

Settling Disputes with the School

If a school district and a homeless parent do not agree about a child's right to educational services, the school must still provide them, even transportation, until the dispute is settled. If a homeless parent or child has any complaint about what is done at the school, he or she may talk to someone at the school about it.

The school must then give the parent information about the dispute process as well as a list of low cost or free legal aid and other helpful programs in the community. This is to be sure that parents get the help they need.

The dispute must then be sent by the school to a special person at the Regional Office of Education. This person must call a meeting of all the people within five (5) school days, if possible, to try to settle the dispute.

A parent or child may also file a lawsuit against the school to protect their rights. If they do so and win, the cost of the lawsuit, including their lawyer's fees, must be paid by the school.



If you have any questions about the educational rights of homeless children and youth in Illinois, you can call any of the following:

Your Local School Homeless Liaison:

**The Opening Doors Project:
Adult Learning Resource Center
(847) 803-3535
Regional Office of Education #26
<http://homelessed.net>
Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness
(708) 263-3590**

**Law Project of the Chicago Coalition
for the Homeless
(800) 940-1119**

**Information Hotline
Illinois State Board of Education
(800) 215-6379**

**Accountability Division
Principal Consultant - ISBE
(217) 782-2948**

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*Opening Doors
2626 S. Clearbrook Dr.
Arlington Heights, IL 60005
Phone (224) 366-8623
Fax: (847) 378-6225*

A PARENT'S GUIDE

Educational Rights of Illinois' Children & Youth in Homeless Situations



Statewide Access to Education
for
Homeless Children and Youth

Funded by
Illinois State Board of Education,
Accountability Division, under the
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

The Educational Rights of Homeless Children & Youth

Homeless children and teens have problems getting to school and staying in school. Many homeless families move one or two times during the school year. School records get lost. Physical exams and shots needed for school can be hard to get. Both Illinois and U.S. law—the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act—say that schools must help homeless children and teens with these problems. Schools need to know how hard it is for homeless children to enroll and then attend school. Schools must help as much as they can.

Illinois school districts have people called liaisons who must work to help these children and teens. This paper tells what school rights and kinds of help homeless children and teens have in Illinois.

Who is Homeless?

The definition of “*homeless*” under Illinois and U.S. law is very wide. It includes a person who does not have a “fixed, regular and adequate” place to sleep at night. It also means a person who stays at a shelter most nights or in a place not used by people for sleeping, like a box or car. **It can also mean children or teens who are staying with friends or relatives because they cannot pay for a place to live.**



Choice of Schools

Homeless children and teens must be able to choose their school. When a child changes schools, he or she may fall months behind. So the law says a child must be given the choice to keep going to the “home” school for as long as he or she is homeless. After the family finds a home, the child may finish the school year in the same school. The home school means the school the child went to last or the one he went to before he was homeless. If the school chosen is not in the district where the child is living, the two districts must agree on how to get the child to school.

Homeless families may also choose the school that other children who live in their area attend. This is true even if the child is not living with a parent or guardian.

Immediate Enrollment

By law, Illinois schools must help homeless children get into school right away. If they do not have their school records, the school must help to get them. If they need shots or medical records,* the school must help with this. The school *can* ask for a way to contact the parent. **Information given at time of enrollment is confidential.**

** If a child has not had shots, the school must admit the child and then refer him or her to free or low-cost medical services.*

Transportation

When a parent or guardian chooses the “home” school for the child, the parent or guardian may ask the school to help with transportation. The school can ask the parent or guardian to come to a meeting to talk about what is best for the child. *But the parent or guardian has the right to choose the school.*

