

## **EXCALIBUR CHARTER SCHOOLS, INC. HOMELESS 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. This school district will ensure that all children and youth receive a free appropriate public education and are given meaningful opportunities to succeed in our schools. This district will also follow the requirements of the McKinney –Vento Act.

It is policy of our district 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.” The school will not segregate or stigmatize the children and youth from the mainstream school environment. 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. Our schools will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation and harassment.

Information regarding this policy will be: distributed to all student upon enrollment and once during the school year; provided to student who seek to withdraw from school; and posted in every school in the district, as well as other places where children, youth and families in transition receive services, including family and youth shelter, soup kitchens, motels, campground, drop-in center, welfare departments, health department and other social service agencies.

Each year, schools that have been particularly creative or pro-active in implementing this policy will be publicly recognized for the benefits they provide their students.

### **Definitions**

*Children and youth in transitions* means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, and lack of fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residences, including:

- Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other person due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, camping grounds of trailer parks due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations, are living in emergency or transitional shelter; 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 designated 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; and
- Migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.

A child or youth shall 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 described above. The more general term *youth* also included unaccompanied youth.

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

*Immediate* means without delay.

*Parent* means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

*School* or *origin* means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

*Liaison* is the staff person designated by our LEA and each LEA in the state as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act.

## **Identification**

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the liaison will identify children and youth in transition in the district, both in and out of school.

The 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 liaison. The liaison will also instruct school registrars and secretaries to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student, and to forward information indicating homelessness to the liaison. Community partners in identification may include; family and youth shelter, soup kitchens, motels, campground, drop-in centers, welfare departments and other social services agencies, street outreach teams, faith-based organization, truancy and attendance officers, local homeless coalitions and legal service.

The liaison will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the district, 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 or origin, or to attend any school that housed 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 have also been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools or 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 shall remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent's 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 shall be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and parent's or youth's wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

- Safety of the student;
- Continuity of instruction;
- Likely area of family's or youth's future housing'
- Time remaining in the academic year;
- Anticipated length of stay in temporary living situation;
- School placement of siblings; and
- Whether the student has special needs that would render the commute harmful.

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin (see below) and services under federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.

### **Enrollment**

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, student in transition may not have school enrollment documents, readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth in transition. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:

- Transcripts/school records (The enrolling school must contact the students' 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.);
- Immunization or immunization /health/medical/physical records ( If necessary, the school must refer students to the liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunizations 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 guardianships;
- Birth Certificate;
- Any other document requirements;
- Unpaid school fees;
- Lack o uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes; and
- Any factor related to the student's living situation.

Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling or liaison.

## **Transportation**

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school or origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent's request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition. Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth that a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during the pendency of disputes. The liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will only be considered 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 the right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.

Schools and the liaison shall use the district transportation form to process transportation requests. Requests shall be processed and transportation arranged without delay. If the student in transition is living and attending school in this district, this district shall arrange transportation. If the student in transition is living in this district but attending school in another, or attending school in this district but living in another, this district will follow the inter-district transportation agreement to determine who must arrange transportation. It is the district's policy that inter-district disputes shall not result in a student in transition missing school. If such a dispute arises, this district will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention of the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to housed students.

## **Services**

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

- Transportation (as described above);
- Title I (as described below);
- Education 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;
- School nutrition program; and
- Before and After School programs.

The district recognized 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, evaluation of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability shall be given priority and coordinated with student's prior and subsequent schools as necessary, to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. When necessary, the district shall expeditiously designate a surrogate parent for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability. If a student had an Individualized Educational Program (IEP), the enrolling school shall immediately implement it. Any necessary IEP meeting or re-evaluations shall 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 case, the goal ill be to avoid any disruption inn appropriate service.

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absences related to a child's or youth's living situation shall be excused. Or school district 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 shall refer children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The 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 the 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, 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 liaison immediately. The 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 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**

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I 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, 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 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 liaison will conduct training and sensitivity/awareness activities for the following LEA and school staff at least once each year: the Superintendent, principals, federal program administrators, registrars, school secretaries, school counselors, school social workers, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, school nurses, and 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 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 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.

## **Preschool**

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Children in transition have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. To facilitate preschool enrollment and attendance, the provisions of this policy will apply to preschools administered by our school district. Our district will ensure that children in transition receive priority enrollment in preschool programs operated by the district, including exempting children in transition from waiting lists.

Children in transition with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Children in transition under age three will be referred for at-risk services under Part C of IDEA and screened to determine if referrals for additional Part C services are appropriate. The liaison will collaborate with Head Start and Even Start programs and other preschool programs to ensure that children in transition can access those programs.

**Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc.**  
**Education of Homeless Children and Youth**  
**Dispute Resolution Process**

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc. must immediately enroll the homeless student in either the school of origin or the school of residency, whichever is sought by the parent, guardian, or homeless youth, pending resolution of the dispute. Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc. must also provide transportation to the parent-selected school for the duration of the dispute resolution process. In cases of an inter-district dispute, the LEAs must split the costs associated with this transportation.

With the help of the Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc. Liaison, the parent, guardian, or homeless youth shall work through the expedited Dispute Resolution Process established by Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc. Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc. shall provide the parent, guardian, or homeless youth with a written notice of the Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc. decision regarding school selection or enrollment and their right to appeal.

If the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth is dissatisfied with the resolution, he/she may appeal the decision to the state level.

The state level dispute resolution process is available for appeals from district level decisions and inter-district disputes. Parent, guardians, unaccompanied youths, or public school districts and charter holders may file appeals.

To initiate the state level dispute resolution process, within seven (7) work days after receiving written notification of the district level or inter-district decision, the appellant must forward to the Arizona Department of Education Homeless Education Coordinator:

- 1) a copy of the State Level Notice of Appeal; and
- 2) a copy of the Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc. written decision

Copies of all paperwork filed with the Homeless Education Coordinator shall be provided to all other parties to the proceeding.

Upon receipt of a notice of appeal, the Homeless Education Coordinator shall, within seven (7) work days, convene a panel of at least two (2) Arizona Department of Education employees, including the Homeless Education Coordinator and the Deputy Associate Superintendent for the Unit or his/her designee. This panel shall review the entire record of the dispute, including any written statements submitted, and make a determination based on the child or youth's best interest. Within seven (7) work days of the date the panel convenes, the Arizona Department of Education will issue this decision in writing.

The determination of the panel shall be final.

**Arizona Department of Education  
Education of Homeless Children and Youth  
Office of the Coordinator**

**State-level Notice of Appeal  
(Student/Family vs. Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc.)**

Student's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade level \_\_\_\_\_

Form completed by \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship \_\_\_\_\_

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

School District: **Excalibur Charter Schools, Inc.**

Homeless Liaison \_\_\_\_\_

Did you receive a decision in writing from the school or school district? Yes No

If so, when did they give you the written decision? \_\_\_\_\_

***\*\*\*Please attach the written decision from the school district to this form. Both documents must be returned to ADE no later than 7 days after you received the district decision in writing.***

Why are you appealing the decision?(You may attach additional pages as needed.)  
Please explain what rights you feel the school or district has not honored.

Please return this form to Arizona Department of Education, Education of Homeless Children and Youth Office of the Coordinator 153 W. Jefferson Street, Phoenix, AZ, 85006 Frank Migali State Coordinator for Homeless & Refugee Education Phone: 602-542-4963 Fax: 602-542-5175 Email: [Frank.Migali@azed.gov](mailto:Frank.Migali@azed.gov)

Within 7 calendar days of receipt at ADE, the entire written record will be reviewed by a panel of Arizona Department of Education employees, including the Homeless Education coordinator and a Deputy Associate Superintendent. This panel will issue a written decision to all parties involved. The determination of this panel shall be final.