

# **Acorn Montessori**

## **Educational Policy to Implement the McKinney-Vento Act**

Homelessness exists in the Tri City Area, and that includes the Prescott Valley Community. A combination of many factors causes families to leave their home such as high cost of living, and poverty. Many of our youth leave their homes due to abuse, neglect, and family conflict. Children and youth who have lost their housing live in many different places including motels, shelters, shared residences, transitional housing programs, campgrounds, even cars. This lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious consequences physically, emotionally, and mentally. Acorn Montessori will ensure that all children and youth enrolled will receive a free, appropriate, public education, and are given an abundance of meaningful opportunities to succeed on their educational journey at our School. Acorn Montessori will always follow the requirements set forth in the McKinney-Vento Act.

### **Statement of Assurance**

Acorn Montessori Charter School shall provide an educational environment that treats all students with dignity and respect. At Acorn Montessori it is our policy to view all students as individuals. This in mind, our policy will not refer to children as *homeless*, they will instead be referred to as *children and youth in transition*. Federal Law states that every child and youth in transition shall have access to the same full educational opportunities to meet state and local academic achievement standards as students who are not in transition. This commitment to the educational rights of children and youth in transition, and unaccompanied youth, applies to all services, programs, food programs, transportation programs, and activities provided or made available. Acorn Montessori will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation, and harassment.

Information regarding this policy will be included in our enrollment packet and made available throughout the year.

## Definitions

*Children and Youth in transition* means children or youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education and services, under the McKinney-Vento Act. They lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who are:

- Living in a shelter
- Living in temporary shared housing
- Living in a transitional living program
- Living in a hotel/motel
- Living in campground or similar situation
- Living in an abandoned building
- Living at a bus station, in a park, in a vehicle
- Living at a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not appropriately designed for or meant to be used as regular sleeping accommodations for a person.
- Migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above

A Child or youth shall be considered in transition for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above.

*Unaccompanied youth* means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, and who is in transition as defined above. The general term “youth” in the phrase *children and youth in transition* also includes unaccompanied youth.

*Enroll* and *Enrollment* means being a member of a school and participating completely in school activities.

*Parent or Guardian* means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

*School of origin* means the school the child or youth attended when last permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

*Liaison* is the staff member who is designated by our LEA and each LEA in the state as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the liaison by the McKinney-Vento Act.

### **Identification**

Together, with school personnel, and community organizations, our McKinney-Vento Liaison will identify children and youth in transition within the Acorn Montessori Charter School district. The Liaison will train the school staff on the possible indications of homelessness, on sensitivity in identifying families and youth in transition, and the procedures to make the Liaison aware of the information indicating homelessness. The liaison will also instruct all office personnel to inquire about possible homelessness upon enrollment and withdrawal of every student and to inform the Liaison if homelessness is indicated.

Community partners in identifying indications of homelessness may include shelters, motels, campgrounds, homeless outreach organizations, faith-based organizations, legal services, welfare departments, and other social agencies. The Liaison will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the Acorn Montessori Charter School district. This data will include where they live, their academic achievement (including all standardized testing and assessment results), the reason for and enrollment delays, interruptions in their education, or school transfers.

### **School Selection**

All children and youth in transition have the right to stay at their school of origin or attend any school that housed students would attend who live in the area where the child or youth actually lives. Keeping students in their school of origin is important for both the student and our district. Students who change schools have been found to have lower academic performance and test scores than their peers who do not change schools. Even academically stable children and youth in transition, that change schools often, have been shown to have lower test scores. Keeping students in their schools of origin gives them a better opportunity to grow both academically and socially, while allowing the school of origin to benefit from the enhanced test scores and achievement shown as a result of student continuity. Therefore, in school selection, children and youth in transition will remain at their schools of origin to the greatest extent feasible, unless the parent or youth decides differently. Students may stay at their school of origin the entire time they are in

transition and until the end of the school year that they become permanently housed. This also applies to children or youth that lose their housing between school years. McKinney-Vento eligible students have the right to select from the following schools:

- The school the student attended when last permanently housed (school of origin)
- The school in which the student was last enrolled (school of origin)
- The school in the attendance area in which the student lives (school of residency)

The feasibility of staying at a child or youth in transition's school of origin will be determined according to the best interest of the child, based on the needs of that student, and the decisions of their parent or the wishes of the youth. Possible **feasibility** are as follows:

- Safety of the student or youth in transition
- Continuity of academic instruction
- Time remaining in the current school year
- Possible area of family or youth's future housing
- Possible length of stay in transitional living situation
- Where siblings go to school
- Whether the student has special needs that would make the commute harmful

Services that are *required* to be provided through the McKinney-Vento Act, such as transportation availability to and from the school of origin, and services under federal and other programs, will not be feasibility determination factors.

### **Enrollment**

It is essential that children and youth in transition maintain consistent and uninterrupted instruction to achieve academic success. However, the realities of mobility during transition may make providing enrollment documents unavailable. The school selected for enrollment must enroll any child or youth in transition immediately. Enrollment may never be denied or delayed due to the lack of required documents including:

- Proof of residency

- Transcripts (they will be requested and obtained by the selected school's registrar. Placement, until records are received, will be determined based on information obtained from that student, or the student's parent/guardian)
- Immunization, health, medical, or physical records- the Liaison will assist.
- Proof of guardianship
- Birth Certificate
- Any other documents required for enrollment
- Unpaid school fees
- Lack of dress code clothing requirements
- Anything related the student or youth in transition's living situation

Immediate enrollment is also required for unaccompanied youth. They may be enrolled by a parent, caretaker, older sibling, themselves, or the McKinney-Vento Liaison.

### **Transportation**

Transportation is a vital part of the ability for students and youth in transition to attend instruction and curriculum at their school of origin, and to avoid added social, emotional, and mental stress to an already difficult situation. At the parent's request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition, and will be provided free of charge, for the duration of time the child has the right to attend that school, as defined previously, including during dispute resolution. The McKinney-Vento Liaison shall request transportation to and from school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will only be taken into consideration based on potential harm to the student. (Please refer to the feasibility considerations above). Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of the right to transportation before they select a school to attend.

The Liaison at each campus in the Acorn Montessori Charter district will use the district's transportation form to process transportation requests. Upon completion and processing of the form, transportation will begin without delay. If the student in transition is attending Acorn Montessori Charter School, we shall arrange transportation. This transportation will include not only transportation to and from our school, but also any other transportation services offered to housed students.

McKinney-Vento student transportation costs will be provided by Title 1 funds that have been set aside, and our Maintenance and Operating funds.

### Services

At Acorn Montessori Charter School, enrolled children and youth in transition shall be provided services comparable to enrolled housed students, including:

- Transportation (described above)
- Title 1 (described below)
- Special Education, if eligible
- English Language Learning, if eligible
- School nutrition programs, and National School Lunch Program
- Before and after school programs

Acorn Montessori Charter School acknowledges that children and youth in transition have statistically higher occurrences of special needs and are frequently not evaluated so appropriate services can be provided. A child or youth in transition, suspected of having an unevaluated disability, is ensured a timely completion of a full evaluation. If a child or youth in transition has an existing Individualized Education Program (IEP) it will be immediately implemented. Necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be expedited. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use their best judgement, in coordination with Administration, to choose the best course of action according to procedures and provision of services, the goal being to avoid interruption in appropriate services.

With the Liaison's assistance, school personnel shall refer enrolled children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services.

Parents or guardians of children and youth in transition will be informed of all educational and educational related opportunities, and the availability for them to meaningfully participate in their student's education. This will be done in a manner understandable to parents or guardians.

### **Attendance**

Any tardiness or absences related to the living situation of a child or youth in transition, regardless of the attendance policy, shall be excused. Any tardiness or absences not related to the living situation of a child or youth in transition shall be recorded according to the Acorn Montessori Charter School Attendance Policy.

### **Disputes**

The parent or guardian of a child or youth in transition may file a complaint with Acorn Montessori Charter School over disputes that arise regarding anything in this policy, including enrollment, transportation, services, or fair treatment of the student. The School must respond and attempt to resolve the issue quickly. During the dispute procedure, the student must be immediately admitted to the selected school and provided appropriate educational services, transportation, free nutrition, and Title 1 services until the final resolution of the dispute is reached. The McKinney-Vento Liaison will assist in making decisions, providing notice of any appeal process, and filling out the dispute forms. The parent or guardian of the student will receive an understandable written explanation of the decision and will be informed of the right to appeal. The parent or guardian of the student shall be referred to the Liaison, who shall ensure them that the student is enrolled in the selected school, receiving all entitled services, and that the dispute shall be resolved as quickly as possible. The parent or guardian of the child or youth in transition shall be given every opportunity to have meaningful participation in the dispute process. The Liaison shall keep records of all disputes to determine whether there are any delays or denials of the enrollment of the child or youth in transition.

### **Meals and Nutrition**

Acorn Montessori Charter School is dedicated to the health of the whole child. This includes proper nutrition which is profoundly important to learning. To ensure that children and youth in transition are getting proper nutrition while at school, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. The student's name must be submitted to Acorn Montessori's Food Service's Department for immediate processing upon enrollment.

## **Title 1**

The profound difficulties experienced by children and youth in transition put them at significant risk of academic regression that warrants additional support. These students are automatically entitled to, and shall be provided with, Title 1 services. Title 1 funds will be used to provide educational support services to children and youth in transition, both in school and outside of school to help remove possible difficulties that may prevent regular attendance.

Acorn Montessori Charter School shall assess, report on, and include children and youth in transition in accountability systems as required by federal law and U.S. and Arizona Departments of Education.

## **Training**

The Acorn Montessori Charter School's McKinney-Vento Liaison will conduct a training session at least once each year for all staff. This training will include procedures, as well as, sensitivity and awareness practices. Training will focus on staff awareness of homelessness in our community, procedures to expedite assistance, compliance with policy, and very importantly, approaching the issue with sensitivity and dignity toward the child or youth in transition. Please refer to the "Identification" portion of this policy.

## **Coordination**

The McKinney-Vento Liaison shall coordinate with, and seek support from, public and private service providers in the community, any Acorn Montessori Charter School service departments, Liaison's in neighboring districts, and the State Coordinator for the Homeless Children and Youth:

Silvia Chavez

Arizona Department of Education

1535 W. Jefferson Street

Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Phone (602)542-4963

Email [alexis.clermont@azed.gov](mailto:alexis.clermont@azed.gov)

Website- [www.ade.az.gov/asd/homeless](http://www.ade.az.gov/asd/homeless)

The coordination of all public and private agencies will be encouraged to support the Liaison in implementing this policy, keeping in mind our motto-

**"Children First, Always"**

## **References**

- The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- Title 1, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Child Nutrition Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture
- The Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- The Arizona Department of Education
- The U.S. Department of Education