10 Things Parents Wish Homeless Liaisons Knew

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1. **I didn't mean to fill out your forms wrong, but the questions weren't easy to answer.** Many school districts identify families covered by McKinney-Vento based on a few questions on enrollment paperwork. This means families can be missed if they struggle to read the forms, misunderstand the questions asked, or aren't fluent in English. Many caretakers and students do not know what buzzwords they need to say to be identified as McKinney-Vento eligible. Providing parents with support to understand what services are offered and how to access them can ensure all families experiencing housing instability are served. [*See* 42 USC § 11432(g)(6)(A).]

2. **I am not trying to avoid your calls, but I don't always have a stable form of communication.** Families experiencing housing instability might change their number often or go through periods without access to a working phone. This can be because of economic hardship or safety concerns, such as domestic violence. Families may call from many different numbers or not be available at the number they listed on their contact information, so it is important to make multiple efforts to get in touch. [See 42 USC § 11432(g)(1)(I).]

3. **I want to enroll my child(ren) in school, but I don't have a way to get there.** Families experiencing economic hardships or safety concerns that contribute to homelessness may not have access to transportation to get to a school or district office to complete enrollment paperwork. Providing transportation to the district offices, working with families over the phone, or meeting families halfway to complete enrollment paperwork and set up transportation services for their child(ren) will allow parents to enroll their child(ren) in school. Immediate enrollment without barriers caused by paperwork is a requirement of federal law. [See 42 USC § 11432(g)(1)(I).]

4. **School might be the most stable place for my child right now.** When families are experiencing disruptions in housing, this can create many disruptions in children's lives. Working with families to ensure students can stay in the same school, with the friends and classmates they already know, can help provide a vital source of stability for children during a chaotic time in their lives. [See 42 USC § 11432(g)(3)(B).]

5. **I am trusting you with information about my situation because my family needs assistance right now, but I would rather you not tell everyone about what is going on.** For parents experiencing homelessness, telling others what is going on can be very scary. Many families worry that their children can be taken away from them if this information is disclosed to the wrong person. Additionally, having schools call landlords, housing agencies, or employers to verify the information provided can create further barriers for parents, such as being kicked out of a friend or family member's home or losing their job. It is important to remember that information about a family's living situation is private and should only be disclosed to those who need to know. [See 42 USC § 11432(g)(3)(G).]

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I can't always afford uniforms, technology and classroom fees, school supplies, or fees for extracurriculars, but I still want my child to participate. Families may not know they can ask for help with these items to ensure their children can fully participate in the school environment without barriers. Telling families about all of the resources school districts can provide can help with attendance and participation by making sure students aren't missing class because of not having uniforms or supplies. [See 42 USC § 11432(g)(1)(F)-(G).]

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I know and care about my child, and I would like to be consulted about what transportation options will work best for my family. Working with families to prevent burdens due to transportation is necessary when families are experiencing homelessness. Inflexible policies (e.g., cabs dropping families after 3 missed rides) can make it difficult for families who do not have stability in their home environment. Developing transportation plans in conversation with families will help ensure that the most suitable form of transportation for the child is selected. [See 42 USC § 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii), 42 USC § 11432(g)(6)(A)(viii).]

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I might not always agree with you, and it helps to know how to voice my disagreement so it can be resolved. Families may not always know about the dispute resolution process or how to assert their or their child's rights. Homeless liaisons are obliged to inform families of the process to dispute decisions caretakers do not agree with and their rights under federal law. [See 42 USC § 11432(g)(3)(E).]

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I may not understand all of my rights, and I would like to know what additional supports and services my child can access. Families experiencing housing instability should be told about all the services they can have access to, including free or reduced lunch, educational services, removal of barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular services, and additional tutoring. These services can be incredibly beneficial to students experiencing homelessness, allowing them to participate fully in school and to engage with their peers. [See 42 USC § 11432(g)(1)(F), 42 USC § 11432(g)(4).]

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Instead of labeling me hard to communicate with, I wish school staff engaged with me in a trauma-informed way. School staff should be intentional about the way they communicate with families that have experienced trauma, which is often true of families who are experiencing housing instability. Using trauma-informed strategies can help build trust with families and establish strong channels of communication, which will benefit all involved. [See 42 USC § 11432(g)(6)(A).]

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