

Inwood Academy for Leadership Charter School

Addendum - Enrollment and Transportation Policy: Students Experiencing Homelessness and Children in Foster Care

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E) Compliance — Policy Addendum

Policy Owner: McKinney-Vento Liaison / LEA Point of Contact **Applies To:** All students, grades K–12

This policy was adopted in compliance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) amendments to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E) governing the educational stability of children in foster care.

I. Purpose

Inwood Academy for Leadership Charter School (the "School") is committed to ensuring that students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care have equal access to the same free and appropriate public education provided to all other students. This policy is adopted in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.), ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E), the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, and New York State Education Law.

II. Definitions

Students Experiencing Homelessness: Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including those who are:

- Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons (doubled-up);
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations;
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters;

- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- Abandoned in hospitals; or
- Awaiting foster care placement.

Child in Foster Care: A student who is in the legal custody or guardianship of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) or the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), or any successor child welfare agency, as a result of an abuse, neglect, or dependency proceeding.

School of Origin: For homeless students, the school the student attended when they first became homeless or in which they were last enrolled. For students in foster care, the school the student attended when they first entered foster care or in which they were last enrolled.

Best Interest Determination: A collaborative decision-making process used to determine whether maintaining a student in foster care in their school of origin or enrolling them in a new school better serves the student's educational stability and overall wellbeing.

LEA Point of Contact / McKinney-Vento Liaison: The designated School staff member responsible for coordinating services, enrollment, and transportation for both homeless students and students in foster care. These roles may be fulfilled by the same individual or by separate designated staff members.

III. Immediate Enrollment

The School will immediately enroll any child or youth experiencing homelessness or entering foster care, even if the student is unable to produce documents typically required for enrollment, including but not limited to:

- Proof of residency or address;
- Proof of immunization or immunization records;
- School records or transcripts;
- Birth certificate or proof of age; or
- Any outstanding fees, fines, or unpaid balances from a previous school.

The School will not delay or deny enrollment on the basis of any missing documentation listed above. Upon enrollment, the McKinney-Vento Liaison or LEA Point of Contact will assist the family or student in obtaining any required documents and will coordinate with previous schools to retrieve academic records.

Where immunization records are unavailable, the School will immediately enroll the student and refer the family to appropriate health resources to obtain immunizations, in accordance with New York State law.

IV. Continued Enrollment and School of Origin

A. Students Experiencing Homelessness

A student who is enrolled at the School and subsequently becomes homeless has the right to remain enrolled at the School for the duration of homelessness and until the end of the academic year in which the student obtains permanent housing, regardless of whether the student is temporarily residing outside of the School's geographic boundaries.

B. Students in Foster Care — Best Interest Determination

A best interest determination will be conducted whenever a student in foster care initially enters foster care, experiences a change in placement, or is at risk of being displaced from their school of origin. The determination will be conducted no later than 72 hours after the School is notified of a placement or placement change, and will involve collaboration among:

- The School's LEA Point of Contact;
- The student's caseworker from ACS or the relevant child welfare agency;
- The student's foster parent or caregiver;
- The student, where age and developmentally appropriate; and
- The student's parent or legal guardian, where applicable.

In making the best interest determination, the School and child welfare agency will consider, at minimum:

- The student's current academic progress and performance;
- The student's social and emotional wellbeing and attachment to their current school community;
- The age and grade level of the student;
- The distance between the foster care placement and the school of origin;
- The availability and feasibility of transportation;
- The student's proximity to graduation or a terminal grade; and
- Any special education, English language learner, or other specialized services the student receives at the school of origin.

Unless the best interest determination concludes otherwise, the School will presume that maintaining the student in the school of origin is in the student's best interest. The outcome of the determination will be documented in writing, retained in the student's file, and provided to the student's caregiver and caseworker.

Where the best interest determination supports a school change, the School will immediately enroll the student in the new school and promptly transfer all academic records, regardless of any outstanding fees, fines, or missing documentation.

C. Disputes Regarding Enrollment or Placement

If a dispute arises regarding school placement for either a homeless student or a student in foster care, the student will be immediately enrolled in the school of choice and will continue to receive all services, including transportation, pending resolution of the dispute. The McKinney-Vento Liaison or LEA Point of Contact will provide the family with written notice of the dispute process and their rights.

V. Removal of Barriers

The School will actively identify and remove barriers that may prevent homeless students or students in foster care from enrolling, attending, or fully participating in school. These barriers include but are not limited to:

- Outstanding fees, fines, or charges from the School or a previous school;
- Unpaid lunch balances or fees for extracurricular activities;
- Excessive or unexplained absences resulting from housing instability or placement changes;
- Lack of school supplies, uniforms, or materials; and
- Transportation challenges.

No student experiencing homelessness or in foster care will be denied enrollment, suspended, or otherwise penalized solely on the basis of outstanding fees, fines, or absences attributable to their housing or placement situation.

VI. Identification

The School will implement procedures to identify students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care at the point of enrollment and throughout the school year. The McKinney-Vento Liaison and LEA Point of Contact are responsible for:

- Training School staff to recognize signs of housing instability or foster care placement;
 - Ensuring that enrollment forms include appropriate questions to identify homeless status and foster care status in a sensitive and non-stigmatizing manner;
 - Maintaining confidentiality of each student's housing and foster care situation in accordance with applicable law; and
 - Outreaching to community organizations, shelters, and child welfare agencies serving homeless families and children in foster care in the School's area.
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VII. Transportation Policy for Students Experiencing Homelessness

The School is committed to ensuring that transportation is never a barrier to school access for students experiencing homelessness. The following transportation rights and practices apply to all identified homeless students.

A. Transportation to the School of Origin

Students experiencing homelessness have the right to receive transportation to and from their school of origin. The School will provide or arrange such transportation:

- For the full duration of the student's homelessness;
- Through the remainder of the academic year in which the student becomes permanently housed; and
- For an additional year beyond permanent housing if the current school year is the student's terminal grade level (e.g., the final year of elementary, middle, or high school), where such continuation is in the student's best interest.

This right applies to all eligible students, including preschoolers attending a preschool of origin affiliated with or served by the School.

B. Distance Coverage

The School will provide or arrange transportation to the school of origin for distances of up to 50 miles each way, even where comparable long-distance transportation is not provided to students who are permanently housed. For distances exceeding 50 miles, the McKinney-Vento Liaison will work with the New York City Department of Education to determine the most reasonable and cost-effective transportation arrangement in the best interest of the student.

C. Extracurricular Activities and Summer School

Transportation barriers will not prevent homeless students from full participation in School life. The School will provide or arrange transportation for students experiencing homelessness to attend:

- Extracurricular activities, including after-school programs, clubs, athletics, and enrichment activities; and
- Summer school programs offered by or through the School,

where the lack of transportation would otherwise pose a barrier to participation.

D. Coordination and Costs

The McKinney-Vento Liaison is responsible for coordinating transportation arrangements promptly upon identification of a homeless student. Transportation will be arranged regardless of whether the student's temporary residence falls within or outside the School's normal service

area. Costs associated with transportation under this section will not be charged to the student or family.

E. Disputes Regarding Transportation

If a dispute arises regarding transportation, the student will continue to receive transportation services during the pendency of the dispute. The McKinney-Vento Liaison will provide the family with written notice of their rights and the School's dispute resolution process.

VIII. Transportation Policy for Children in Foster Care

The School is committed to ensuring that transportation is never a barrier to educational stability for students in foster care. The following transportation rights and practices apply to all identified students in foster care.

A. Provision of Transportation

Where it is determined to be in the student's best interest to remain in the school of origin, the School will provide or arrange transportation to and from the school of origin for the full duration of the student's time in foster care, regardless of the distance between the foster care placement and the school.

B. Coordination

The School's LEA Point of Contact will coordinate transportation arrangements with the relevant child welfare agency — including ACS or OCFS — promptly upon notification of a foster care placement or placement change. Transportation will be arranged and in place no later than the student's next school day following notification, where practicable.

C. Transportation Options

Depending on the circumstances, transportation may be arranged through one or more of the following means:

- The School's existing transportation services;
- The New York City Department of Education transportation system;
- A transportation provider contracted by the child welfare agency; or
- Reimbursement to the foster parent or caregiver for transportation costs, where agreed upon by the School and the child welfare agency.

D. Duration

Transportation will be provided for the full duration of the student's time in foster care and, where applicable, through the end of the school year in which the student exits foster care, to minimize disruption to the student's education.

E. Costs and Funding Coordination

The School and the relevant child welfare agency will collaborate to determine how transportation costs will be funded. The LEA Point of Contact is responsible for initiating cost-sharing discussions with the child welfare agency at the time of the best interest determination. Transportation costs will not be charged to the student, foster parent, or caregiver.

In cases where transportation costs are disputed or where funding responsibility has not been clearly established, the School will provide or arrange transportation in the interim while the funding dispute is resolved, so as not to disrupt the student's attendance. The School will work with ACS, OCFS, and the New York City Department of Education, as applicable, to resolve funding responsibilities in a timely manner.

F. Disputes Regarding Transportation

If a dispute arises regarding transportation for a student in foster care, the student will continue to receive transportation services during the pendency of the dispute. The LEA Point of Contact will provide the student's caregiver and caseworker with written notice of the dispute process and the student's rights under ESSA and applicable state law.

IX. Liaison and Point of Contact Responsibilities

The McKinney-Vento Liaison and LEA Point of Contact serve as the primary points of contact for students and families experiencing homelessness and students in foster care, respectively, and are jointly responsible for:

- Facilitating immediate enrollment and school placement;
 - Conducting or coordinating best interest determinations for students in foster care;
 - Coordinating transportation arrangements under Sections VII and VIII of this policy;
 - Connecting students and families with academic support services, health services, and community resources;
 - Coordinating with child welfare agencies, the New York City Department of Education, and other LEAs as needed regarding transportation, placement, and records;
 - Ensuring that students are not segregated into separate programs or schools based solely on their homelessness or foster care status; and
 - Reporting as required to the New York State Education Department.
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X. Confidentiality

The School will maintain the confidentiality of each student's homeless status and foster care status in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and all other applicable federal and state privacy laws. This information will not be disclosed to School staff beyond those with a legitimate educational need to know.

XI. Non-Discrimination

Students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care will have full and equal access to all School programs, services, extracurricular activities, and support services available to other students, including special education services, English language learner programs, gifted programs, and nutrition services. The School will not stigmatize or treat students differently on the basis of their housing or foster care status.

XII. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the McKinney-Vento Liaison, LEA Point of Contact, and School leadership to ensure continued compliance with federal and state law and to assess the effectiveness of the School's practices in serving students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Trustees of Inwood Academy for Leadership Charter School in compliance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and ESSA Section 1111(g)(1)(E) governing the educational stability of children in foster care.

Inwood Academy for Leadership Charter School is an equal opportunity educational institution and does not discriminate on the basis of housing status, foster care status, or any other protected characteristic.