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## Purpose

Desert Heights Charter Schools are committed to creating equal educational opportunities for all children. Our schools strive to ensure that homeless children and youth have access to a free, appropriate public education that is comparable to that provided to the children of any Arizona resident and consistent with Arizona's mandatory school attendance laws.

## Scope

Desert Heights Charter Schools will strive to reduce all barriers to school access experienced by children and youth who are experiencing homelessness. They will be immediately enrolled in school based on availability and will have educational opportunities equal to those of their non-homeless peers. Homeless students will not be stigmatized or segregated on the basis of their status as homeless.

### I. Policy Statement

Desert Heights Charter School will ensure compliance with all state and federal requirements established within Subtitle B of Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.) with revisions included as part of ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015).

[Subtitle B of Title VII](#) of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program is authorized under Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.) The McKinney-Vento Act was originally authorized in 1987 with a recent reauthorization in December of 2015 as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Under this act state and local authorities must ensure that children and youths experiencing homelessness have equal opportunities to a free and appropriate public education in the same manner and with the same resources and supports available to all students. These students will have the same access to the related services necessary to achieve Arizona College and Career Ready Standards (AzCCRS) and will not be separated from the mainstream school environment. Desert Heights Charter School will designate a Homeless Liaison to ensure that students experiencing homelessness are identified and their needs are being met, utilizing the U.S. Department of Education funding provided for state and local programs to provide supplement services to these children and youths.

### Additional Authority

[Title IX](#) Part A-Homeless Children and Youth  
[FERPA](#)  
[Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004](#)  
[Subtitle B of Title VII](#)

### II. Procedure

Referrals for identification of a student as eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act may be made to the site Homeless Liaison or Director of Federal Programs by a parent/guardian, any school staff member, or as a self-referral especially in the case of unoccupied youth. Desert Heights Charter Schools incorporates a McKinney-Vento Eligibility Questionnaire within the enrollment packets that are completed for each student upon enrollment.

Upon referral, the Homeless Liaison will contact the parents, legal guardian, or unaccompanied youth to complete an intake interview and determine if the student meets the eligibility criteria of a student experiencing homelessness. Following this determination, the Homeless Liaison will complete a barrier interview to determine the obstacles interfering with the student's ability to access a free and appropriate public education. A plan will be developed by the Homeless Liaison and Director of Federal Programs to provide the support necessary to eliminate the identified barriers.

Desert Heights Schools will reduce enrollment barriers, including barriers related to missed application or enrollment deadlines, fines, or fees; records required for enrollment, immunization or other required health records, proof of residency, or other documentation; or academic records, including documentation for credit transfer. Desert Heights Charter School will support school stability, including the expansion of school of origin to include receiving schools and the implementation of a feasible transportation plan until the end of the school year even if a student becomes permanently housed.

The school selected by the homeless student shall immediately admit the homeless student based on availability, 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 including:

- Outstanding fees or fines and excessive absences cannot be used to delay enrollment.
- Application and enrollment deadlines cannot be used to deny access to school enrollment.

Desert Heights Charter Schools will immediately contact the school last attended by the student to obtain relevant academic and other records.

The Homeless Liaison will coordinate programs in the best interest of students who are homeless to include but not be limited to the continuation of the student's education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness. Services will be provided in any case in which a family becomes homeless between academic years, during an academic year and continue for the remainder of the academic year even if the student becomes permanently housed during that year.

If the student needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, Desert Heights Charter School will immediately refer the parent or guardian of the student to the Homeless Liaison, who shall assist in obtaining necessary immunization, or immunization or medical records.

The Homeless Liaison will enroll the student in any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the student is actually living are eligible to attend. Together with the Federal Programs Director the Homeless Liaison will coordinate and inform parents of transportation options to and from the school, if feasible, using the school transportation system.

Transportation to an eligible child/youth's school of origin may be approved by the Local Educational Agency Homeless Liaison if it is feasible and in the child's best interest. If the district determines that the school of origin is not in the best interest of the student, a written explanation will be provided to the parents or guardian and youth (if unaccompanied).

In determining the best interest of the homeless student, the LEA shall:

- To the extent feasible, keep a homeless student in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to
- the wishes of the student's parent or guardian
- Provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal any decision at the state level, to the homeless student's parent or guardian, if the homeless student is sent to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian; and
- In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the liaison for students experiencing homelessness shall assist in placement or enrollment decisions, considering the views of such unaccompanied youth, and providing notice to such student of the right to appeal.
- Supply transportation for the student to the school and from the school of origin.
- Ensure students are not segregated or stigmatized based on their status as homeless.

Parents or guardians and youth (if unaccompanied) will make their determination regarding remaining at the school of origin and have the right to appeal school decisions that are counter to their desire to remain at the school of origin.

Homeless Liaisons will inform unaccompanied youths of their rights and independent status in relation to FAFSA (Free Application for Student Aid).

Together with the Federal Programs Director the Homeless Liaison will ensure that all staff are trained regarding homelessness and ensure that enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the law and inform parents and guardians of educational and related opportunities available to their children such as

- Title I services regardless of location of enrollment;
- referrals to local preschool programs for siblings
- referrals to medical, dental, and mental health providers
- transportation to/from school of origin if feasible and in the “best interest of the student”

The Homeless Liaisons will receive professional development that allow for completion of these duties.

### Responsible Party

The Homeless Children and Youth Liaison for Desert Heights Preparatory Academy is **Cynthia Jordan** and she can be contacted at (602) 896-2900 or by email at [cynthia.jordan@dhschools.org](mailto:cynthia.jordan@dhschools.org).

The Homeless Children and Youth Liaison for Desert Heights Charter School is **Debbie Hamza** and she can be contacted at (602) 896-2900 or by email at [debbie.hamza@dhschools.org](mailto:debbie.hamza@dhschools.org).

The Director of Federal Program for Desert Heights Charter Schools is **Beth Gue** and she can be contacted at (602) 896-2900 or by email at [bethgue@dhschools.org](mailto:bethgue@dhschools.org)

### III. Definitions

A. Homeless children and youth are defined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act of 2001, public Law 107-110, Title X, Part C, Sub-Title B, Section 725 (2)(B) as:

- Unaccompanied youth includes a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.
- Homeless students” means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
- Students who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative, adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals.
- Students who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Students who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory students who qualify as homeless because the children are living in circumstances described above.
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances as described above.

A. A “fixed” residence does not change from night to night and remains stationary.

B. A “regular” residence can be used on a nightly basis.

C. An “adequate” residence meets the physical and psychological need that would be expected within a typical home environment.

D. Substandard housing may vary by location and is determined by the Local Education Agency (LEA) incorporating city, county, or state housing codes into the determination. The LEA may consider whether the setting lacks fundamental utilities such as water, electricity, or heat; is infested with vermin or mold; lacks a basic functional part such as a working kitchen or bathroom.

E. Barrier is defined as an obstacle to access.

F. FERPA is the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

G. FAFSA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

## Dispute Resolution

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment in a school:

- The student shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought based on availability, pending resolution of the dispute;
- The parent or guardian of the student shall be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or student to appeal the decision at the state level;
- The student, parent, or guardian shall be referred to the Homeless Liaison for review of the dispute. The review process shall take up to no more than 10 business days. The homeless liaison may forward the dispute resolution to both the President of schools and the Director of Federal Programs, who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute in accordance with the procedure found in the Arizona State Plan including the right to appeal to the State level and/or the State Coordinator of Homelessness
- In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the liaison for the homeless students shall ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

## FERPA

Desert Heights Charter Schools will maintain privacy of student records, including information about a homeless child or youth's living situation. A student's living arrangement will be treated as a component of his/her education record and is subject to all the protections of FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act).

## Parents Right to Know

Parents of our students have the right to know:

- Whether the State of Arizona has licensed or qualified the teacher for the grades and subject he or she teaches.
- Whether the teacher is teaching under an emergency permit or other provisional status by which state licensing criteria have been waived.
- The teacher's college major; whether the teacher has any advanced degrees and, if so, the subject of the degrees.
- Whether any instructional aides or similar paraprofessionals provide services to your child and, if they do, their qualifications.