



## McKinney-Vento Homeless Definition

The term “homeless children and youths”–

- (A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
- (B) includes–
  - ♥ children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons (doubled up) due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
  - ♥ are living in motels, hotels, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
  - ♥ are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or abandoned in hospitals.
  - ♥ children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designated for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; such as cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing.
  - ♥ migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purpose of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described above.
  - ♥ “unaccompanied youth” (students not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian) who qualify as homeless for the purpose of this subtitle.

## Facts

- ♥ Nationally, 2,127,781 children age 0 through 12th grade were identified as being in a homelessness situation during the 2020-21 school year.
- ♥ In Florida, 78,269 homeless students were identified in 2021-2022.

The number of homeless students identified to Hearth for the last several years are listed below:

School Year	# Hearth Students
2022-2023	4,808*
2021-2022	4,055*
2020-2021	3,733*
2019-2020	3,738*
2018-2019	3,725*

Hearth services provided to students experiencing homelessness and at-risk for 2022-2023: 11,298.

\* Lake Wales Charter System maintains their own homeless student information.

## School Board Members

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 Rick Nolte, District 3  
 Sara Beth Reynolds, District 4  
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 Justin Sharpless, District 6  
 Lisa Miller, District 7

## Superintendent

Frederick Heid



## POLK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Visit HEARTH’s website at:  
[www.polkschoolsfl.com/hearth](http://www.polkschoolsfl.com/hearth)  
 Facebook: The Hearth Project



# HEARTH

(Homeless Education Advocates  
Restoring the Hope)



*Warmth for  
Homeless Children*



## Education of Homeless Children and Youth

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 Polk County Public Schools  
 P.O. Box 391  
 Bartow, Florida 33831  
 (863) 457-4709  
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## Educational Rights of Homeless Students

- ♥ Free, appropriate public education, no matter where the student lives;
- ♥ Immediate school enrollment when missing certain documentation (physical, immunization, birth certificate, school records, guardianship, and proofs of residency) and attendance in school while obtaining those necessary documents;
- ♥ Remain at the school of origin (school last enrolled in or attended), when in the best interest of the student;
- ♥ Transportation to and from school of origin;
- ♥ Same special programs and services, if needed, as provided to all other children served in these programs;
- ♥ Free breakfast and lunch.

### Homeless Liaison and School District must ensure:

- ♥ Homeless students are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies.
- ♥ Students experiencing homelessness enroll in school and receive educational services for which they are eligible.
- ♥ Assist homeless children and youth who do not have proper documentation for school enrollment.
- ♥ Help unaccompanied youth choose and enroll in a school, after considering the youths' wishes.
- ♥ Inform parents or guardians of homeless students of the educational rights, including transportation to the school of origin, along with other educational and related opportunities available to their children.
- ♥ Public notice of the educational rights of students in homeless situations is disseminated where children and youth receive services.
- ♥ Enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the Enrollment Disputes section of the McKinney-Vento Act.

## Services Provided by Hearth

- ♥ Provide enrollment assistance for students missing required documents, including guardianship papers; enrollment assistance to the school of origin; and process transportation requests for students to remain in the school of origin.
- ♥ Contracted services with The Salvation Army providing tutorial services for children residing in the transitional living and emergency facilities.
- ♥ Contracted services with HALO Child Enrichment Center (preschool program) at the Salvation Army.
- ♥ Work with Title I to provide tutors at selected sites and local shelters housing children.
- ♥ Work together with organizations and individuals to meet needs of homeless children. Through donations and grants HEARTH provides needed school supplies, uniforms, shoes, hygiene and personal items, clothes, bus passes, medical services, cap & gown, jacket and valentine card assistance.
- ♥ Provide case management and follow up services to homeless unaccompanied high school students including letters of verification for the FAFSA.

## Additional Outreach Services

- ♥ Educate and inform the community about homelessness through presentations and media releases.
- ♥ Encourage homeless advocates in local schools to aid in the identification and assistance of homeless children throughout Polk County.
- ♥ Host homeless shelter meetings to discuss and solve issues of concern for the local shelters housing children.
- ♥ Present Homeless Sensitivity and Poverty Simulation Training to school and district personnel.
- ♥ Member of local, state, and national organizations providing assistance to homeless families.

The Hearth Project began in 1991 as one of a few pilot programs in Florida. The program is responsible for ensuring the educational rights of homeless students as outlined in the McKinney-Vento Federal Law.

The Polk County program currently has the following 6 staff members:

Homeless Liaison  
Homeless Technician  
Homeless Advocate (2)  
Social Worker - Unaccompanied Homeless  
High School Youth  
Part-time College Clerk

## Current Ways to Help Hearth

### Miscellaneous:

- ♥ **Crock-pots** (new) and electric skillets (new) for the families living in hotels;
- ♥ **Gift cards** from local stores to give to unaccompanied high school students and families for their food and clothing needs;
- ♥ **Gas Cards** to assist individuals and families with transportation;
- ♥ **Mentors** for our homeless unaccompanied students;
- ♥ **Monetary donations** to assist with additional needs (when all other resources are exhausted) such as school physicals; birth certificates; GED expenses; medical expenses, including prescriptions; etc. (make checks payable to Polk Education Foundation (PEF) with HEARTH in the memo line).

### School Related:

- ♥ **Belts:** Collect new belts in a variety of sizes in black, navy blue, or brown for boys and girls to help meet the uniform requirement;
- ♥ **School supplies:** Paper, folders, composition/spiral notebooks, crayons, pens, pencils, markers, colored pencils, calculators, etc.;
- ♥ **Sponsor** a child/children for a field trip;
- ♥ Purchase a **yearbook and/or cap and gown** for a homeless senior.

**HEARTH Office**  
863-457-4709