
Issue Date: March 22, 2024

Guidelines for Enrolling Refugee Students

Purpose

This document is intended to support school and LEA administrators with information to assist them in the appropriate enrollment and inclusion of newcomer students.

Key Points

- The responsibility for enrolling newcomer refugee students is shared between schools and refugee resettlement organizations, where resettlement agencies are involved.
- Every effort should be made to enroll newly arriving students as soon as possible after arriving in a SU/SD.
- This enrollment should happen regardless of the perceived permanence of a student's housing. It is important to refer all students who do not have fixed, regular, and adequate housing to the district Homeless Liaison so they can determine if the student is eligible for services and support under the McKinney-Vento Act.
- If the student is eligible for McKinney-Vento, the student has a right to immediate enrollment, even when records normally required for enrollment are not present.
- Immunization laws allow for up to a six month provisional enrollment for all students who are awaiting appointments for immunizations.

Creating a Welcoming Environment and Orienting Students

Consider the following strategies when enrolling newcomer students to ensure that they feel welcomed into their new school environment:

- It is important that students enroll immediately, even if the school placement is temporary. Introduction to the US School system is vital to eventual student success. For students who are highly mobile, school provides a structure that students can rely on. In addition, it is a place where students have access to other services that they may not have access to elsewhere, including climate control and food.
- For students who are not enrolling with the support of a case worker with translation and/or interpretation ability, it is vital that translation and/or interpretation services are provided by the SU/SD at enrollment. Information about which language and mode of communication best serves the family should be maintained in the student's permanent file. If the student speaks English, but the parents do not, translation and interpretation is still a requirement.



- As a reminder, do not ask families about their documentation status.
- For McKinney-Vento eligible students, any necessary immunization records can be obtained after enrollment. Local liaisons must help obtain necessary immunizations or screenings, or immunization or other required health records, while ensuring the student is enrolled in and attending school in the meantime. If a student or family does not have access to their prior school records, try to contact the previous school, the consulate in the country the family lived in prior to arriving in the US, or work with the family to gather information to make appropriate placements. Lack of records may not act as a barrier to immediate enrollment and full participation in school activities.

McKinney-Vento Considerations

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless liaisons are required to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified, both by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies. Each situation should be evaluated on an individual, case-by-case basis, considering whether or not the student has a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. A family or student may not and does not need to use the word “homeless” to describe their living conditions in order to meet the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness.

In short, homeless liaisons should use the same process of determining McKinney-Vento eligibility for an immigrant child or youth as that used for a child or youth born in the United States. If an immigrant child or youth’s living situation meets the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless, they are eligible for rights and services under the Act. Immigrant students are likely to have never been enrolled in a school in the United States before arriving; therefore, those students who also meet the definition of homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act will not have a school of origin in the US. They will enroll in the local attendance area school for the area in which they are currently living—even if that living situation is not permanent. Once enrolled in a Vermont public school, that school will now be considered a school of origin. If the student moves outside the boundaries of the area served by that school, the student has the right to remain in the school of origin, if it is in their best interest to do so.

School enrollment should not be held up because of perceived impending moves, or lack of records or other normally required paperwork for enrollment. The McKinney-Vento Act requires that students experiencing homelessness be enrolled in school immediately, even if they are lacking documentation that is normally required for enrollment. The local homeless liaison must ensure that all students who qualify for McKinney-Vento services, including immigrant children and youth experiencing homelessness, are enrolled in school immediately. For all McKinney-Vento eligible students, regardless of immigration status, schools must address barriers to full participation in school activities, including transportation.

Additional Consideration

If the student or their family are working in agriculture or have a history of working in agriculture, they should be referred to the Vermont Migrant Education Program.

Resources

- [Vermont State Refugee Office](#)
- [USED: Educational Resources for Immigrants, Refugees, Asylees, and other New Americans](#)
- [NCELA Newcomer Toolkit](#)
- [NCELA Family Toolkit: Chapter 1: Enrolling Your Child in School](#)
- National Center for Homeless Education brief: [Supporting the Education of Immigrant Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [SchoolHouse Connection's Strategies for Supporting Immigrant and Migrant Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Information on the Rights of Unaccompanied Children to Enroll in School and Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs](#)
- [Welcoming America: Welcoming Refugees](#)

Contact Information

- For questions regarding refugee resettlement generally, contact Tracy Dolan: tracy.dolan@vermont.gov
- For questions related to English Learners (ELs), contact Stephanie Vogel: stephanie.vogel@vermont.gov
- For questions related to students experiencing homelessness, contact Katy Preston: katy.preston@vermont.gov
- For questions related to migrant students, contact Megan Kinlock: megan.kinlock@vermont.gov
- [Local Homeless Liaison Contact List](#)