

PENNSYLVANIA DISTANCE LEARNING CHARTER SCHOOL

Book: Policy Manual

Section: Programs

Title: Homeless Students Policy

Reference: Education for Homeless Children - 42 U.S.C. Sec. 11431 et seq.
24 P.S. Sec 1306
22 PA Code Sec 11.18, 403.1
42 U.S.C. Sec 11431
Family Education Rights and Privacy, Title 34 CFR Part 99
Guidelines for Enrollment of Homeless Children - 67 Fed. Reg 10698
PA Education for Homeless Children and Youth State Plan

Adopted: March 3, 2014

Revised: March 6, 2017, September 20, 2021, September 23, 2024

PURPOSE: The purpose of this policy is to describe the guidelines and processes Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School (PDLCS) will adhere to when working with homeless students.

SCOPE: The Board recognizes its obligation to ensure that homeless students have access to the same educational programs and services provided to other district students. The Board shall make reasonable efforts to identify homeless children within the district, encourage their enrollment, and eliminate existing barriers to their attendance and education, in compliance with federal and state law and regulations.

The Board may waive policies, procedures and administrative regulations that create barriers for enrollment, attendance, transportation and success in school of homeless students, based on the recommendation of the Chief Executive Officer.

POLICY AUTHORITY: The Board and Chief Executive Officer designate the Student and Family Advocate to serve as the school’s liaison for homeless students and families. The school’s liaison shall coordinate with:

- Local service agencies that provide services to homeless children and youth and families.

- Other school districts on issues of records transfer.
- State and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies.

The school's liaison shall provide public notice of the educational rights of homeless students on our public and internal school websites.

DEFINITIONS: The following terms are defined below unless context indicates otherwise:

Homeless Students: are defined as individuals lacking a fixed regular and nighttime residence, which include the following conditions:

- Sharing the housing of others persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship.
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations.
- Living in emergency, transitional or domestic violence shelters.
- Abandoned in hospitals.
- Living in public or private places not designated for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings.
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, transportation station or similar settings.
- Living as migratory children in conditions described in previous examples.
- Living as run-away children.
- Abandoned or forced out of homes by parents/guardians or caretakers.
- Living as school age unwed mothers in houses for unwed mothers if they have no other living accommodations.

SCHOOL OF ORIGIN: is defined as the school the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled.

DETAILED POLICY STATEMENT: Students shall not be discriminated against, segregated nor stigmatized based on their status as homeless.

To the extent feasible, and in accordance with the student's best interest, a homeless student shall continue to be enrolled in his/her school of origin while s/he remains homeless or until the end of the academic year in which s/he obtains permanent housing. Parents/Guardians of a homeless student may request enrollment in the school in the attendance area where the student is actually living or other schools. If a student is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, the PDLCS homeless liaison will consider the views of the students in determining where s/he will be enrolled.

The selected school shall immediately enroll the student and begin instruction, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment pursuant to PDLCS policies. However, PDLCS may require a parent/guardian to submit contact information. The homeless liaison may contact the previous school for oral confirmation of immunizations, and the school shall request records from

the previous district. Homeless families are not required to prove residency regarding school enrollment.

SCHOOL/HEALTH RECORDS: PDLCS may contact the district of origin for oral confirmation that the student has been immunized, but must not be a barrier to enrollment. Oral confirmation between professionals is a sufficient basis to verify immunization with written confirmation to follow within thirty (30) days. The instructional program should begin as soon as possible after the enrollment process is initiated and should not be delayed until the procedure is completed. The Homeless Liaison will assist the parent/guardian in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization and medical records.

PLACEMENT/DISPUTE/COMPLAINTS: If PDLCS is unable to determine the student's grade level due to missing or incomplete records, the school shall administer tests or utilize appropriate means to determine the student's placement.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent/guardian/student will be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision on the dispute, including the right to appeal. The parent/guardian/student will be referred to the Homeless Liaison who will carry out the state's grievance procedure as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. In the case of an unaccompanied student, the Homeless Liaison shall ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

If disputes or complaints on noncompliance arise regarding the education of homeless students, the following steps may be taken:

- The person filing the complaint shall first contact the school's Homeless Liaison, the Principal or the Chief Executive Officer to present their concerns to the people closest to the situation and most likely to be able to resolve it quickly.
- If Step 1 is not successful or is not possible under the circumstances, contact should be made with the Homeless Project Education Liaison, or the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will accept complaints directly through the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.
- Individual cases may be referred to PDE's Office of Chief Counsel and the Office of the Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, as needed, by the State Homeless Coordinator.

PDE will deliver a response within fifteen (15) business days of the receipt of the complaint. The complaint may arrive in the form of a copy of the school/district letter or on the Dispute Letter Form if given directly to a Liaison of the Homeless Initiative.

SERVICES: Homeless students shall be provided services comparable to those offered to other PDLCS students including but not limited to: programs for students with limited English proficiency; and educational services for which students meet eligibility criteria, such as programs for disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITIES: The following guidelines will be followed in cases when the education of the student is provided by PDLCS while the student meets the homeless student definition. The guidelines shall also apply in cases when the LEA of prior attendance, is not the LEA the student attended when permanently housed, will education the student:

- Homeless individuals not in facilities (shelters) or institutions, as well as homeless individuals living in hotels, motels, cars, tents, doubled-up with a resident family, shall be reported and reimbursed as resident students.
- For homeless individuals in temporary shelters, the educating school, PDLCS, will send a form for the determination of district residence for students in facilities or institutions to the presumed district of residence.
- If the form is acknowledged by the resident district, the educating school, PDLCS, will enter the student on its rolls as a student from the acknowledging resident school. The educating school, PDLCS, will bill the resident district for tuition and will report membership data according to state child accounting procedures.
- If the form is disclaimed and a district of residence cannot be determined, the student will be considered a ward of the state. The educating school, PLDCS, will enter the student on its rolls as a nonresident ward of the state and will report membership according to state child accounting procedures. The Department of Education will pay tuition to the educating school, PDLCS, based on membership reported to child accounting.

In cases when the education of the student is provided by PDLCS that is the LEA where the student attended when permanently housed, PDLCS will continue to educate a homeless student for the period of temporary displacement and should maintain the student on its rolls as a resident student.

In cases when the student becomes permanently housed during the academic year and continues in the school of origin, which is not the district of new residence, the educating school, PDLCS, will continue to educate the formerly homeless student on its rolls as a nonresident student.