

## Categorical Eligibility of Homeless Students for Free Meal Benefits

*Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004*

- Children identified as **runaway, homeless** or **migrant** are categorically eligible for free meals in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. If their school participates in both breakfast and lunch programs, they receive both.
- The definition of homeless children is the same one used in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act; that means that children living in doubled-up situations are eligible. The host household's income is not a factor in this eligibility.
- Eligible children may be directly certified based on a list provided by an appropriate person such as the district's homeless liaison, a local shelter director, or a runaway and homeless youth service provider.
- Documentation of free meal eligibility must consist of the child's name (or a list of names), the effective date(s) and the person's signature. **No application is required. The law's intent is to expedite the process and provide meals as quickly as possible.**
- If there is a delay in receiving necessary information from the liaison or provider, the school/school district should determine who best knows the child's situation and have that person provide the documentation stated above.
- A homeless child who is declared eligible for free meals remains eligible for the rest of the school year even if homeless status changes. Thus no tracking is necessary.
- According to the Childhood Hunger Relief Act, signed into law in February 2005 by Gov. Rod Blagojevich, if at least 40% of a school's students are eligible for free or reduced lunches, the school must offer a School Breakfast Program.

Opening Doors – Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth

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