

STATE PLAN

Peer Review Criteria and Consolidated Notes for the McKinney-Vento EHCY Program

State Name: New Jersey



U.S. Department of Education
June 22, 2017

Background

Peer reviewers will apply their professional judgment and experiences when responding to the questions in response to the criteria below. Consistent with section 1111(a)(4)(C) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, peer reviewers will conduct an objective review of State plans in their totality and out of respect for State and local judgments, with the goal of supporting State- and local-led innovation and providing objective feedback on the technical, educational, and overall quality of a State plan, including the validity and reliability of each element of the plan. Reviewer responses to the questions inform the written determination of the Secretary regarding the State plan.

Role of the Peer Reviewers

- Each peer reviewer will independently review a consolidated State plan in accordance to the criteria for Title VII, Subtitle B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY). Each reviewer will record their responses to the questions, will note where changes may be necessary for an SEA to fully address statutory and regulatory requirements, and may also present suggestions for improving the plan or to highlight best practices. Each peer will create individual recommendations to guide the remote review. These are submitted to the Department but will not be shared with the State.
- A panel of peer reviewers will meet remotely to discuss each SEA's plan. The panel of peer reviewers will generate one set of peer review notes that reflects their collective review and evaluation of the SEA's State plan, but the panel is not required to reach consensus. The notes should reflect all reviewer perspectives on each item.

After the peer review is completed, each SEA will receive the final peer review notes that include the peer reviewers' responses to the questions and any recommendations to improve the SEA's State plan in the sections that the peers reviewed. The peer review notes serve two purposes: 1) they constitute the official record of the peer review panel's responses to questions regarding how an SEA's State plan addresses the statutory and regulatory requirements; and 2) they provide technical assistance to the SEA on how to improve its plan. The peer review notes also serve as recommendations to the Secretary to determine what, if any, additional information to request from the SEA. Taking into consideration the peer reviewers' recommendations, the Department will provide feedback to each SEA that outlines the areas the SEA must address, if any, prior to the Secretary's approving its State plan. If a plan cannot be approved, the Department will offer the State an opportunity to revise and resubmit its plan and have a hearing, consistent with ESEA section 8451.

Consistent with ESEA section 1111(a)(5), the Department will make publicly available all peer review guidance, training, and final peer panel notes. The names of peer reviewers will be made publicly available at the completion of the review of all State Plans, though the peer reviewers for any individual State will not be made available.

How to Use This Document

The reviewer criteria is intended to 1) support States as they develop their consolidated State plans, and 2) inform peer review teams as they evaluate each State plan. This document outlines required elements in order for an SEA to fully address the applicable statutory and regulatory requirements. If an SEA has provided insufficient information for peer reviewers to determine whether any question is fully addressed, peer

reviewers should indicate that the SEA has not fully addressed that requirement and identify what additional information or clarification may be needed.

Instructions

Each peer reviewer should include individual review notes in the space provided below each State plan requirement. For each State plan requirement, a peer reviewer will provide:

- Peer Analysis: Describe the peer reviewer's justification for why an SEA did or did not meet the requirements;
- Strengths: Summarize strengths of the SEA's response to the State plan requirement;
- Limitations: Summarize the limitations of an SEA's response to the State plan requirement, including issues, lack of clarity, and possible technical assistance suggestions;
- Overall Determination: Determine if the SEA met the State plan requirement (indicated by Yes/No); and
 - If the peer reviewer indicates 'no' above, the peer must describe the specific information or clarification that a State must provide in order to meet the requirement.

The peer reviewer notes should address all of the required elements of each State plan requirement in this document, but do not need to address each element individually (*i.e.*, the peer notes should holistically look at I.5 the Strategies to Address Other Problems, incorporating each of the five identified items in this element but do not need to individually respond to each item).

SECTION I: EDUCATION FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAM, MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT, TITLE VII, SUBTITLE B

I.1: Student Identification (722(g)(1)(B) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- Does the SEA describe the procedures it will use to identify homeless children and youth in the State and to assess their needs?

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	<p>The peer reviewers observed that the State plan provided a clear narrative of the procedures used by the SEA and LEAs to identify and assess the needs of homeless children and youth.</p> <p>Procedures included provision of regional training by the State Coordinator and internal as well as community-based training by local liaisons regarding the identification and service to homeless children and youth, in addition to specific policies and procedures for the facilitation of enrollment and services, and coordination with other programs.</p>
<i>Strengths</i>	<p>The peer reviewers saw strengths in the State plan’s description of their response to this requirement in the State’s use of the regional Education of Homeless Children and Youth Education projects, facilitative enrollment policies and procedures, training and technical assistance, additional collaboration, and a clear narrative of the State’s procedures on the identification and needs assessment of homeless children and youth.</p> <p>Specifically, the State plan’s procedures for identifying and assessing the needs of homeless children and youth included regional technical assistance on the McKinney-Vento Act and relevant State policies, school-level enrollment policies and procedures, services for eligible students, and individualized needs assessments to ensure eligible student receive services and supports for enrollment and academic success. In addition, it was observed that procedures included local liaisons being required to train school staff on identifying homelessness and coordination with other programs.</p>
<i>Limitations</i>	<p>It was noted that the State’s plan could be strengthened by including the Statewide data collection on homeless students that LEAs complete.</p>
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (3) Reviewers</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>

<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	
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I.2: Dispute Resolution (722(g)(1)(C) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA describe procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding the educational placement of homeless children and youth?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the dispute resolution is outlined in State statute and provides for the roles of both the SEA and LEAs in relation to the prompt resolution of disputes.
<i>Strengths</i>	Peer reviewers observed in the State’s plan as a strength the State’s statute regarding dispute resolution, the N.J.A.C. 6A:17-2.7, and regional training, and dispute timelines.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer reviewers noted that there was not a mention of homeless student transportation rights in the resolution of disputes.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (3) Reviewers
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The peer reviewers indicated that the State plan could be strengthened if the current dispute resolution provided mention of transportation rights for homeless children and youth during the dispute resolution process, as well as the provision of more technical assistance to parents and homeless youths to help them navigate the dispute process.

I.3: Support for School Personnel (722(g)(1)(D) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA describe programs for school personnel (including the LEA liaisons for homeless children and youth, principals and other school leaders, attendance officers, teachers, enrollment personnel, and specialized instructional support personnel) to heighten the awareness of such school personnel of the specific needs of homeless children and youth, including such children and youth who are runaway and homeless youths?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the State plan described several tools it will use to oversee the implementation of the programs for school personnel to heighten the awareness of such personnel of the specific needs of homeless children and youth, including such children and youth who are runaway and homeless youths, but it was not clear if other school personnel such as school leaders and attendance officers) were included in these programs.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer reviewers observed as strengths in the State plan that the SEA and regional Education of Homeless Children and Youth projects offered technical assistance, professional development, and conferences, and that there was implementation of a certification process for local liaisons.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer reviewers noted that training and conferences could be made available to other groups of school personnel such as teachers and administrators.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (3) Reviewers
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The peer reviewers indicated that the State plan would be strengthened if the SEA addressed additional school personnel (such as school administrators, and attendance officers) and provided them with professional development.

I.4: Access to Services (722(g)(1)(F) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA describe procedures that ensure that homeless children have access to public preschool programs, administered by the SEA or LEA, as provided to other children?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the State plan addressed access to public preschool for homeless children and youth through its State statute and monitoring tools.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the State plan referenced the N.J.A.C. State statute (addressing students in preschool through grade 12) as the State’s response to this requirement, that local liaisons are tasked with working with local Head Start and Even Start programs, and that the State Coordinator serves on the New Jersey Council for Youth Children. The peer reviewers observed in the State plan the collaboration with the New Jersey Council for Young Children by the State Coordinator as helping facilitate policies and procedures that address barriers to preschool enrollment for homeless children. In addition, peer reviewers observed in the State plan monitoring tools to further support this requirement. During monitoring, the barriers (actual and perceived) are surfaced and technical assistance provided.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer reviewers noted that the State plan’s narrative for this requirement described assurances more than procedures, and outlined a pilot program that NJDOE is involved in. While the pilot program was described as one that is designed to encourage and motivate liaisons to identify homeless children that qualify for EHCY services, it was noted that it did not seem to directly address this State plan requirement.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (1) Reviewer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (2) Reviewers
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The peer reviewers indicated that the State plan could be strengthened by describing specific procedures to address the requirement, providing more detail on what is already in place, increasing the information on the topic on the SEA website, and addressing space issues for homeless preschool students. Peer reviewers also indicated that the State plan would be strengthened if in addition to providing detail on how the State provides access to preschool to homeless preschoolers, the State listed any outreach activities to the community or families of identified students to inform them of the access to appropriate public preschool programs.

- **Does the SEA describe procedures that ensure that homeless youth and youth separated from public schools are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services, including by identifying and removing barriers that prevent youth described in this clause from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with State, local, and school policies?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the State plan narrative for this requirement described a new pilot program with the White House Social and Behavioral Science Team but did not describe procedures that address this requirement.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer reviewers observed that ongoing coordination with other programs addressing homeless children and youth was a strength.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer reviewers noted that the State plan narrative for this requirement described a pilot program but did not specifically describe procedures or elements outlined in the requirement.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (3) Reviewers
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The peer reviewers indicated that the State plan would be strengthened by expanding the narrative response to this requirement by explaining any existing and planned procedures.

- **Does the SEA describe procedures that ensure that homeless children and youth who meet the relevant eligibility criteria do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities, including magnet school, summer school, career and technical education, advanced placement, online learning, and charter school programs, if such programs are available at the State and local levels?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the State plan referenced N.J.A.C. 6A:17 in response to this requirement, which provided assurances but did not provide the procedures required to address this State plan requirement.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer reviewers saw the N.J.A.C. as a strength in that it was used to respond to this requirement as a framework for the State addressing this requirement.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer reviewers noted that referencing the N.J.A.C and having all aspects of the McKinney-Vento Act put under the designation of the local liaison was a partial but not complete way to address this requirement.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (3) Reviewers
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The peer reviewers indicated that the State plan could be strengthened if the State describes clear procedures outlining how the SEA will ensure that homeless children and youth do not face the barriers to the activities listed in this requirement.

I.5: Strategies to Address Other Problems (722(g)(1)(H) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA provide strategies to address other problems with respect to the education of homeless children and youth, including problems resulting from enrollment delays that are caused by—(i) requirements of immunization and other required health records; (ii) residency requirements; (iii) lack of birth certificates, school records, or other documentation; (iv) guardianship issues; or (v) uniform or dress code requirements?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the State plan addressed this requirement primarily through its State statute and provides strategies to address immediate enrollment for homeless children and youth. While the plan indicates that immediate enrollment will occur despite the listed causes of enrollment delays, it did not specify how immediate enrollment would occur through specific strategies.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer reviewers saw the State statute N.J.A.C. 6A:17-2.5 as important to the State’s response to this requirement, and the State plan included specific steps if barriers are encountered.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer reviewers noted that the State plan relied heavily on local liaisons to remove barriers and needed more detailed strategies at the SEA and LEA levels to address barriers that arise and preventing barriers.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (2) Reviewers <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (1) Reviewer
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The peer reviewers indicated that the State plan could be strengthened with strategies to address these areas: Lack of documentation, residency requirements, guardianship issues, and dress code requirements. In addition, clarity is needed regarding if these areas will be waived, not required, or obtained with assistance from the LEA or SEA.

I.6: Policies to Remove Barriers (722(g)(1)(I) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA demonstrate that the SEA and LEAs in the State have developed, and shall review and revise, policies to remove barriers to the identification of homeless children and youth, and the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth in schools in the State, including barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the State plan narrative for this requirement demonstrated that the SEA communicated an expectation of immediate enrollment of homeless children and youth regardless of residency documentation, but did not specifically address barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the State plan demonstrated extant systems and procedures to address this State plan requirement.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer reviewers noted that the State plan did not specifically address barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences. Information provided in the plan was not found to provide additional information or policy information concerning the retention of students or outstanding fees, fines or absences for homeless children and youth. The peer reviewers noted that the State plan provided a link to NJAC 6A-17 which outlined policy on identification and enrollment of homeless children and youth, but the plan did not mention SEA policies to remove barriers as a result of outstanding fees, fines or absences.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (3) Reviewers
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The peer reviewers indicated that the State plan could be strengthened by reflecting that the SEA and the LEAs in the state have developed, and shall review and revise, policies to remove barriers to the identification of homeless children and youth, and the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth in schools in the State, including barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences. In addition, the peer reviewers indicated the plan could be strengthened by the inclusion of annual review of laws, regulations and practices at the State and local level to identify potential barriers, as well as technical assistance logs, monitoring, and other tasks to identify areas of needs or concern at the local and State level.

I.7: Assistance from Counselors (722(g)(1)(K))

- **Does the SEA include how youths described in section 725(2) will receive assistance from counselors to advise such youths and prepare and improve the readiness of such youths for college?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer reviewers observed that the State plan had several protocols in place to address this requirement and is in the process of developing additional protocols and programs. For example, the peer reviewers observed that the State plan described that the State Coordinator provided consistent training and technical assistance to homeless liaisons specifically on the rights of homeless children and youth that included improved readiness for college. In addition, the State plan provided detail on the pilot program to support higher education attainment for homeless students. Peer reviewers also observed that while the plan demonstrated the work of NAEHCY's Higher Education Helpline, it limits what the State and LEA officials will be required to do.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer reviewers observed strengths in the State plan with the inclusion of information on the monitoring of LEAs for compliance in relation to this requirement, and the ongoing partnership the State Coordinator's office has with the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY). The peer reviewers also observed that the State plan addressed this requirement by describing how McKinney-Vento youths will receive assistance from counselors regarding college readiness through work with ED and the OMB Social and Behavioral Sciences Team on a pilot program, and provided detail on how the pilot email program will be implemented and executed.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer reviewers noted that the pilot program is still in its infancy. Until it is determined if this pilot program is successful, the SEA will need to use its monitoring protocols to address LEAs compliance with these elements.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (3) Reviewers <input type="checkbox"/> No
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	

