



AN INTERVIEW CHECKLIST FOR SUPPORTING SCHOOL SELECTION: UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH

Adapted with permission from NCHE's [Guiding the Discussion on School Selection](#).

The McKinney-Vento Act provides a student identified as homeless the right to attend either the school of origin or the local school, according to the student's best interest. The *school of origin* is the school the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled. The *local school* is any public school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the student is actually living are eligible to attend. Local educational agencies (LEAs) must make best interest determinations about school selection that:

- presume that staying in the school of origin is in the best interest of the student;
- consider specific student-centered factors;
- prioritize the wishes of the unaccompanied youth; and
- include a written explanation and notice of the right to appeal if the LEA determines that remaining in the school of origin is not in the youth's best interest.

School district homeless liaisons and other school personnel play a critical role in helping unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness evaluate their best interest. This brief provides a guide for school selection conversations with unaccompanied youth. The LEA must give priority to the unaccompanied youth's wishes. In addition to being a legal requirement, this can reduce the likelihood of disputes or unnecessary school changes and respects the role of young people in their education.

Step One: Explain the rights and significance of school selection

Thank the youth for speaking with you and let him/her know that while it is the LEA's responsibility to determine the best school placement for the youth, the LEA must prioritize both school stability and the youth's wishes, and you are here to support him/her in this process. As appropriate, acknowledge the challenges of the youth's living circumstances and the importance of making sure that he/she is in a school setting that supports his/her academic success and overall well-being during this difficult time.

Step Two: Help the parents/guardians consider their options

Explain to the youth that you can help him/her consider whether the school of origin or local school would best meet his/her current needs by asking a few important questions. Remind the youth that he/she may change his/her wishes about school placement later if housing circumstances, priorities, or needs change.

| School of Origin Considerations (Check if yes) | | Local School Considerations (Check if yes) | |
|---|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Overall continuity Have you attended the school of origin for a long time? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Overall continuity Have you attended the school of origin for only a brief time? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Length of anticipated stay at current residence Do you think that you will have to move again very soon, or are you unsure how long you can stay? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Length of anticipated stay at current residence Do you think that you will be able to stay where you are staying now for a while? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Time of year Is it late in the academic year? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Time of year Is it early in the academic year? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Personal safety of the student Do you feel safer at the school of origin? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Personal safety of the student Do you think you would feel safer at the local school? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Interaction with peers How important to you are your friendships at your current school? Is keeping those friends close important to your emotional well-being, school success, and participation? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Interaction with peers Are you looking forward to making new friends with school peers who live closer to where you are staying now? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Academic strength When you have changed schools before, was it really hard for you to stay on track and/or catch up? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Academic strength Has it been easy for you to keep up with classes and schoolwork when you have changed schools before? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Social and emotional state Have you developed strong ties and bonds to the current school, and do not want to leave the school? Do changes in your environment or routine provoke anxiety or other difficulties for you? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Social and emotional state Have you experienced a lot of challenges at the current school, so that a fresh start at a new school sounds good to you? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Impact of the commute on the student's education Do the advantages of continuing to attend the school of origin outweigh any potential disadvantages presented by the commute? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Impact of the commute on the student's education Would a shorter commute help you concentrate, pay attention, or participate in school? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Student's need for special instruction Do you receive, or are you currently being evaluated for, special education or other special services at school? Do you feel like it is best for you to continue receiving those services or complete the evaluation at the school of origin? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Student's need for special instruction If you receive, or are currently being evaluated for, special education or other special services at school, do you think starting that process in a new school might better meet your needs? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Participation in extracurricular activities Are you active in extracurricular activities that are meaningful and important to you at the school of origin, and will you be able to continue those activities while living in your current living situation? | <input type="checkbox"/> | Participation in extracurricular activities Would it be easier for you to participate in extracurricular activities, if you want to participate, at the local school? |
| Total checks: | | Total checks: | |

Review the responses and their significance in determining the school placement. If the LEA determines that the appropriate school is DIFFERENT from that selected by the youth, explain to the youth that the LEA will provide him/her with a written explanation of the LEA's determination, including a statement regarding his/her right to appeal. Explain the appeals process to the youth and assist the youth to access that process immediately.

Step Three: Ensure continuity of instruction in the current school or a smooth transition to the new school

Staying in the school of origin: Explain to the youth that, if remaining in the school of origin is in the youth's best interest, transportation will be provided to the student. With sensitivity, encourage the youth to inform the school promptly of any problems with transportation or changes in residence, and to let you know what he/she needs to be able to attend and succeed in school. Do not tell the student's teachers about his/her homelessness without explicit permission.

Transferring to a new school: If enrolling in the local school is the best option for the youth, explain to the youth that the homeless liaison in the district of origin will contact the liaison in the district in which the youth is now living (if these are two different districts) to facilitate immediate enrollment. Explain that the local school must remove any barriers to enrollment and full participation that are created by homelessness, including transportation barriers.

Work with the youth to make the transition at a time when disruption can be minimized, such as at the end of a grading period or over a holiday break. With sensitivity, encourage the youth to let the liaison in the new district know what he/she needs to be able to attend and succeed in school.