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BOARD POLICY HOMELESS AND FOSTER YOUTH

Vibrant Minds Charter School (VMCS) adheres to the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act that entitles all homeless school-aged children to the same free and appropriate public education that is provided to non-homeless children. VMCS also believes that foster youth deserve the same level of support and protections as homeless scholars. To remove any barriers to the enrollment, attendance, and academic success faced by homeless scholars, VMCS will provide general assurances and individual assistance to homeless/foster scholars and their families in compliance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

General Assurance

VMCS provides homeless/foster scholars the following general assurance to maximize access to various educational, social, and enrichment programs that promote achievement.

- Homeless/foster children and youth shall not be segregated or stigmatized in any way, based on their home status.
- Homeless/foster children and youth shall be provided services comparable to those received by other scholars in the school, including educational programs for which scholars meet eligibility criteria (*such as services offered under Title 1 or similar state and local programs, programs for scholars with disabilities, programs for scholars with limited English proficiency, gifted and talented program, vocational/technical program, and school nutrition programs*).
- VMCS shall provide and post notices of the educational rights of homeless/foster children and youth.
- VMCS shall provide homeless/foster scholars with access to education and other services necessary for these scholars to meet the same challenging academic standards as other scholars.
- Homeless/foster children and youth will have access to school-level funds (set-aside within Title I funding) for serving homeless scholars.

Definition of Homeless Youth

A homeless scholar is defined as a person between the ages of birth and twenty-two who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and may:

- Live in an emergency or transitional shelter, abandoned building, parked car, or other

facility not designed as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;

- Live “doubled-up” with another family, due to loss of housing stemming from financial problems (e.g., loss of job, eviction or natural disaster);
- Live in a hotel or motel;
- Live in a trailer park or campsite with their family;
- Have been abandoned at a hospital;
- Be awaiting foster placement in limited circumstances;
- Reside in a home for school-aged, unwed mothers or mothers-to-be if there are no other available living accommodations; or
- Be a migratory or abandoned, runaway, or “throwaway” youth that qualifies as homeless because s/he is living in circumstances described above.

Definition of Foster Youth

A foster youth is defined as a scholar without parental support and protection, placed with a person or family to be cared for, usually by local welfare services or by court order.

Identification and Reporting

Homeless/foster children and youth will be identified through:

- The application process for enrollment (self-identification)
- School personnel recommendations
- Coordination of activities with other entities and agencies

Using the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of eligibility, the designated Homeless/Foster Scholar Liaison shall obtain information regarding potentially eligible scholars as possible, case by case, with sensitivity and utmost discretion. VMCS will comply with all federal, state, county, and other data collections and reporting requirements regarding homeless/foster youth.

Homeless/Foster Liaison

VMCS will designate a Homeless/Foster Scholar Liaison, to provide support and resources for homeless/foster scholars and families and ensure compliance with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The Liaison will receive annual training on applicable policies and procedures to support homeless/foster scholars.

The Homeless/Foster Liaison will:

- Ensure that homeless/foster children and youth are identified by school personnel and through coordination with other entities and agencies.
- Ensure that homeless/foster scholars enrolled in VMCS have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school.
- Ensure that homeless/foster scholars are not segregated from their non-homeless/foster peers.
- Ensure that homeless/foster families, children, and youth receive educational services for which they are eligible and referrals to health, mental health, dental, and other appropriate social services.
- Based on availability of funds, provide homeless/foster scholars with basic school supplies, such as backpacks and uniforms, and fees for general education testing, as appropriate.
- Ensure that public notice of the educational rights of homeless/foster scholars is disseminated where children and youth receive services under the Act.
- Ensure that enrollment disputes are mediated following the dispute resolution provisions.
- Ensure that the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth is fully informed of all transportation assistance provided by the school if available and feasible.
- Assist unaccompanied youth in placement and enrollment decisions.
- Assist homeless/foster children and youth who do not have immunizations, or immunization or medical records, to obtain necessary immunizations or medical records.
- Collaborate with school staff responsible for the provision of education and related scholar support services to homeless/foster children and youth.
- Monitor homeless/foster scholars attendance and performance, and facilitate their participation in school (clubs, sports, extracurricular).

School Selection

Homeless/foster scholars have a right to select from the following schools:

- The school in which he/she attended when permanently housed (School of Origin)
- The school in which he/she was last enrolled (School of Origin)
- The school in the attendance area in which the student currently resides (School of Residency)

A homeless/foster child or youth's right to attend the school of origin extends for the duration of homelessness/foster care. If a child or youth becomes permanently housed during the academic year, s/he is entitled to stay in the school of origin for the remainder of the academic year.

School Enrollment and Records

VMCS is an independent charter school, and therefore is a school of choice rather than an assigned district school. Placement decisions are based solely on parent request through the application process. In order to provide equal access to the school, VMCS provides specific information in its outreach materials, websites, at community meetings, open forums, and regional center meetings, that notifies parents that the school is open to enroll and provide services for all scholars, and provides a contact number for access to additional information regarding enrollment. Furthermore, VMCS's annual recruitment plan shall include efforts to reach homeless/foster families, children, and youth via free public events, community centers, and local social service providers.

Homeless/foster children and youth will be allowed to apply for enrollment, even if the parent/guardian is unable to provide the school with the records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, birth certificate, proof of residency, and immunization records, etc. Enrollment is defined as "attending classes and participating fully in school activities." The Liaison shall immediately contact the school last attended by the scholar to obtain the required records for enrollment. If the scholar needs to obtain immunizations or does not possess immunization or other medical records, the parent/guardian shall be referred to the Liaison. The Liaison shall assist the parent/guardian in obtaining the necessary immunization or records for the scholar. Preference in admission will be granted in accordance with VMCS's admissions policy.

The laws require the immediate enrollment of homeless/foster scholars. Schools must immediately enroll homeless/foster scholars, regardless of missing or pending academic or health records. It is the responsibility of the Liaison to request all necessary documents from the previous school, and refer parents to all programs and services for which the scholar is eligible. Unaccompanied homeless/foster youths have these same rights. Parents and unaccompanied homeless/foster youth may self-identify their current living situations on Scholar Enrollment Registration Form or by a notifying a school administrator.

Any confidential record ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records, academic records, birth certificate, guardianship records, and evaluations for special services or programs, of each homeless/foster child or youth will be maintained so that the records are available, in a timely fashion, when a child or youth enters a new school or school district.

Unaccompanied Homeless/Foster Minor

Homeless/foster youths will not be discriminated against in the application process. Unaccompanied youth includes a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the Liaison shall assist in the enrollment process.

Unaccompanied youth shall be immediately enrolled if space is available, even if unable to provide the school with the records normally required for enrollment, despite lack of parent/legal guardian supervision or permission, or “power of attorney” by supervising adult.

Transportation

Per the McKinney-Vento Act, VMCS must provide services to homeless children/youth that are comparable to those received by other scholars in the school, including transportation. While VMCS does not generally provide transportation to scholars, VMCS will work closely to support any request by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth to provide transportation assistance to scholars experiencing homelessness to ensure the scholars are able to attend school during their homelessness. This transportation assistance may be in the form of bus token, voucher, or other reasonable method, as determined by the executive director and/or assistant director and the parent/guardian or homeless youth.

Nutrition Program

Homeless/foster students automatically qualify for free school nutrition program at VMCS. Families will be asked to fill out an application and indicate homeless/foster status. Homeless/foster scholars will be added to the free meal program as soon as they have been identified.

Review of Policy

This policy may be reviewed periodically by the VMCS Board.

Adopted: November 4, 2020

Amended: