



# **Everything You Need to Know: Improving Access to Head Start for Families in Temporary Housing**

Presented by Jennifer Pringle, NYS-TEACHS at Advocates for Children of NY

# NYS-TEACHS

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- ▶ Funded by the New York State Education Department and housed at Advocates for Children of New York
- ▶ Provides technical assistance on homeless education issues to school districts, social service providers, parents, youth, and other professionals.
- ▶ Services include:
  - ▶ Infoline (800-388-2014)
  - ▶ Website: [www.nysteachs.org](http://www.nysteachs.org)
  - ▶ Webinars
  - ▶ Annual Workshops
  - ▶ On-site trainings



## True (A) or False (B)?

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1. School districts must identify preschool-age children who are homeless and ensure that they receive pre-k, Head Start, and other public preschool services for which they are eligible.
2. Children who are homeless must show proof of immunization before enrolling in a Head Start program.
3. Children in temporary housing must meet the income criteria to be eligible to participate in a Head Start program.
4. Head Start programs must prioritize children who are homeless for enrollment.

# A note about language...

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- ▶ Temporary housing = homeless
- ▶ People first language:
  - ▶ Children in temporary housing
  - ▶ Children in transitional housing
  - ▶ Children who are homeless
  - ▶ Children experiencing homelessness
- ▶ NOT “homeless children”

# Today's Training

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Did You Know?

Defining Homelessness

The Impact of Homelessness on Children

Rights and Protections

Recruitment and Prioritization

Determining and Verifying Eligibility

Enrollment without Records

Serving Children who are Enrolled

Resources

# Key Takeaways

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- ▶ Approximately 1 in 10 children under six experiences homelessness in NYS.
- ▶ **Children who are homeless are eligible for Early Head Start and Head Start**
- ▶ Early Head Start and Head Start Programs must:
  - ▶ Give children who are homeless priority enrollment
  - ▶ Enroll children who are homeless without records
  - ▶ Collect information about housing status of all children seeking enrollment
  - ▶ Verify homeless status
  - ▶ Report homeless status data



“Homeless people often don’t fit the stereotypes. However, the segment of the homeless population that is most rapidly increasing *does* conform to many of society’s most offensive and simplistic conceptions about homelessness.

These homeless people *do* drink a lot, but it’s mostly milk and juice. They *do* exhibit strange behavior, but it is conduct most of us know as the ‘terrible twos.’”

*Bridging the Gap: Early Care and Education for Massachusetts Young Homeless Children*





# Poll

Approximately how many children under 6 experience homelessness in NYS?

- A. 1 in 100
- B. 1 in 50
- C. 1 in 25
- D. 1 in 10





# Statistics on Family Homelessness

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- ▶ In New York State:
  - ▶ **135,952 children under 6 were homeless**
  - ▶ **1 in 10 children under 6 experienced homelessness**
- ▶ ***But only 9% of children experiencing homelessness were enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start or Pre-K.***

From “Early Childhood Homelessness in the United States: 50-State Profile,” available at:  
<https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/homeless/early-childhood-homelessness-state-profiles.pdf>

# Home at Head Start Campaign

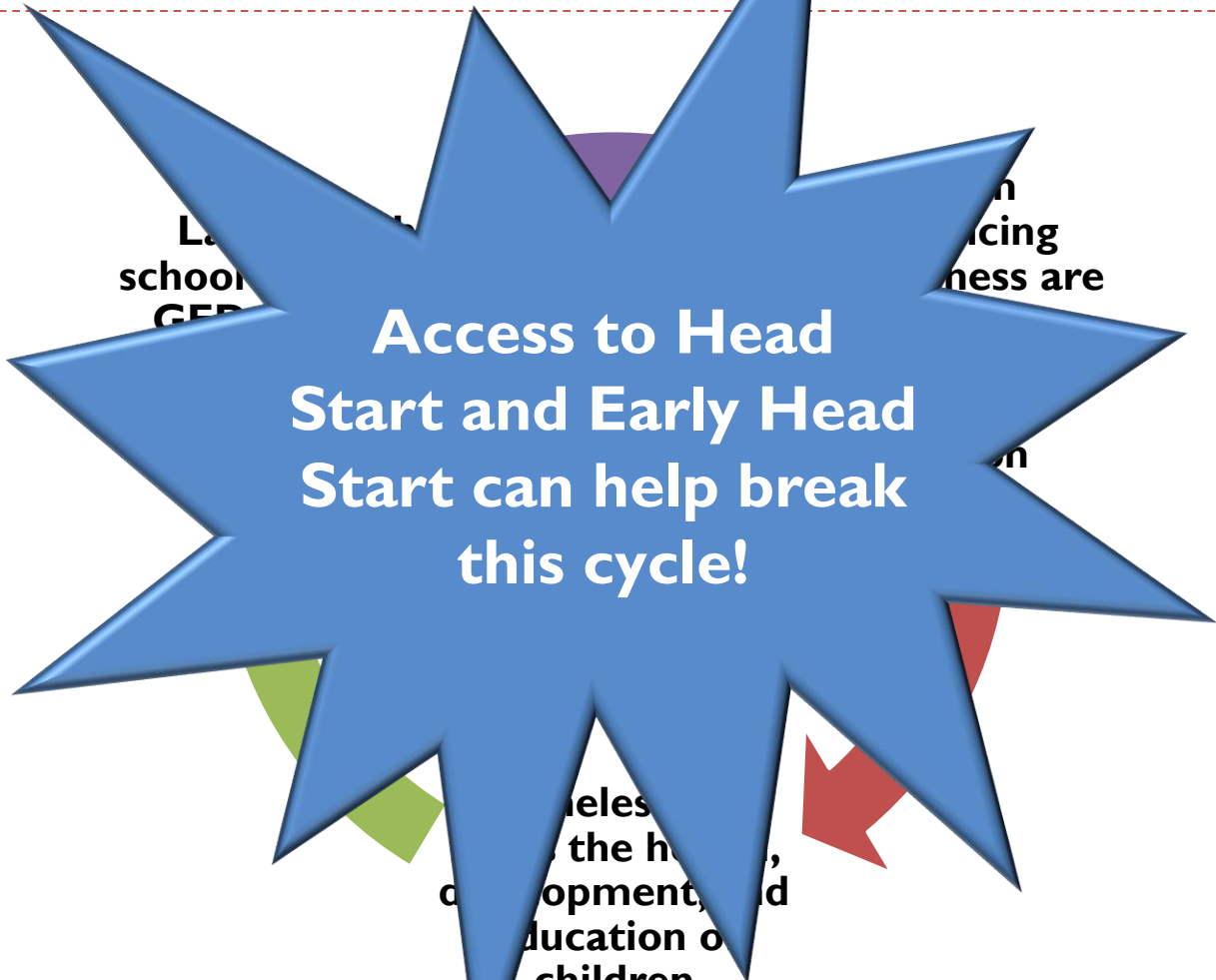
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- ▶ National Office of Head Start recently announced new campaign:
  - ▶ [Home at Head Start: Helping Families Experiencing Homelessness Access Head Start Services](#)
  - ▶ Goal is to enroll 10,000 children who are homeless in Head Start and Early Head Start
- ▶ What can you do?
  - ▶ **Share** this [Tip Sheet for Head Start Programs](#). It has important information about how to better serve children experiencing homelessness.
  - ▶ **Refer** parents!



# Head Start is a Tool that Can Help Disrupt the Cycle of Homelessness!

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**Access to Head Start and Early Head Start can help break this cycle!**

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Research compiled from: SchoolHouse Connection fact sheet: <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ECE-Overview-SHC-December-2017-1.pdf>; Missed Opportunities – Youth Homelessness in America, a report from Chapin Hall and Voices of Youth Count: [http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall\\_VoYC\\_NationalReport\\_Final.pdf](http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_NationalReport_Final.pdf); SchoolHouse Connection website: <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/preschool-to-prevent-homelessness-research-rights-and-resources/>

# Barriers to Participation

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- ▶ **No seats:** Early childhood education programs are often full and can have long waitlists, creating barriers for children moving to different locations throughout the school year
- ▶ **No subsidy:** Many programs have dual sources of funding and the family may not have a child care subsidy
- ▶ **Lack of awareness:** Parents may be unaware of the benefits of quality early childhood education or how to register their children
- ▶ **Lack of transportation**
- ▶ **Lack of outreach to families experiencing homelessness**

**What else?**



# Early Head Start & Head Start: **Key Protections** for Children experiencing **Homelessness**

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## ▶ Eligibility

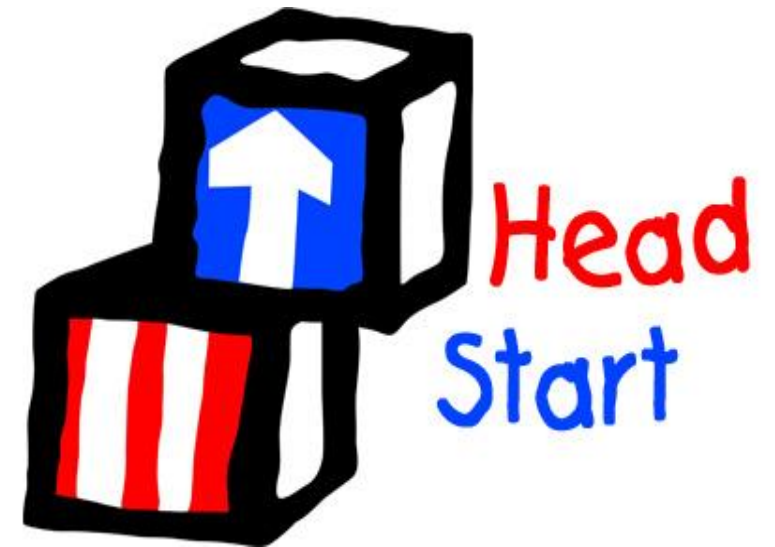
- ▶ Children who meet the definition of **homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act** are **eligible** and
- ▶ **Get priority for enrollment** (for example selection criteria that take into account housing status, setting aside seats, priority on any waitlist)

## ▶ Enrollment without records

- ▶ Can participate in the meantime

## ▶ Transportation

- ▶ School district must arrange if child is in pre-k & HS is a school of origin



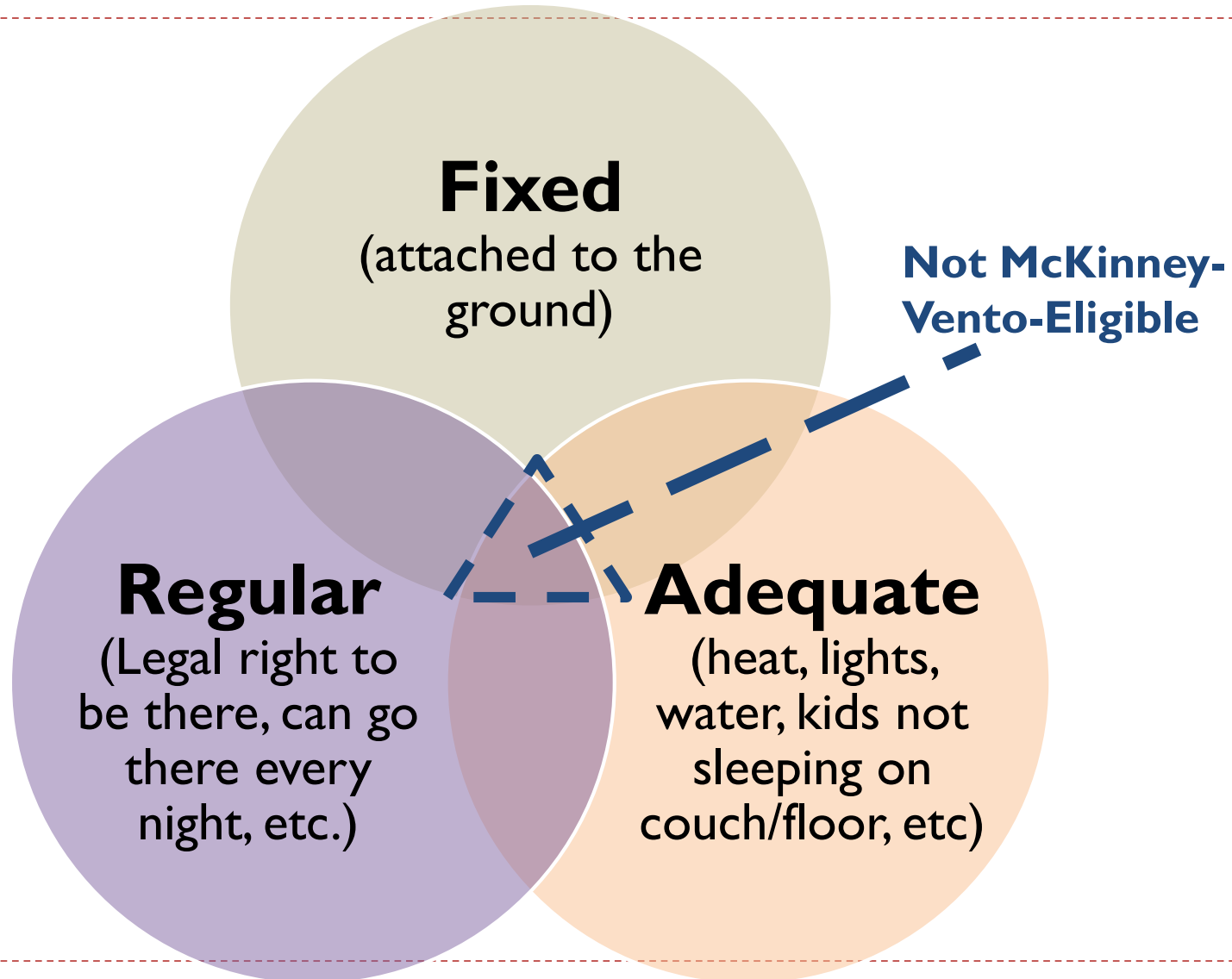
# The McKinney-Vento Act: Who's Eligible

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- ▶ **Sharing the housing of others** due to loss of housing, economic hardship or other similar reason
- ▶ Living in **emergency or transitional shelters**
- ▶ Living in **motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds** due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- ▶ Abandoned in hospitals
- ▶ Living in a public or private place not designed for sleeping
- ▶ Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, etc.
- ▶ Migratory living in circumstances described above

# The McKinney-Vento Act: Who's Eligible

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# Activity: Case Scenario

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- ▶ **Eligibility Scenario:** Ms. Taylor and her 2-year old Alicia



# Activity: Recruitment

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- **How do you recruit children who are experiencing homelessness?**
- I-2-4-All



# Recruitment: Outreach

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- ▶ Recruitment process must include efforts to locate children who are homeless
- ▶ To recruit children in temporary housing, Early Head Start and Head Start Programs should collaborate with:
  - ▶ School District **McKinney-Vento liaisons**
    - MV Liaison must ensure children who are homeless receive pre-k, Head Start, and other public preschool for which they are eligible
    - **MV liaison information can be found at**  
[www.nysteachs.org](http://www.nysteachs.org)
  - ▶ Directors of Temporary Assistance at the local Department of Social Services (**DSS**) for information about local shelters:  
<https://otda.ny.gov/workingfamilies/dss.asp>
  - ▶ Local domestic violence (**DV**) shelters:  
<https://www.nyscadv.org/find-help/program-directory.html>



# Recruitment Strategies for Engaging Parents

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- ▶ Don't assume parents know the benefits of Head Start.
- ▶ Many parents in temporary housing are reluctant to be separated from their young children.
- ▶ Share information about the safe and engaging environment your program offers and encourage the parent to visit.
- ▶ Use **local data** to identify areas where children may be experiencing homelessness
  - ▶ Data about student homelessness available here:  
<https://nysteachs.org/resources/data-on-student-homelessness-nys/>
  - ▶ Child poverty data available here:  
<https://nysteachs.org/resources/local-poverty-rates-student-homelessness/>



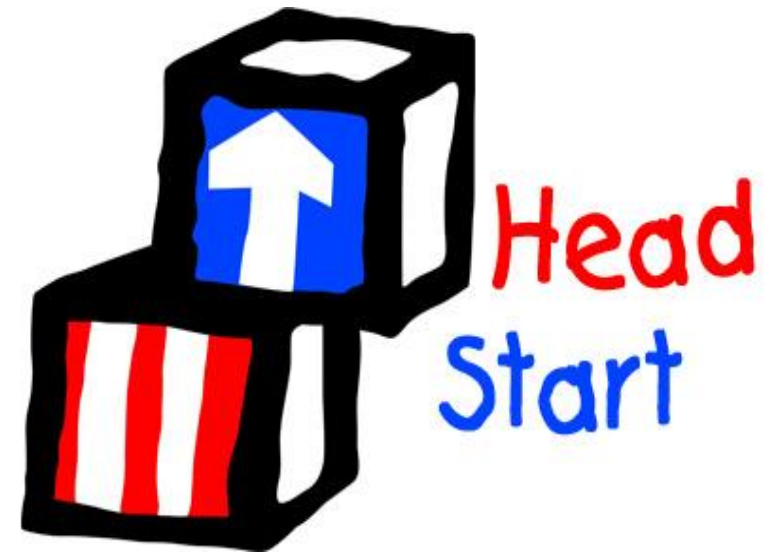
# Early Head Start and Head Start: Protections for Children who are Homeless

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- ▶ Children who meet the definition of homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act are eligible and get **priority for enrollment.**

Here are some examples:

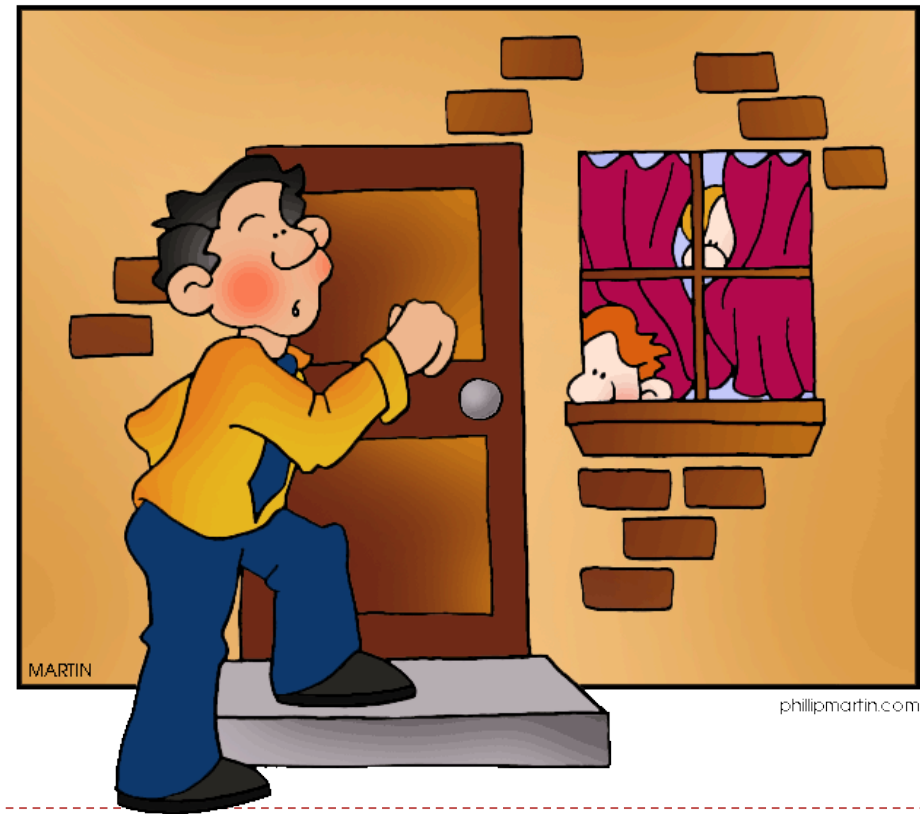
1. **Selection criteria**
2. **Priority on any waitlist**
3. **Setting aside seats**



# Activity: Priority Enrollment

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- How does your program prioritize enrollment for children who are experiencing homelessness?
- I-2-4-All



# Priority Enrollment

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- ▶ Review your program's **Selection Criteria** to award more points to children in temporary housing
  - ▶ Involve your **Policy Council** (or Delegate Agency Policy Committee)
- ▶ Ensure children in temporary housing are placed at the **top of any waiting list**
- ▶ **Set aside** seats for children in temporary housing
  - ▶ Reserve one or more enrollment slots and then get an extra 30 days to fill the seat(s). These seats are **NOT** counted as under-enrollment. For more info, see:
    - ▶ Head Start Program Performance Standard 1302.15(c)
    - ▶ “Reserving Slots in Head Start Programs for Children Experiencing Homelessness” from Nat’l Assoc. for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, <http://naehcy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Reserving-Slots-in-Head-Start-for-Homeless-Children-final.pdf>



# Poll

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Head Start programs must guarantee spots to children who are homeless.

- A. True
- B. False



# Determining Housing Status: Housing Questionnaire

- ▶ Use a **Housing Questionnaire** for all children who apply to determine who might be temporarily housed. Template is available here:  
<https://nysteachs.org/resources/housing-questionnaire-head-start/>
- ▶ Get **sample questions** to ask parents from the Determining Eligibility Issue Brief  
([http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/det\\_elig.pdf](http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf))

[INSERT NAME AND ADDRESS OF HEAD START PROGRAM/SITE or PROGRAM LETTERHEAD]

## HOUSING QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First Middle

Gender:  Male  Female Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_  
Month Day Year

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### NOTE TO PARENTS:

Children who are living in temporary housing can enroll in and begin attending Head Start programs right away, **even if they don't have the documents normally needed** for enrollment (such as proof of address/residency, immunization records, or birth certificate). Parents of children in temporary housing must be given reasonable time to hand in these documents. In the meantime, the children can enroll and participate in the program. Children who are living in temporary housing also get **priority for enrollment**.

The answer you give below will help the Head Start program determine whether your child is in temporary housing and eligible for these benefits.

The answer you give will be kept confidential as much as possible and will only be shared with staff providing services to your child and those who have to keep track of how many children in the Head Start program are in temporary housing.

**Where is your child currently living?** (Please check **one** box.)

- With another family or other person because of a loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason (also called temporarily living "doubled-up")
- In a shelter
- In a hotel or motel
- In a car, park, bus or train station, or campsite
- Other temporary living situation (Please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
- In permanent housing

# Determining Housing Status: Housing Questionnaire

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Does the student's housing fit into one of the listed examples?



Is it fixed, regular AND adequate?



Have questions? Call NYS-TEACHS at 800-388-2014 or email Patty Persell

# Determining Housing Status: Common Challenges and Solutions

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- ▶ Parents hide their homelessness because of embarrassment or fear.
  - ▶ Do not use the word “homeless;” use “students in temporary housing” or similar language.
- ▶ Parents do not know that their living situation may entitle their child to certain protections.
  - ▶ Be transparent about questions and explain the protections and services available to children who are homeless (e.g., eligibility, priority enrollment).
  - ▶ Use language to describe homelessness that reflects the living arrangement, e.g. “doubled-up” or “staying at a shelter.”
- ▶ Parents don’t want everybody in the site to know about their circumstances and are worried that that information might be used to negatively stereotype their child.
  - ▶ Discuss living situation with parents in an office where other parents and staff can’t overhear.
  - ▶ Share with the parent how the information will be used (e.g., it will only be shared with staff on a need-to-know basis; program is required to report data on temporary housing).
  - ▶ Provide internal trainings to staff to increase awareness and sensitivity around these issues.
- ▶ **What other challenges might there be and how would you address them?**

# Verification of Homeless Status

Programs must verify the child's temporary housing. Examples of documents:

- ▶ Written documentation from a homeless service provider, school personnel, or other service agency that indicates a child is experiencing homelessness,
- ▶ Information from enrollment or application forms (e.g., Housing Questionnaire),
- ▶ Notes from an interview conducted by program staff, or
- ▶ Statement signed by the parent that his/her child is in temporary housing/homeless (e.g., Housing Questionnaire)

## Head Start Eligibility Verification



1. Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Child's date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

3. The child is eligible to participate in the program.  Yes  No

4. Check the applicable category of eligibility for this child:

<input type="checkbox"/> SSI	<input type="checkbox"/> Income ( <i>check box that applies</i> ):
<input type="checkbox"/> Homeless	<input type="checkbox"/> Below federal poverty guidelines
<input type="checkbox"/> Foster Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Between 100-130% of federal poverty guidelines (no more than 35% of enrolled children may fall into this category)
<input type="checkbox"/> Public assistance	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Over- Income
	<input type="checkbox"/> Counted as part of 10% maximum for non-AI/AN programs)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Counted as part of the 49% maximum for AI/AN programs)

5. What documentation was used to determine eligibility?

<input type="checkbox"/> Income Tax Form 1040	<input type="checkbox"/> Written statements from employers
<input type="checkbox"/> W-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Foster care reimbursement
<input type="checkbox"/> TANF documentation	<input type="checkbox"/> SSI documentation
<input type="checkbox"/> Pay stub or pay envelopes	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment	If Other, please explain: _____

Documentation of no income: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Staff signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of eligibility verification: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Staff name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

# Participation Without Records

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- ▶ Early Head Start and Head Start programs must allow children who are homeless to enroll **if they don't have all of the documents normally needed**
  - ▶ Parents have 14-30 days to get immunization records (Public Health Law 2164(7)(a)) and Early Head Start and Head Start programs must work with families to help children get immunization records
  - ▶ HS programs can get waiver for medical statement (physical) requirement
    - Waiver OCFS Form 4887: [https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/Forms/Day\\_Care/NewForms/OCFS-4887%20Request%20for%20Waiver.dot](https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/Forms/Day_Care/NewForms/OCFS-4887%20Request%20for%20Waiver.dot)
    - OCFS Policy Statement: <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/childcare/policies/17-1.pdf>
- ▶ Early Head Start and Head Start programs **must allow children who are homeless to participate** while the parent is getting the needed documents



# Serving Children who are Enrolled

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- ▶ Programs must make efforts to maintain children who are homeless even if they move to a different service area



- ▶ Programs must help children who are homeless find another program if families move to a different area and want to enroll their child in a closer program



# Transportation

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- ▶ Under McKinney-Vento, all school districts must provide transportation for children in temporary housing to attend the school of origin, including state funded pre-k
- ▶ Program must use community resources to transport children who are homeless
- ▶ In NYC, parents may get a MetroCard to accompany their children to Head Start. Parents should contact the NYC Students in Temporary Housing Regional Manager:  
<https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/special-situations/students-in-temporary-housing>



# Key Takeaways

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- ▶ Approximately 1 in 10 children under 6 experience homelessness in NYS
- ▶ Children who are homeless are eligible for Early Head Start & Head Start
- ▶ Early Head Start & Head Start Programs must give children who are homeless:
  - ▶ Priority enrollment
  - ▶ Enrollment without records
- ▶ And Must:
  - ▶ Collect information about housing status of all children seeking enrollment
  - ▶ Verify homeless status
  - ▶ Report homeless status data



# Resources

- ▶ **Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness** - An interactive learning series for professionals. Learn how to identify families experiencing homelessness, conduct community outreach, and much more: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-support-well-being/article/supporting-children-families-experiencing-homelessness>
- ▶ **Self-Assessment Tool for Early Childhood Programs Serving Families Experiencing Homelessness** - Specifically designed for child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, and public pre-k programs as a guide for welcoming and supporting families and children experiencing homelessness into these programs: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecl/final\\_self\\_assessment\\_tool\\_for\\_early\\_childhood\\_programs\\_serving.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecl/final_self_assessment_tool_for_early_childhood_programs_serving.pdf)
- ▶ **Housing Questionnaire** – Tool to use to help Head Start programs identify children experiencing homelessness: <https://nysteachs.org/resources/housing-questionnaire-head-start/>
- ▶ **Tip Sheet for Head Start Programs serving children experiencing homelessness:** <https://nysteachs.org/resources/tip-sheet-for-head-start-programs/>
- ▶ **Head Start Verification Form:** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/operations/docs/hs-eligibility-verification-form-ext.pdf>
- ▶ **McKinney-Vento Liaison Contact Information:** <http://nysteachs.org/liaisons/>
- ▶ **NEW! Early Care and Education Services for Children Experiencing Homelessness** – Guide from Early Childhood Advisory Council with information about early care and education programs and information about services available to families experiencing homelessness: <https://nysteachs.org/resources/early-childhood-education-services-for-students-experiencing-homelessness/>
- ▶ **Sesame Street: Family Homelessness:** Meet Lily! <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/family-homelessness/>

# Thank You!

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