Educating displaced children and youth in Montana presents many unique challenges due to the nature of our state. Most of our school districts are small and rural with dedicated staff members filling multiple roles. Our communities have few resources or services designed to meet the needs of families and youth experiencing homelessness, such as emergency shelters, transitional housing, or soup kitchens. Despite these challenges, our educators and communities work tirelessly to meet the needs of Montana's most vulnerable children.

The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) provides training and technical assistance to school districts and local homeless liaisons. The OPI also provides information and awareness materials to educators, nonprofits, shelter providers, and other interested community members throughout the state of Montana.

The OPI's McKinney-Vento Program is located in the 1300 11th Avenue building, Helena, Montana, in the Federal Programs Unit. The purpose of this program is to ensure that every homeless child and youth in Montana has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education as provided to other children and youth in Montana schools.

Montana Office of Public Instruction

Justine Guthrie
State Coordinator for Homeless
Education justine.guthrie@mt.gov,
406-444-2036

Zach Hawkins
Federal Grants Unit Director
Zachariah.Hawkins@mt.gov,
406-444-3083

National Center for Homeless Education

At the SERVE Center

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) provides research, resources, and information enabling communities to address the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, NCHE serves as a clearinghouse of information for people seeking to remove or overcome educational barriers and to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The NCHE also supports educators and service providers through producing training and awareness materials and providing training at regional and national conferences and events.

Contact the NCHE helpline at 1-800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org.

District Liaison Name Tara Hubing

School Name Circle Public Schools

Address 1105 F AVE

City, State, Zip Circle, MT 59215

Phone 406.485.3600

Fax 406.485.2332

Email thubing@circleschools.k12.mt.us

Montana Office of Public Instruction

Families in Transition

McKinney-Vento
ESEA Title IX, Part A

opi.mt.gov

Elsie Arntzen
State Superintendent of Schools
Montana Office of Public Instruction
PO Box 202501
Helena, MT 59620-2501
406-444-3095

Toll-free: 1-888-231-9393

The Montana Office of Public Instruction Families in Transition Program

Definition of Family in Transition

The term "family in transition" refers to individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Under the law a child may qualify as homeless if he/she is:

- Living in an emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter, or transitional housing.
- Living in a motel or hotel due to economic hardship.
- Living in a car, park, public place, bus or train station, abandoned building, or other structure not meant for housing.
- Doubled up with relatives or friends due to a loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.

Children who are not living with a parent or legal guardian may be considered a homeless, unaccompanied youth if their living situation meets one of the four definitions listed above.

If you or someone you know is living in one of these situations, contact your local school district for assistance with services in your school and your community.

The Office of Public Instruction is committed to equal opportunity and non-discriminatory access to all our programs and services.

For more information or to file a complaint, contact Tom Antonick, OPI Title IX/EEO Coordinator at 406-444-3161 or tantonick@mt.gov

Educational Rights of Eligible Students

They Have Rights to:

- Immediate enrollment in school, even if the student does not have required paperwork.
- Continue attending the school in which they were enrolled when they became homeless, the last school attended, or the school closest to their temporary residence.
- Remain in the sequence of schools with their peers when homelessness is longer than one school year.
- Receive transportation to and from school.
- Automatic enrollment for free meals at school without proof of income.
- Automatic qualification for Title I services, even if the student is enrolled in a non-Title I school.
- Receive all school-based services for which they qualify.
- Participate in all programs and activities offered to other students, including athletics, music, clubs, and other extracurricular activities.
- Have their parents participate in and attend school events and activities.
- Challenge decisions on homeless status or services made by schools and districts through a dispute/grievance procedure.

Tips for Parents

- Make sure your child arrives at school on time every day. Children who miss school miss out on important learning activities.
- Make sure your child gets eight to ten hours of sleep every night. Children who are well rested learn more.
- Read to your child every day. Reading is the key to success in school. Talk to your child's teacher or school librarian about books you can read together.
- Talk with your child's school about your living situation. Your child may qualify for additional help through other programs and resources available at the school.
- Talk to your child's teacher. The more a teacher knows about your child the more they can help them succeed.
- Get involved in your child's education. Your child's teacher and school can talk with you about how to become an active part of the school community.