



Housing Instability, McKinney-Vento and Special Education

Families experiencing homelessness or unstable housing may have protections under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. When a child also has a disability, McKinney-Vento, IDEA, and Section 504 protections may work together to support school access, stability, and needed services.

1 Who may qualify for McKinney-Vento support?

A student may qualify when they lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This can include children and youth who are:

- Temporarily staying with friends or relatives because of loss of housing or financial hardship
- Living in a shelter or transitional housing
- Staying in a motel or hotel because other housing is unavailable
- Living in a car, campground, or another place not normally used for housing
- An unaccompanied youth, meaning a young person in one of these situations who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian

2 Key education protections to know

Immediate enrollment

Eligible students may be able to enroll in school even when some normally required records or documents are not immediately available.

School stability

Families may ask whether remaining in the school of origin is in the student's best interest and what transportation support is available.

Special education continuity

A student's housing situation does not cancel IDEA or Section 504 rights. IEP services and disability related supports should remain a priority during transitions.

Evaluation and support

If a disability is suspected, a parent may request a special education evaluation. Housing instability should not be used as a reason to delay appropriate consideration of disability related needs.

3 If your child has an IEP

Consider contacting both the district McKinney-Vento liaison and the student's special education team. Ask the IEP team to review whether changes in housing are affecting:

- Transportation and attendance
- Communication with the family
- Emotional or behavioral needs
- Health, medication, or safety needs
- Access to school materials, technology, or homework space
- Related services and consistent implementation of the IEP

4 Illinois resources and next steps

Start with these school contacts

- 1

McKinney-Vento Liaison
Every Illinois public school district has a liaison who can help with identification, enrollment, school of origin questions, transportation, and connections to services.
- 2

Special Education Case Manager or Director
Share how the housing situation is affecting access to the IEP, attendance, transportation, related services, behavior, communication, or other disability related needs.
- 3

IEP Team
A parent may request an IEP meeting when they believe the student's needs, supports, services, or circumstances should be reviewed.

Illinois and federal resources

ISBE, McKinney-Vento Homeless Education	Illinois information on educational rights and supports for children and youth experiencing homelessness. isbe.net/Pages/Homeless.aspx
ISBE, Special Education Parent Resources	Parent information on evaluations, IEPs, procedural safeguards, dispute resolution, and other special education topics. isbe.net/Pages/Special-Education-Parents-of-Students-with-Disabilities.aspx
U.S. Department of Education, IDEA	Federal information about special education rights and requirements under IDEA. sites.ed.gov/idea
Illinois Legal Aid Online	Plain language legal information and resources for Illinois families, including education and housing related topics. illinoislegalaid.org

5 How Family Matters PTIC can help

Family Matters Parent Training and Information Center (FMPTIC) provides free education, resources, training, and individualized support to Illinois families of children with disabilities. An Educational Support Coach can help families:

- Understand special education rights and the IEP process
- Prepare questions and concerns for school meetings
- Understand evaluations, eligibility, services, and procedural safeguards
- Organize documentation and communication with the school team
- Locate additional Illinois resources and supports

Helpful reminder

Housing instability should not prevent a child from accessing school or needed disability related supports. Coordinating the McKinney-Vento liaison and special education team can help address enrollment, transportation, and IEP needs together.

Family Matters PTIC

1-866-436-7842 (1-866-4FMPTIC) | fmptic.org

Supporting families across Illinois with special education information and parent to parent guidance.

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