

August 31, 2017

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED

Subject: Hurricane Harvey enrollment guidance

The purpose of this letter is to provide an update and reminder to all school districts and charters of key provisions in place to support students displaced by Hurricane Harvey.

Please remember that a child whose family has been displaced due to Hurricane Harvey will generally meet the definition of “homeless” under the federal McKinney-Vento Act. Any student(s) staying with friends, relatives, or other persons or staying in a shelter or other temporary location due to loss of housing because of the hurricane are considered homeless.

In addition, note that “homelessness” is a characteristic of the individual and not a result of a home school district being closed temporarily. Students are not homeless because their local school may have suspended operations for a short period.

- **Immediate Enrollment** – The federal McKinney-Vento Act, entitles students to enroll immediately in the public school which serves the attendance area where the student is staying temporarily. Additionally, state law, Educ. Code § 25.001(b)(5), allows a homeless student to enroll in any school district in Texas regardless of where they are staying. Families and students experiencing the trauma of a disaster may need some additional time and guidance to assess their circumstances, in-order to make an informed school selection. School personnel can help parents and youth make a student-centered, best interest determination regarding school selection by using this helpful tool: http://www.theotx.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Checklist_SchoolSelectionProvision_SchoolOrigin_AttendanceZone.pdf
- **Identification of Students in Homeless Situations** – By federal law, every school district must identify students living in homeless situations. Every school district should have a means of identifying the living situation of all students entering and/or returning to their schools, including students displaced by Hurricane Harvey.
- **School Selection and Transportation for Homeless Students** – The McKinney-Vento federal law allows families and students living in homeless situations to remain in the school of origin (where the student attended when he/she became homeless or the last school he/she attended) and receive transportation to the school of origin or enroll in the local school where the student is temporarily staying. Texas state law allows students to enroll in any Texas district. With this latter option, the district selects the campus and there is no obligation on the part of the district to provide transportation.
- **Missing Records** – Students must be enrolled without delay and without the usual required documents, including immunizations records, previous school records, proof of residency, or legal guardianship. In most instances, these records may be obtained from the previously

attended school district. In the case of a large-scale disaster, these records may be delayed or inaccessible.

- *Reminder for Students with Disabilities:* LEAs are required to immediately provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). When students enroll without records or with incomplete records, districts must use whatever information is available to them, including parent and student interviews etc., to ensure that the students are provided with FAPE. Adjustments to individual educational programs can be made when more complete records have arrived.
- *Reminder for Students who are English Language Learners (ELL's):* When enrolling English learners with incomplete or missing records, districts should use whatever information is available to them, including parent and student interviews etc., to ensure that program placement is as consistent as possible with what was being provided in the student's previous district.
- **Texas Student Data System PEIMS Crisis Code** – All students enrolling in a school district or charter school as a result of being displaced by Hurricane Harvey should be reported with a 'Crisis Code' of 05. This specific code indicates that a student was enrolled or eligible to enroll in a Texas public school district or charter school impacted by Hurricane Harvey, and the student enrolled in another Texas public school district or charter school, or moved from a Hurricane Harvey impacted campus to a non-impacted campus in the same LEA during the 2017-2018 school year. Should additional resources become available, this information will be critical for impacted LEAs. As a reminder, all homeless students, as defined by McKinney-Vento, are eligible to be enrolled where they are living and must be reported through the LEA TSDS PEIMS data.
- **Texas Records Exchange (TReX) System**– LEAs enrolling displaced Hurricane Harvey students should submit a TReX records request to the LEA where the student previously attended or should have been enrolled as soon possible regardless of the operational status of the LEA. Many impacted LEAs still have access to their electronic student information data.
- **Free Meals** – All homeless students must receive free school meals without delay and are categorically eligible for nutrition benefits.
- **Referral to Services** - Students must have their needs assessed and be referred to appropriate supports and services, including health, mental health, housing, and other community resources.
- **LEA Homeless Liaison** - Every LEA is required to designate a Homeless Liaison to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. LEA Homeless Liaisons should be included in local disaster relief efforts and LEA planning concerning Hurricane Harvey. For a list of local liaisons visit: <http://www.theotx.org/liaison-directory/>

For more information about the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education program and supporting students who are displaced because of Hurricane Harvey, please visit:

- The Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO) website and toll-free hotline (1-800-446-3142): <http://www.theotx.org/>

- Texas Department of State Health Services, School Administrator, Hurricane Harvey: <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/immunize/school/admittance-faq.aspx>
- Texas Department of Agriculture, Hurricane Harvey: <http://www.squaremeals.org/FandNResources/HarveyUpdatesforTexasNutritionPrograms.aspx>
- U.S. Department of Education, Hurricane Harvey: <https://www.ed.gov/hurricane-harvey>
- National Center for Homeless Education, Disaster Preparation and Response: https://nche.ed.gov/ibt/dis_prep.php

In addition, TEA has established a Hurricane Harvey Resources page for districts and charters (http://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/Other_Services/Weather_and_Disaster/Hurricane_Harvey_Resources/) on its website. We will be providing more details and information concerning Hurricane Harvey and its impact on Texas schools and communities as soon as it is available.

Mike Morath
Commissioner