemic 19-20 grades were the highest rates of passing over the previous several three years (Math 88% in 17-18 vs 80% in 18-19 vs. 90% in 19-20), reading (90% in 17-18 vs 76% in 18-19 and 94% in 19-20), and science (94% in 17-18 vs 90% in 18-19 and 95% in 19-20). The 22-23 grades were showing a continued trend that could be connected to the SE climate and post-pandemic challenges. The district continues to target these challenges as evidenced by growth in science grades, however further work and support is still needed to continue addressing challenges for some homeless students in the areas of ELA and math.
- Credit recovery and summer school programs were available for homeless students during the 22-23 school year on an as-needed basis. Tutoring was available to elementary, middle, and secondary students throughout the school year.
- At the end of the 22-23 school year, 78% of the homeless students had 0 discipline infractions with 9% of students having 1 infraction, 5% having 2 and only 8% of students having 3 or more discipline infractions with a total of 47 infractions among 90 students. While this represents a slight increase in infractions since the 21-22 school year, it is important to point out that the numbers of the homeless students have grown as well, representing a larger student body when reviewing discipline. These data will be further shared with the district and school teams to re-visit a plan 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 11 schools were referred to a mental health counselor at The Enrichment Center for screening purposes to ensure each student receives support as needed. Five schools referred homeless students to receive counseling with 18 homeless students receiving school-based professional counseling services for a total of 119 private counseling sessions provided to homeless students throughout the 22-23 school year. Parents/guardians (if possible) were invited to the RTI meetings. Unaccompanied youth attended the RTI meeting at the request of the counselor.
- District homeless liaison and social workers 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 Needs Assessment Rating for 23-24 Planning

Based on the surveys, student data, social worker and homeless liaison feedback, and stakeholder surveys the needs assessment items were rated in the table below to display the extent to which the district currently meets the special needs of homeless children and youth and their families.

Educational/School-Related Services	Need Not Addressed	Need Addressed /Remains Major Need	Need Addressed/ Remains Minor Need	Need Well-Addressed	Not an Identified Need
Tutoring/Remedial Programs			x		
Special Education				x	
Counseling for Students		x			
School Transportation		x			
Free Lunch/ Breakfast		x			
School Supplies			x		
Activity Fees			x		
Parent Training/Involvement		x			
Case Management for Enrollment and Community Services		x			
School Coordination with Local Community Services		x			
Professional Development on Homeless Issues for District Staff Posting Student Rights and Services		x			
Medical Services			x		
Mental Health Services		x			

Food and Clothing		x			
Emergency Shelter		x			
Transitional Shelter		x			
Affordable Permanent Housing		x			
Domestic Violence/Child Abuse Intervention			x		
Life Skills Training		x			
Substance Abuse Intervention			x		
Community Transportation		x			
Childcare		x			
Job Placement Services			x		

## **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.

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 Madison City 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 Madison City 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.

### **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. It is the responsibility of the Madison City Schools Homeless Education Liaison to ensure that documentation normally required for enrollment is gathered and submitted in a timely manner.

### **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 Madison City 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.

### **Dispute Resolution Procedures**

If a school selection or eligibility dispute develops regarding the options available under the McKinney-Vento Act, the child or youth will be immediately enrolled to the school in which enrollment is sought by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth, pending resolution of the dispute.

#### **STEP 1: How to Start a Dispute or Challenge a Decision by the School System**

The parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth must complete the attached Dispute Form and submit the form to a school principal or the District's Homeless Liaison, Natalia A. Dooley, within 10 school days from date of the Written Notice of Decision that was

provided to the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth. The form may be mailed to Natalia A. Dooley at the following address:

Madison City Schools  
District Homeless Liaison: Natalia A. Dooley  
211 Celtic Drive  
Madison, AL 35758

Additionally, the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth may begin the dispute process by verbally explaining the dispute to the District's Homeless Liaison, Natalia A. Dooley (256-464-8370).

### **STEP 2: Meeting with Superintendent and Homeless Liaison**

After the Dispute Form is received or a verbal complaint is made, the Superintendent, or someone that works for the Superintendent, will schedule a meeting with you, the student (if appropriate), the District's Homeless Liaison, and at least one person representing the school where enrollment has been requested. The meeting must occur within ten (10) days of the District's receipt of the Dispute Form. Within five (5) business days after the meeting, the Superintendent will inform you of his/her decision in writing.

### **STEP 3: Appeal to the State Department of Education**

After you receive the Superintendent's decision in writing, you may file an appeal with the Alabama State Department of Education:

State Coordinator for Homeless Education  
Alabama State Department of Education  
Federal Programs  
50 North Ripley Street  
Montgomery, AL 36130  
1-888-725-9321 (toll free)

The Alabama State Department of Education will review your dispute and will address the issues within 10 days from the receipt of your written request for resolution. *See Ala. Admin. Code r. 290-3-1-.02(7)(j)(i)-(iv).*

### **NEED HELP?**

If you have questions regarding the Dispute Resolution Procedures or how to file an appeal, please contact:

Natalia A. Dooley  
District Homeless Liaison  
Madison City Schools  
Phone: (256) 464-8370

Email: [nadooley@madisoncity.k12.al.us](mailto:nadooley@madisoncity.k12.al.us)

**For matters concerning homeless children and youth, please contact:**

**The Madison City Schools Homeless Liaison:**

**Natalia A. Dooley**

**211 Celtic Drive**

**Madison, AL 35758**

**(256) 464-8370**