



NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
SCHOOL  
PSYCHOLOGISTS

## New Schools for Students With Disabilities: Tips for Families Who Have Been Relocated

Families can find themselves in new communities for many reasons. The transition is particularly challenging when the move is a result of a stressful situation such as a job loss, or when a family can no longer afford their mortgage or rent. Such circumstances are becoming increasingly more common due to hardships resulting from the current economic crisis. Beyond the common transition issues faced by all families with school-age children enrolling in a new school are the additional challenges of meeting the needs of children with disabilities or special learning needs. This handout provides some basic tips for parents of children with disabilities who have relocated following the downturn in the economy or other crisis events.

### **All Children Have a Right to an Education**

Regardless of where you are from, or the community to which you have relocated, all children of school age have the right to a free public education in the local school system. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act protects students without a permanent address and is designed to increase school enrollment, attendance and school success. Students may remain in their home school and receive transportation even if their temporary living arrangement is based in another school district. Children can begin attending school immediately, even when the family cannot produce normally required school enrollment documents. In addition, children who have no permanent address are guaranteed the same educational rights as all other children, including the right to special education and related services if needed under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA).

### **Enroll Children As Soon As Possible**

In communities with a large number of relocated or homeless families, local agencies should be available to make it easier for you to obtain information about nearby schools and registration requirements. A good place to start obtaining the information you need is by visiting a public school near you. School office staff should have information about how to enroll your children as well as information about the special education programs and services available. The very first step is to **enroll your children** so that they can begin to attend school, continue to make academic progress and receive special education supports and services as needed.

### **Collect and School and Health Information**

Check to see if you have any of the following, and bring to the school when you go to enroll your child:

- Birth certificate
- Immunization records
- Health records (reports of physical examinations, medications, surgeries, etc.)
- All individual education plans (IEPs) and all other special education records (including assessment reports if available and descriptions of accommodations)
- Report cards
- Any reports of district or state test results

It is very possible that few or even none of these records are readily available depending on the circumstances of your move. When you do not have documents of your child's school and health history,

take a few minutes to write down what you (and your child) remember, and bring these notes to the school. Don't worry if you don't remember every detail in your child's educational history; the staff at your child's new school will work with you to plan an appropriate educational program.

Ask yourself (or your child if old enough) the following questions:

- Where did my child attend school? (starting with kindergarten)—note the name of the school and city
- When did my child first start to receive special education services?
- In what areas did my child receive help? (reading, math, speech therapy, physical therapy, behavior, etc.)
- Which school professions were working with my child? (Special educator, School psychologist, Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Individual Student Aide, etc)
- Was my child found to have a specific disability? (Learning Disability, Emotional Behavioral Disorder, Speech/Language Disorder, etc.)
- How did my child receive special education services? (In a general education class, special class or school, with a tutor in a small group, individually with a tutor?)
- About how much time per day did my child receive special education help?
- What can I recall about the results of my child's most recent evaluation or review? About how long ago was it?
- What can I recall about the goals on my child's most recent IEP? What was he/she working on?
- How much time did my child receive instruction in the regular education classroom?
- What curriculum materials were used with my child in either regular or special education? (Do I remember the name of the reading or math program?)
- Did my child have a behavior plan? What behaviors were of concern? What was the plan?
- Did my child receive any accommodations or modifications in the classroom such as special seating, large print texts, or as extra time or fewer items on tests?
- Did my child have a Section 504 Plan?
- Has my child ever been retained in grade? When?

### **Advocate for Services for Your Child**

It is important that schools provide appropriate instruction for all children, and that includes children with disabilities. Efforts to determine what services your child needs should begin as soon as you enroll the child, but it might take a while to develop a formal IEP. Parental input is an important and required part of the educational planning process. It may be necessary for the school staff to conduct screening (brief assessments) or even a new comprehensive assessment in order to determine your child's skill levels and what services are appropriate. In the meantime, your child should be placed in a classroom or program that seems most likely to meet his or her needs, so that instruction can begin promptly. Sometimes schools will be able to quickly write a temporary or "interim" IEP based on the information you provide. Sometimes the child will be placed in a program that is a "best guess" and then staff will begin to observe, screen and possibly conduct more assessment and make any changes necessary to give your child appropriate instruction in the least restrictive educational setting.

As you make contacts with school personnel and agencies or advocates in the community, be sure to keep a log of all individuals you interact with. Write down names and phone numbers so that you can get back to the right person. It will be helpful to new families to seek out community resources and support networks. If you have particular concerns about your child or your family's emotional reaction to life changes due to tough economic times, the school psychologist, school counselor or social worker can help determine if other services are appropriate. These professionals will likely know of community organizations and agencies that can provide a variety of resources to help relocated families. Ask if there are disability support agencies or groups for parents and for students. These groups will be able to offer advice for obtaining appropriate services and help explain local and state regulations, procedures and resources.

Remember, relocation does not change your child's right to an education or right to due process. All special education safeguards still apply. Parents have the right to be part of all decisions regarding their child's education. Finally, be an active partner with your child's new school staff. Everyone, especially your child, will benefit from close teamwork between parents and school.

## **Resources**

**IDEA 2004: Building the Legacy** <http://idea.ed.gov/>

### **National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth**

*The Economic Crisis Hits Home: The Unfolding Increase in Child and Youth Homelessness at:*  
[www.naehcy.org/dl/TheEconomicCrisisHitsHome.pdf](http://www.naehcy.org/dl/TheEconomicCrisisHitsHome.pdf)

### **National Association of School Psychologists**

See helpful resources for schools to use to support students and families affected by the economic crisis: [www.nasponline.org/educators/economic.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/educators/economic.aspx)

### **National Center for Homeless Education**

A clearinghouse funded by the U.S. Department of Education providing information and resources on the educational rights of homeless children:  
[www.serve.org/nche](http://www.serve.org/nche)

**National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities** [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)

**Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers** [www.taalliance.org/index.asp](http://www.taalliance.org/index.asp)

**U.S. Department of Education** [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

*Education Department: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 at:*  
[www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/index.html).

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