

Enrollment Guidelines for Educating the Homeless

The Board of Education is dedicated to the guiding principle that all eligible children and youth, including the homeless, who reside within the school system, are entitled to a free appropriate education.

I. Eligibility

A “homeless student” is determined to be:

- A child or youth who lacks fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;
- A child or youth who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly-operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
- The term “homeless” does not include any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained by an act of Congress or a state law.

II. School Admission/Enrollment

A homeless student will be assisted in the school admissions/enrollment process, according to the child’s or youth’s “best interest”, which is determined as the following:

- Continuation of the child’s or youth’s education in the “school of origin” for the:
 - (a) duration of the homelessness or (in the case in which a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year); or
 - (b) remainder of the academic year (in the case in which a family becomes permanently housed during the academic year, but the residence is located outside the attendance zone for the school of origin); or
- Enrollment in the school serving the attendance area in which the homeless student is currently living.

In determining the “best interest” of the homeless child or youth, the School District will, to the extent feasible, keep a homeless student in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the parent or guardian. The district will submit, in writing to the parent or guardian, an explanation regarding school placement if the homeless student is sent to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian.

“Feasibility” in determining school enrollment should be a student-centered, individualized determination considering many factors including, but not limited to: (a) the age of the homeless student; (b) the distance of a commute and the impact it may have on the student’s education; (c) personal safety issues; and (d) a student’s need for special instruction.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school, the homeless student will be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute; the parent or guardian of the homeless student will be provided with a written explanation of the school’s decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian or homeless student to appeal the decision. In the case of an unaccompanied homeless student, the homeless liaison will ensure that the homeless student is immediately enrolled in the school pending resolution of the dispute.

III. Records Requirements

The school selected for enrollment of a homeless student will immediately enroll the student, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of residency, or other documentation. While the requirement of these records is not waived, the school will not prohibit enrollment due to the immediate lack of the necessary records.

Any record ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, or evaluations for special services or programs shall be maintained so that the records are available when a homeless student enters a new school or school district.

IV. Comparable Services

Each homeless student shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school, including the following:

- Transportation services
- Education Services for which the homeless student meets eligibility criteria, such as Title I, educational programs for children with disabilities, and educational programs for students with limited English proficiency
- Programs in vocation and technical education
- Programs for gifted and talented students
- School nutrition programs

V. Appeal Process

Any dispute in regard to providing a public education to a child designated as homeless will be presented to the school principal to be resolved. If the matter is not resolved at that level, the dispute shall be brought to the Superintendent or designee who will resolve the matter. If the matter is not resolved at this level, the dispute shall be brought to the Board of Education. In the event the dispute cannot be resolved locally, the parent/guardian may request a review of the dispute by the Georgia Department of Education.

Note: These guidelines are to be provided to any student, parent, guardian, or homeless liaison seeking enrollment for the homeless in the Cherokee County School District. These guidelines outline protocol for establishing eligibility, school admissions/enrollment, records requirements, comparable services, and the appeals process for disputes.