Prompt and Proper Placement: Enrolling Students without Records

Who is homeless?

(McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 – Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act – Sec 725)

The term "homeless children and youth"—

A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence…; and

B. includes —

i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

ii. children and youths 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…

iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

iv. migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized as Title X, Part C, of the No Child Left Behind Act, requires schools to enroll homeless students immediately, even if they do not have the documents normally required for enrollment such as school records, medical records, proof of residency, or others. Unfortunately for many homeless students on the move, incomplete records often result in classroom/curriculum placements that promote frustration and result in failure. This document offers teachers, school counselors, and other school personnel valuable tools and information to assist in making sound educational decisions for immediate placement of homeless children and youth in appropriate classroom settings.

The Importance of Quick Assessment

Accurate assessment of a student's current academic functioning levels can have a critical impact on school performance. Sound decisions about classroom placement can provide much-needed support and minimize potential disruptions to teachers and students. The 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes and the continuing housing instability of many displaced families have underscored the importance of the role of the school in offering stability and support to students whose lives are disrupted by homelessness. Given the large numbers of families displaced by recent disasters and the associated challenges faced by highly impacted school districts, it is important that the receiving schools develop a streamlined approach to initial student assessment. The goal of this approach would be to gather information needed to support the best possible placement decisions as expediently as possible for busy school personnel. It is important to remember that according to the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless students must be enrolled and participating fully in school activities while the assessment process is taking place.

Gathering Existing Information

Regardless of the cause of their homelessness, all homeless students benefit from continuity in their education. To maximize continuity and minimize disruption as much as possible, immediate enrollment and appropriate placement decisions require a quick analysis of available information about the student being enrolled. Quick analysis of student needs should start with whatever existing information can be acquired. The McKinney-Vento Act requires the receiving school to contact the

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previous school immediately for school records. In the case of disasters in which the previous school was destroyed or closed, receiving schools should contact the school district office or State Coordinator for Homeless Education to see what records may be available in electronic or other form. For those students whose records might be damaged, destroyed, or otherwise unavailable, it is incumbent upon the receiving schools to begin to build new student records immediately based on information gathered from parents, students, local district or state-level student databases, and any other reliable sources of student information.

Academic Placement and Support

While waiting for official records, if phone/e-mail contact information is available, it may be helpful to talk with previous teachers, school counselors, and others for informal assistance with placement decisions. Likewise, talking with physicians and/or nurses on behalf of those students who have prescribed medications or those whose Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) require classroom accommodations may also be advantageous. It is always in the school's best interest to get as much information as possible from the prior school through informal conversations as well as official transcripts and records. It is advisable to train front-line staff in strategies to gather all available information from students and parents including any academic records, report cards, tests, homework, immunization or other medical records, IEPs or special education referrals, evaluations, meeting notes, or any other school papers the parents or child may have. Receiving schools may also be able to access standardized testing or other achievement data from state or local database systems. Keep in mind that FERPA, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, does allow transferring records and informal conversations between schools without parental consent when a child is changing schools.

Gathering Information from Parents and Students

Parents and students themselves can provide important and useful information regarding student needs and appropriate classroom placement. Interviews with parents can be conducted informally with simple, descriptive questions to learn about the student's prior academic performance.

Sample questions for parents might include:

- Do you have any papers from the previous school such as notes from teachers, homework assignments, tests, progress reports, or any other papers?
- Have you worked with your child on any recent homework assignments? If so, what were the assignments about?
- What were your child's grades like? What does he/she find easy? Difficult?
- Did you ever go to a meeting at school with a lot of teachers, a doctor or someone from the school district office?,
- Did you ever sign any papers that talked about goals for your child or special school services?

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Sample questions for students might include:

- What was your school day like?
- Do you remember the names of any of your books or what the covers looked like?
- What were you learning in your math/history/science/language class?
- What were some of your recent homework assignments? Do you have any old homework assignments, tests, notes from teachers, or any other papers from school?
- What was the name of your math/history/science/language class?
- How many kids were in your class? How many teachers were in your class?
- Did you ever spend time alone or in a small group with a different teacher?
- Did you ever spend time alone or in a small group in a different classroom?
- What were your grades like?

Conversations such as these with parents and students can often yield helpful information to guide initial placement decisions.

Useful Tools for Quick Assessment

Although schools should continue to seek existing records from all available sources, there may be times when no student records will be available; in these instances, a quick, valid, and reliable assessment of student academic placement needs is critical. The following section provides a representative sampling of various tools that are available and in use by educators who need to make sound initial placement decisions based on a quick assessment process. Many of these instruments are likely to be in use in schools already by school psychologists, special education teachers, and classroom teachers as part of their routine screening and diagnostic processes. A preliminary discussion among members of the school's existing diagnostic team should take place to inform choices about which instruments are best used and by whom for the individual student (s) of concern. It is important to note that in some cases, choice of assessment instruments will be driven by the school's testing protocols and whether the use of some of the suggested tools might best be reserved for use in the established special education diagnostic process. Teachers and specialists should collaborate to generate the most valuable assessment results possible. To the extent that time allows, team decisions regarding the selection of assessment tools should be the goal.

The following list is a representative, not comprehensive, sampling of assessment tools. Inclusion in the list should not be viewed as a recommendation or endorsement by NCHE. Pricing and other information are subject to change and should be confirmed with the provider if purchases are anticipated.

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Quick Assessment Tools

Quick assessment in core academic subjects can be accomplished with a variety of available instruments, including:

Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills – Revised (CIBS-R)

Assesses reading comprehension, decoding, and math; individually administered; untimed; select desired subtests; PreK -3 and higher; $139 for screen and manual; $32.95 for record books (10); diagnostic battery available in Spanish.
Available from Curriculum Associates, Inc., *www.curricassoc.com*

Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR)

Assesses phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; individually administered; 25-40 minutes; K-12; $219 for classroom kit.
Available from Riverside Publishing, *www.riverpub.com*

Diagnostic Screening Tests – Reading (DSTR)

Assesses comprehension, decoding, and sight vocabulary; 5-10 minutes; grades 1-3 and higher; two forms are available for test-retest applications; $50 for manual and 50 test forms.
Available from Slosson Educational Publications, *www.slosson.com*

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

Assesses the development of pre-reading and early reading skills; standardized, individually administered, one-minute fluency measures; K-3 and higher; part of larger DIBELS data system, allowing online data entry and automated reports ($1 per student per year).
Measures available for free downloading, *dibels.uoregon.edu*

Gray Oral Reading Test – 4 (GORT-4)

Assesses comprehension, decoding, and fluency; 15-30 minutes; grades 2-3 and higher; two forms are available for test-retest applications; $147 for manual, student book, and 50 record forms.
Available from PRO-ED, Inc., *www.proedinc.com*

Informal Reading Comprehension Placement Test

Assesses reading grade level of the student, vocabulary, and comprehension; individually administered; 30-45 minutes; K-3 and higher; $59.95 for software package.
Available from Educational Activities, Inc., *www.edact.com*

Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Second Edition (KTEA-II)

Assesses reading comprehension and decoding, math, written language, and oral language; individually administered; 15-45 minutes (brief form); covers areas mandated by IDEA and Reading First; $234.95 for administration manual and 50 individual record booklets
Available from American Guidance Service, Inc. (AGS), *www.agsnet.com*

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KeyMath – Revised

Assess student's understanding and application of important math concepts and skills; individually administered; 30-35 minutes; grades K-12; includes two forms for pre- and post-test applications.
Available from American Guidance Service, Inc. (AGS), *www.agsnet.com*

Spanish Reading Comprehension Test

Assesses reading comprehension; administered in group or individually; 30 minutes; grades 1-2 and higher; available in both English and Spanish; $20 for manual and reproducible score sheets.
Available from Moreno Publishing Company, 619-461-0565

Standardized Reading Inventory (SRI)

Assesses reading comprehension and decoding skills; individually administered; 15-45 minutes; Pre-K–3 and higher; two forms are available for test-retest applications; includes instructions for miscue analysis; $93 for manual, student booklet, and 50 record sheets.
Available from PRO-ED, *www.proedinc.com*

Test of Reading Comprehension – 3rd Edition (TORC-3)

Assesses reading comprehension, vocabulary, and syntax; includes subtest on reading directions of schoolwork; administered individually or in group; 30 minutes; grades 2-3 and higher; $139 for manual, 10 student booklets, and 50 answer sheets.
Available from PRO-ED, Inc., *www.proedinc.com*

Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT-3)

Assesses reading, spelling, and math; administered in group or individually; 15-30 minutes; K-3 and higher; two forms are available for test-retest applications; $110 for manual and 50 test forms.
Available from Wide Range, Inc., 800-221-9728.

Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery (WJ-R)

Assesses reading comprehension and decoding; math, science, social studies, humanities, and handwriting; individually administered, approximately 5 minutes per subtest; K-3 and higher; available in English and Spanish; $677 for complete battery; $267 for standard achievement battery.
Available from Riverside Publishing Company, *www.riverpub.com*

Computer-based Assessment Tools

Lexia Quick Reading Test

Computerized diagnostic reading program; assesses decoding and sight vocabulary; 5-8 minutes; grades K-12.
Available from Lexia, *www.lexialearning.com*

Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) and Diagnostic Online Math Assessment (DOMA)

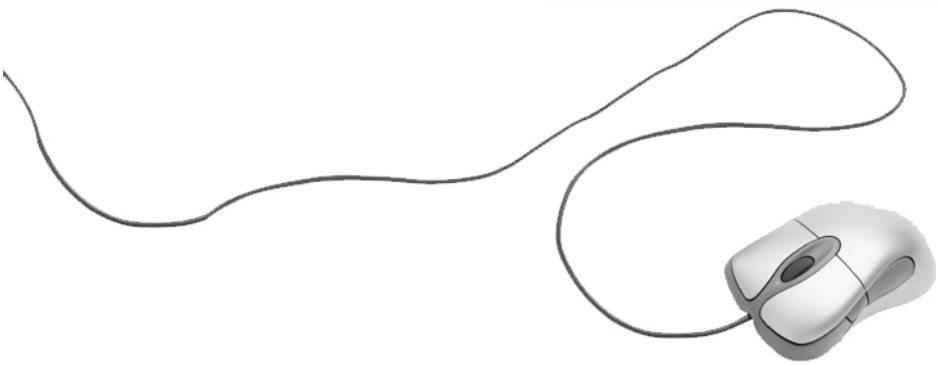
Online tools for individual students or entire classes; grades K-12; provides reports in teacher and parent/tutor versions.
Available from Let's Go Learn, Inc., *www.letsgolearn.com*

STAR Reading

Computer-based assessment of vocabulary knowledge that correlates with reading comprehension; 10 minutes; grades 1-3 and higher. ; provides computer-generated reports; $399 for single computer/$1499 for school-wide site license.
Available from Renaissance Learning, *www.renlearn.com*

Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey

Appropriate for placement in ELP and ESL programs; assesses language proficiency; individually administered, 5 minutes per subtest; preK-3 and higher; available in English or Spanish; $195 for manual, 25 test records, and scoring software.
Available from Riverside Publishing Company, *www.riverpub.com*



Final Considerations

Many textbook series have placement tests and chapter/unit pretests. These can often be used quickly and easily by classroom teachers to yield useful information to guide instructional placement decisions.

Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM), an alternative approach to academic assessment, is a method of choice among many special educators and holds promise for highly mobile students. CBM can be used to measure basic skills in reading, mathematics, spelling and written expression, and using materials from the school's curriculum. For further information regarding training for the use of this assessment approach, visit *www.interventioncentral.org/htmdocs/interventions/cbmwarehouse.shtml*.

This brief was developed by:

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800-308-2145 (toll-free HelpLine)
http://www.serve.org/nche

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Every state is required to have a coordinator for the education of homeless children and youth, and every school district is required to have a liaison for homeless students. These individuals will assist you with the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. For information on the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness in Texas and to obtain contact information for the liaison in your district, please contact:

TEXAS HOMELESS EDUCATION OFFICE
The University of Texas at Austin
Charles A. Dana Center
2901 N IH 35, Room 2.200 Austin, TX 78722
www.utdanacenter.org/theo 1-800-446-3142

Local contact information:

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