



DEMOCRACY PREP CONGRESS HEIGHTS

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Democracy Prep Congress Heights CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN TRANSITION POLICY



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I. Introduction

Homelessness exists in our community. A combination of expensive housing costs and poverty causes many families to lose their housing. Many young people leave their homes due to abuse, neglect, and family conflict. Children and youth who have lost their housing live in a variety of places, including motels, shelters, shared residences, transitional housing programs, cars, campgrounds, and others. Their lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious physical, emotional, and mental consequences. Democracy Prep Congress Heights Public Charter School will ensure that all children and youth receive a free and appropriate public education and are given meaningful opportunities to succeed in our school.

Democracy Prep Congress Heights Public Charter School will also follow the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. It is the policy of our school to view children as individuals. Therefore, this policy will not refer to children as homeless; it will instead use the term children and youth in transition. Under federal law, children and youth in transition must have access to appropriate public education, including preschool, and be given a full opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards. They must be included in state- and district-wide assessments and accountability systems. Our school will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation, and harassment. Information regarding this policy will be distributed to all students during the enrollment or withdrawal process and once during the school year.

II. Definitions

Children and youth in transition are defined as children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, and who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

- Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, campgrounds, or trailer parks due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
- Children and youth who are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting.
- Migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.

A child or youth will be considered to be in transition for as long as he or she is in living situation described above.

- 1) **Unaccompanied youth** - means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is in transition as defined above. The more general term youth also includes unaccompanied youth.
- 2) **Enroll and enrollment** - mean attending school and participating fully in all school activities.
- 3) **Immediate**- means without delay.
- 4) **Parent**- *means* a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.
- 5) **School of origin** - means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.
- 6) **Local liaison**- is the staff person designated by our school who is responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the local homeless education liaison by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

III. Identification

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the Homeless liaison will identify children and youth in transition at Democracy Prep Congress Heights Public Charter School. The local liaison will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth as in transition, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the school's Homeless Liaison.

The Homeless Liaison will also instruct the school's Enrollment Specialist and secretaries to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student and to forward information indicating homelessness to the Homeless Liaison.

IV. Data Collection

The Homeless Liaison will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the School; where they are living; their academic achievement (including performance on state- and district wide assessments); and the reasons for any enrollment delays, interruptions in their education, or school transfers.

V. School Selection

Each child and youth in transition has the right to remain at his or her school of origin or to attend any school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both the student and our school.

Students who change schools have been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. High mobility rates also have been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting our schools to benefit from the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity.

Therefore, in selecting a school, children and youth in transition will remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent or youth's wishes. Students may remain at their schools of origin the entire time they are in transition and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing between academic years. Feasibility will be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent or youth's wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

- The age of the child or youth
- The distance of a commute and the impact it may have on the student's education
- Personal safety issues
- A student's need for special instruction (e.g., special education and related services)
- The length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location
- The time remaining in the school year

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin (see next page) and services under federal and other programs, will not be considered in determining feasibility.

VI. Enrollment

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students in transition may not have school enrollment documents available readily. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must enroll any child or youth in normally required for enrollment, including: transition immediately. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document

- Proof of residency
- Transcripts/school records (The enrolling school must contact the student's previous school to obtain school records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the student's age and information gathered from the student, parent, and previous schools or teachers.)
- Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records (If necessary, the school must refer students to the Homeless liaison to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunization and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from previous

schools or state registries, and school- or community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed.)

- Proof of guardianship
- Birth certificate
- Any other document requirements
- Unpaid school fees
- Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes
- Any factor related to the student's living situation

Unaccompanied youth must also be enrolled immediately in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling, or local liaison.

VII. Transportation

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent's request, transportation will be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition. Transportation will be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes.

The Homeless liaison will request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will be considered only in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.

VIII. Services

Children and youth in transition will be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the selected school, including:

- Transportation (as described above)
- Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education, related services and programs for English language learners
- Vocational and technical education programs
- Gifted and talented programs
- Before- and after-school programs
- Uniform assistance

IX. Special Education Services

Democracy Prep Congress Heights Public Charter School recognizes that children and youth in transition suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability will be given priority and coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary to ensure the timely completion

of a full evaluation. When necessary, the district will designate expeditiously a surrogate parent for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability.

If participation of a surrogate parent in the student's education is needed prior to the appointment of a surrogate parent, the district will designate a temporary surrogate in accordance with the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school will implement it immediately. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations will then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation will be excused. Our school will follow state procedures to ensure that youth in transition and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. School personnel will refer children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The school liaison will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary. School personnel must also inform parents of all educational and related opportunities available to their children and provide parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education. All parent information required by any provision of this policy must be provided in a form, manner, and language understandable to each parent.

X. Disputes

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth in transition will be admitted immediately to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute? The student will also have the rights of a student in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I, Part A, services while the dispute is pending. The school where the dispute arises will provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and will refer the parent or youth to the School liaison immediately.

The school liaison will ensure that the student is enrolled in the requested school and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and will resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth will be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The local liaison will keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth in transition repeatedly. The parent, unaccompanied youth, or school district may appeal the school district's decision as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

XI. Free Meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day a child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the district nutrition office for immediate processing.

XII. Training

The local liaison will conduct training and sensitivity/awareness activities for the school staff at least once each year. The trainings and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with this policy, and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition.

XIII. Preschool

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Children in transition have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. Our school will ensure that children in transition receive priority enrollment in our preschool program. Children in transition with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Children in transition under age three will be referred for at-risk services under Part C of IDEA and screened to determine if referrals for additional Part C are appropriate.

XIV. References

- The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§11431 – 11436.
- Title I, Part A, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§6311 – 6315.
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§1400 et seq.
- Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, 42 U.S.C. §§1751 et seq.
- June 5, 1992 Policy of the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.