

Catalyst Academy Charter School
Homeless Students Policy

INTRODUCTION

Catalyst Academy Charter School (“Catalyst”) recognizes its obligation to ensure that homeless students have access to the same educational programs and services provided to other Catalyst students. Catalyst shall make reasonable efforts to identify homeless children within its school, encourage their enrollment, and eliminate existing barriers to their attendance and education, in compliance with federal and state law and regulations.

Catalyst may waive policies, procedures and administrative procedures that create barriers for enrollment, attendance, transportation and success in school of homeless students, based on the recommendation of the CEO/Principal.

DEFINITIONS

Homeless students are defined as individuals lacking a fixed, regular and nighttime residence, which include the following conditions:

1. Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship.
2. Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations.
3. Living in emergency, transitional or domestic violence shelters.
4. Abandoned in hospitals.
5. Awaiting foster care placement.
6. Living in public or private places not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings.
7. Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, transportation stations or similar settings.
8. Living as migratory children in conditions described in previous examples.
9. Living as run-away children, abandoned or forced out of homes by parents/guardians or caretakers, or separated from parents/guardians for any other reason.
10. Living as school age parents/guardians in houses for school age parents/guardians if they have no other living accommodations.

School of origin is defined as the school the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled.

PROCEDURES

Catalyst designates the CEO/Principal or designee to serve as the Catalyst's liaison for homeless students and families.

Catalyst's liaison shall coordinate with:

1. Local service agencies that provide services to homeless children and youth and families.
2. Catalyst, as well as other school districts, on issues of enrollment, records transfer and transportation.
3. State and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies.

Catalyst's liaison shall provide public notice of the educational rights of homeless students in its schools.

Students shall not be discriminated against, segregated nor stigmatized based on their status as homeless.

Enrollment/Placement - To the extent feasible, and in accordance with the student's best interest, a homeless student shall continue to be enrolled at Catalyst while s/he remains homeless or until the end of the academic year in which s/he remains homeless or until the end of the academic year in which s/he obtains permanent housing. Parents/Guardians of a homeless student may request enrollment in the school in the attendance area where the student is actually living or other schools. If a student is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, the Catalyst liaison will consider the views of the student in determining where s/he will be enrolled.

Catalyst shall immediately enroll the student and begin instruction, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment pursuant to Catalyst policies. However, Catalyst may require a parent/guardian to submit contact information. Catalyst's liaison may contact the previous school for oral confirmation of immunizations, and Catalyst shall request records from the previous district, pursuant to Catalyst policy. Homeless families are not required to prove residency regarding school enrollment.

School/Health Records - Catalyst may contact the School of Origin for oral confirmation that the student has been immunized, but must not be a barrier to enrollment. Oral confirmation between professionals is a sufficient basis to verify immunization with written confirmation to follow within thirty (30) days. The instructional program should begin without delay after the enrollment process is initiated and should not be delayed until the procedure is completed.

Catalyst's liaison will assist the parent/guardian/student in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records.

Placement/Disputes/Complaints - If Catalyst is unable to determine the student's grade level due to missing or incomplete records, Catalyst shall administer tests or utilize appropriate means to determine the student's placement.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent/guardian/student will be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision on the dispute, including the right to appeal. If the homeless student is seeking enrollment at Catalyst, the parent/guardian/student will be referred to Catalyst's homeless liaison, who will carry out the state's grievance procedure as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. In the case of an unaccompanied student, Catalyst's liaison shall ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

If disputes or complaints of noncompliance arise regarding the education of homeless students at Catalyst, the following steps shall be taken:

1. The person filing the complaint shall first contact Catalyst through Catalyst's Homeless liaison, or if the liaison is not the Principal/CEO, then Catalyst's Principal/CEO, to present their concerns to the people closest to the situation and most likely to be able to resolve it quickly.
2. If Step 1 is not successful or is not possible under the circumstances, contact should be made with the Homeless Project Education Liaison, or the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will accept complaints directly through the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.
3. Individual cases may be referred to the PDE's Office of Chief Counsel and the Office of the Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, as needed, by the State Homeless Coordinator.

PDE will deliver a response within fifteen (15) business days of the receipt of the complaint. The complaint may arrive in the form of a copy of the Catalyst letter or on the Dispute Letter Form if given directly to a Liaison of the Homeless Initiative.

Services - Homeless students shall be provided services comparable to those offered to other Catalyst students including, but not limited to school nutrition programs and educational services for which students meet eligibility criteria, such as programs for disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and gifted and talented students.

References:

School Code – 24 P.S. § 1306

State Board of Education Regulations – 22 Pa. Code §§ 11.18, 403.1

No Child Left Behind Act – 20 U.S.C. § 6301 *et seq.*

Education For Homeless Children – 42 U.S.C. § 11431 *et seq.*

Family Educational Rights and Privacy, Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations – 34 CFR Part 99

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