

2018

***Promising Practices for Serving Philadelphia's Students
Who Experience Homelessness***



Family Service Provider Network

K-12 Working Group

4/1/2018

Family Service Provider Network

The **Family Service Provider Network (FSPN)** includes agencies that serve and advocate for homeless families and children from Southeastern Pennsylvania. FSPN has come together to develop ways to improve existing service as well as identify solutions for unmet needs. Our priorities include:

- Emergency and transitional housing services
- Access to permanent housing
- Strong partnerships between schools and agencies
- Improved social services.



Members include:

AchieveAbility, Dignity Housing, Drueding Center, Episcopal Community Services St. Barnabas Mission, Families Forward Philadelphia, Gaudenzia, Inc., HELP Philadelphia, HELP USA, Lutheran Settlement House/Jane Addams Residence, Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network, PathWays PA, People's Emergency Center, Project H.O.M.E., Red Shield Family Residence/The Salvation Army, Visitation Homes/CSS, and Women Against Abuse.

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Photos donated by People's Emergency Center.

For more information, contact 267-777-5851 or e-mail at policy@pec-cares.org.

Promising Practices for Serving Students Who Experience Homelessness

FPSN originally developed *Promising for Providers Serving Homeless Students* in 2010 as a resource for building strong partnerships between family service providers and schools, and this is version II.

Promising Practices offers a framework to help providers develop and maintain relationships with key personnel in their children’s schools, provide academic support, lower truancy, and improve parental involvement.

Key terms are in **bold** and defined in the glossary at the rear of this booklet.

Some Promising Practices might work differently in congregate emergency (EH) and transitional housing (TH) sites than in scattered housing or Rapid Rehousing sites. Scattered site locations may need to adapt the practices based on feasibility and what best suits the needs of the residents.



Key practice issues for serving students experiencing homelessness

I. Education Support Staff (ESS) Program Development

A. **Develop/Identify an assessment tool** to assess family needs and develop an Education Service Plan

B. Work with families to **ensure all children are enrolled** and able to attend their school of origin or new neighborhood school based on the McKinney-Vento Laws.

1. Have **parents** sign release of information for staff to assist with enrollment, obtain report cards, monitor attendance, and make referrals to the Multi-Tiered System Supports (MTSS) team
2. **Communicate** with key school personnel (i.e. Principals, counselors, teachers, school secretaries) regarding truancy, suspensions, behavior issues/concerns, **Individualized Education Plans** (IEP) and Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) results.

C. **Connect** with local school personnel to create open lines of communication that can assist with school enrollment and obtaining resources and/or support for families

1. Emergency Housing (EH) & Transitional Housing (TH) Providers should **introduce themselves** to principals, school counselors, MTSS specialist, special education liaison, and school secretary
2. Re-introduce key contact personnel from your agency via an annual letter and business card in August to school principals, MTSS Specialist, counselors, and school secretary

***Refer to Appendix for annual letter template**

D. **Track** all children currently enrolled in EH and TH programs

1. **Contact every family** in EH and TH Program upon intake or within 30 calendar days of start of school year and ensure every child is documented with age, grade, school attending, IEP identification, transportation and has an Education Service Plan with agency
2. **Coordinate process of uniform voucher distribution** at the beginning of the school year with Office of Educating Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH).

E. Develop/Identify a client survey to evaluate your programs services and provide quality assurance

F. Seek training for educational support staff quarterly to enhance knowledge and programming for families

G. Build relationships with community providers i.e. local health center and/or hospital, other EH and TH providers, local colleges/universities for volunteers, after school programming, and/or tutoring



H. Have parents sign release of information for staff to contact the school, obtain report cards, monitor attendance, and make referrals to the MTSS team

II. Building and Maintaining Relationships with Families

A. ESS should **introduce** themselves to families and make initial contact and provide contact information, business card, and office hours as soon as possible

B. **Assist families** in creating an account with the districts Parent and Family Portal

C. **Educate parents** about the importance of being involved in their children's education.

1. Inform parents about rights of children experiencing homelessness
2. Encourage attendance at parent/teacher conferences
3. Encourage them to review interim reports and report cards and communicate with teachers regarding any concerns
4. Advise parents to schedule appointments outside of school hours to minimize time missed at school

D. **Assist parents** in communicating and partnering with schools to help their children be successful

E. **Track school attendance**

F. Track **increased parental involvement** by documenting progress

G. **Educate parents** about and assist them in providing proper nutrition



III. **Participate in School District's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYECH)**

A. **Emergency Housing (EH) & Transitional Housing (TH)** providers should send a representative to all scheduled meetings

B. The School District's ECYECH letters of memorandum should be **shared** with relevant agency staff.

C. **EH & TH** Providers should educate all relevant staff on the rights of homeless students as outlined in the **McKinney-Vento** legislation

D. **EH & TH** Providers should educate all relevant staff on rights of homeless students as outlined in **Title I**

E. **EH & TH** Providers should utilize ECYECH for assistance as needed for homeless children's school issues i.e. uniform assistance, transportation, admissions, and transfers

***Contact the School District's ECYECH office at (267) 784-9956.**

IV. Building Partnerships with Schools

A. Early Childhood Education (ECE) providers (0-5 years old)

1. Work with **Building Early Links for Learning** (BELL) to identify ECE providers, learn about enrollment and child development.
2. **Locate** ECE providers via Keystone Stars, PHL-PreK, etc. ***Refer to Appendix**
3. **Encourage parents** to enroll their children into high quality childcare programs
4. **Contact** local high quality ECE providers to introduce ESS personnel, identify the programs enrollment process, and determine vacancies
5. **Invite** ECE providers for early spring and late summer open enrollment sessions

B. Elementary Schools and secondary schools

1. EH & TH Providers should **introduce** themselves to **local school principals**, counselors, MTSS specialist, special education liaisons
2. **Re-introduce key contact personnel** from your agency via an annual letter and business card in August to school principals, MTSS Specialist, and counselors
3. Send follow up **letters** within the first two weeks of class requesting a visit to the school. ***refer to appendix for annual letter template**
4. Make an **appointment** to meet with school counselors and identify ways to better serve homeless students
5. Invite **truancy staff** to visit your programs serving homeless children
6. Have **parents sign release of information** for staff to obtain report cards, monitor attendance, and make referrals to the MTSS team
7. **Communicate** with key school personnel (i.e. Principals, counselors, teachers) regarding truancy, suspensions, behavior issues/concerns, IEP's and PSSA results.

V. School Enrollment

A. Early Childhood Education (ECE) (0-5 years old)

1. **Identify** family needs (i.e. location, hours of operation, before/after care transportation, parent preferences)

2. Contact **BELL ECE Specialist** and/or the School District's Office of ECE



3. **Locate ECE providers** via Keystone Stars, PHL-PreK, Great Philly Schools, etc. ***Refer to Appendix**
4. **Encourage parents** to enroll their children into high quality childcare programs
5. **Contact** local high quality ECE providers determine vacancies.
6. Offer families **assistance** with completing and submitting applications
7. Provide a **residency letter** and assist with obtaining other necessary documentation for enrollment ***Refer to Appendix**

B. K-12

1. **Inform parents** of the McKinney Vento Law, their options regarding enrolling and/or transferring children and the assistance offered by ECYEH
2. **Contact ECYEH** to obtain assistance with uniforms and/or transportation
3. Provide a **residency letter** documenting status as a child experiencing homeless to maintain enrollment or request a transfer, secure transportation, and assist with uniforms, if needed.

C. School Choice and High School Selection

1. All K-12 students are able to **apply** to Special Admission, City-Wide and other Neighborhood Schools via The Parent and Family Portal. Families must apply in September for the following school year. Families are typically notified of application status in January.
 - a. Refer family to **School Counselor** for further assistance



2. **Charter Schools** have a separate process for enrollment that varies by school. ESS should assist families in contacting the charter school of interest to identify the application process ***Refer families to Great Philly Schools**

3. ESS staff should **inform parents and students in middle school** of the high school selection process. Eighth grade students that would like to attend a high school other than their neighborhood school must complete an application process and meet eligibility requirements i. e. grades, attendance, standardized test scores results, etc.
 - a. Assist families with selecting schools and applying via Family and Parent Portal
 - b. Remind families to check The Parent and Family Portal for application status

vi. School Attendance

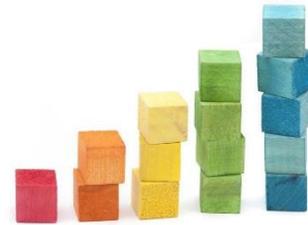
A. **Educational support staff** are to monitor school

attendance, contact school partners to

understand/support their attendance policies, meet

with parents and case managers to understand the

family's barriers to attendance and problem solve, and address chronic lateness and absenteeism



B. Encourage program staff to support families in getting children to **school on time** by assisting families in creating morning routines and schedules, knocking on families' doors, and offering words of encouragement as children leave for school. ***EH only**

C. Implement an **Attendance Incentive Program**

vii. Special Education Services

A. Early Intervention Services (0-5)

1. Children 0-2 years old

- a. **Refer all children** to local early intervention agency i.e. Child Link and/or Children's Specialist, Philadelphia Health Management Corporation(PHMC), at 267-608-9376

- b. Follow-up with family regarding outcome of referral

2. Children 3-5 years old
 - a. **Complete Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)** with assistance from the parent
 - b. Refer child to Elwyn intake for evaluation (depending on the outcome of ASQ and/or parental concerns.
 - c. Follow-up with family after referral is submitted

B. Kindergarten-12th grades

1. **Review report cards** and any concerns the parent and/or teacher may have regarding child's progress i.e. academic, behaviorally, and/or social emotionally
2. **Explain the process** of requesting an IEP evaluation from the school, provide a letter to request the evaluation, and refer to community resources ***Refer to Appendix**
3. **Follow-up** with family after 30 days from requesting the evaluation and/or making referrals

VIII. Academic Support

A. All Students

1. **Encourage** parents and children to set academic goals that focus on literacy
2. **Assist** parents in understanding children's reading levels and identify things they can do to support their children's academic success
3. **Provide** access to computer programs specifically designed for assisting students with challenging subject areas such as reading and math.



4. **Provide** after-school literacy enriched programs on site or make referrals to community programs
5. **Encourage** families to utilize School District Tutoring and the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) office
6. **Connect** with volunteers from local colleges/universities to provide tutoring or mentoring opportunities
7. **Refer** families to Read by 4th and The Free Library of Philadelphia Branches for literacy rich activities in the community and the Summer Reading Program
8. **Provide** summer camp and after-school programming resources from Metro Kids, After School Activities Partnership (ASAP), and other sources.

B. Birth-5th Grades

1. **Assist** parents in signing up for easy-to-use programs such as Vroom, Ready4K, or other texting programs that offer literacy enrichment ideas
2. **Refer** to Read by 4th's website to sign up for additional programs



C. 6th -12th Grades

1. **Refer** students to the School Districts TEEN program, Y-Achievers, or Upward Bound
2. **Encourage** parents and students to connect with the school counselor for academic support and additional resources

IX. Summer Programing

A. K-8th Grade

1. **Provide summer programming** and/or **make referrals** to Summer Camps

- a. Additional referrals may be needed for children with specific academic, behavioral health, and development needs
 - b. Parents of children with disabilities should request Extended School Year (ESY) services be included in their child's IEP
2. **Develop relationships** with community programs that provide activities to support children's literacy development.
 3. **Refer** families to The Free Library of Philadelphia Branches to sign up for library cards and encourage borrowing books
 4. **Encourage** parents to create a literacy rich environment; children need to have easy access to books and creative writing materials
 5. **Encourage** independent reading



B. 9th-12th Grade

1. **Refer** families to Work Ready
2. **Assist** children with obtaining working papers
3. **Refer** families to The Philadelphia Public Library to sign up for library cards and borrow books
4. **Encourage** parents to create a literacy rich environment; children need to have easy access to books and creative writing materials
5. **Encourage** independent reading

Free
LIBRARY OF
PHILADELPHIA

Glossary

Terms, Acronyms, and Abbreviations

ASQ- Ages and Stages Questionnaire is a parent-completed questionnaire that reliably identify children from one month to 5½ years with developmental delays.

BELL- Building Early Links for Learning – BELL is a collaboration between providers of homeless services and early childhood education providers to improve services to children ages 0-5 who are experiencing homelessness. The two main goals are to enhance the developmental friendliness of emergency housing, and to increase engagement of young homeless children in high quality early education.

ECE- Early childhood education is a broad term used to describe any type of educational program that serves children before they are old enough to enter kindergarten.

ECYEH- Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness: The School District of Philadelphia’s program that provides supportive services to homeless students.

EH-Emergency Housing for homeless families

ESS-Education Support Staff is emergency and/or transitional housing staff that is designated to provide a coordination of services to encourage school enrollment, daily attendance, and educational success by eliminating barriers that may prohibit and/or disrupt a student’s stability in school.

ESY-Extended School Year are services that can be implemented in a child's IEP to provide extended special education and related services during the summer months, if they qualify, if an extended amount out of school instructional time will have a negative impact or cause regression.

IEP- Individualized Education Plan: Individualized Education Program, is a written legal document that’s developed for each school child who is eligible for special education. It provides individualized special education and related services to meet the unique needs of the child.

McKinney-Vento- The federal government’s homeless program; the largest single source of funding to serve homeless individuals and families

Metro Kids- Magazine and news source that focuses on children’s issues and provides resources that encompasses the whole family in the Delaware Valley

MTSS- Multi-Tiered System of Support provides responsive services for all students. It is a process that provides high-quality, research/evidence-based instruction based on learner needs. Needs are identified by universal screening and monitoring students’ progress. Adjustments to instruction and interventions are based on students’ performance and rate of

success. MTSS promotes a well-integrated system, connecting general, gifted, and special education with intervention and enrichment services

Parent and Family Portal-The School District of Philadelphia's tool that parents and family members may use to stay connected to their child and their school. Parent & Family Portal provides access to valuable information about your child's education and school i.e. Academic records, standardized test scores, attendance.

PSSA-Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, a standards-based, criterion-referenced assessment tool used to measure a student's attainment of Pennsylvania academic standards while also determining the degree to which school programs enable students to attain proficiency of the standards

Read by Fourth- Read by 4th is a citywide campaign of over 90 organizations that is managed by the Free Library of Philadelphia, aiming to significantly increase the number of students in Philadelphia entering the 4th grade at reading level by 2020

Title I- Provides technical assistance and support to families, school communities, and district offices in implementing all mandates of the No Child Left Behind

Truancy Staff-School staff assigned to work with students who are truant. Truancy is defined as eight or more unexcused absences.

Work Ready- Work Ready is a program that provides employment and internship opportunities in the community year-round for ages 12-21

Helpful Web Resources*

After School Activities Partnerships:

<http://www.phillyasap.org/index.php/more/directorylisting>

Building Early Links for Learning (BELL): <https://www.pec-cares.org/early-childhood.html>

CAP4Kids: <http://cap4kids.org/Philadelphia>

Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships: <http://drexel.edu/dornsifecenter/>

Education Law Center: <https://www.elc-pa.org/>

Elwyn: <https://www.elwyn.org/>

Great Philly Schools(Early Childhood Education): <https://ece.greatphillyschools.org/>

Great Philly Schools: <https://greatphillyschools.org/>

MetroKids: <http://www.metrokids.com/>

Mighty Writers: <https://mightywriters.org/>

Netter Center for Community Partnerships:

<https://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/what-we-do/programs/university-assisted-community-schools>

Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services:

<http://dbhids.org/>

Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services:

<http://www.philadelphiaofficeofhomelesservices.org/>

Philadelphia School District's Office of Early Childhood Education:

<https://www.philasd.org/earlychildhood/>

Philadelphia School District Education for Children and Youth Experiencing

Homelessness: <https://www.philasd.org/homeless/>

PHLpreK: <http://www.phlprek.org/>

Read by Fourth: <http://readby4th.org/>

Philadelphia School District's Office of Family and Community Engagement:

<https://www.philasd.org/face/family-resources/parent-and-family-portal/>

WorkReady: <http://www.workreadyphila.org/>

YMCA: <https://philaymca.org/>

(*) To add your resource, send the name and web link to policy@pec-cares.org

[TEMPLATE - LETTER TO SCHOOLS]

Click or tap to enter a date.

[Organization name]

[Type the sender company address]

[Principal/Counselor name]

[School address]

Dear [Principal/Counselor name]

The school year can be an intense time for students and parents particularly for families experiencing homelessness. Students experiencing homelessness are categorically among the most educationally at risk due to lack of fixed housing and instability.

The city of Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services(OHS) contracts with social service organizations to provide short-term emergency housing. In addition, these organizations have educational support staff delegated to work with the School District's Office of Educating Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness to ensure school enrollment, daily attendance, and educational success.

The Education Support Staff here at [name of agency] are [Name]. Please contact [Name] at [phone number], and [email]. Our goal is to work with you to eliminate barriers that children experiencing homelessness face including, but not limited to securing transportation and specialized education services. In addition, our education support staff inform parents of McKinney-Vento rights, and assist them with securing entitlements. We appreciate all that you and your school do to support these families. Our hope is to partner with you to ensure academic success despite the challenges our students and families face. Please reach out to [Name] at [Phone] and [Email], we look forward to meeting and working with you to ensure that our students maintain success during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

[Education Support Staff name]

[Title]

[Organization name]

[TEMPLATE – RESIDENT LETTER]

Agency name/logo

Click or tap to enter a date.

To Whom It May Concern,

Please be advised that [Parent's name] and [child] listed below are recent residents of our [Family Residence/or Transitional Housing Program].

Child's name D. O. B. Click or tap to enter a date.

The family resides at **address of family residence/or transitional housing program** and is considered homeless under the McKinney Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. Please use this letter to verify residency and to secure Title I funds including transportation and uniforms.

If you have questions or concerns my contact information is listed below. Alternately, the School District of Philadelphia has a Homeless Children's Advocacy Office (Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness-ECYEH) located at 440 N. Broad Street. The phone number is 215-400-5245.

Sincerely,

ESS name

ESS Title

Agency name

Agency address

City, State zip code

p: telephone number

f: fax number

ESS email address

[IEP REQUEST]

[DATE]

[PARENT NAME]

[PARENT ADDRESS]

[PARENT PHONE #]

[PRINCIPAL NAME]

[SCHOOL ADDRESS]

[SCHOOL PHONE #]

Dear [PRINCIPAL NAME]:

I am the parent of [CHILD NAME] whose date of birth is [DOB].

My child has not been doing well in school and I am therefore requesting a comprehensive evaluation to determine whether my child needs special education services, and, if so, what services are needed.

I understand that the evaluation must be completed, and a written report given to me, within **60 calendar days** (not including the summer months) of the school district's receipt of the **Permission to Evaluate-Consent Form** signed by me. I'd like to come to the school and sign the **Permission to Evaluate-Consent Form** immediately.

Should you have any questions or problems with this request, please contact me at the following number(s) [PARENT PHONE AND MAYBE YOUR PHONE]

Thank you.

Sincerely,

[PARENT NAME]

Signature to Acknowledge Receipt: _____ Date: _____