

It is unlawful for any school to separate your child from other children or treat your child differently because he/she lacks stable housing.

Settling Disputes

- If a school district and a parent/guardian disagree regarding a child's right to attend school despite any housing issues, the parent/guardian must be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision, including a right to appeal. The school must assist you in appealing a decision. The child is allowed to enroll or continue enrollment during this process and the school must continue to provide services, including transportation, until the dispute is settled.
- Each school district must appoint a person to convene a meeting of all parties within five school days to resolve the dispute.
- The school must refer you to low-cost or free legal services in the event of a dispute.

Tips for dealing with the system

If you are going to enroll a child in a new school, it would be helpful to bring along a letter from the shelter on the shelter's letterhead, saying that your child is staying there. Or, if you are staying with relatives or in a motel, bring along a letter from your relative or social worker (DCFS or private agency) stating where you and your child are living. However, no school can deny your child admission because you do not have these letters. Each Chicago Public School has a designated staff person who acts as a liaison for students and families experiencing unstable housing. You can always contact the liaison if you feel that you are not receiving the assistance that you need.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

- Send your child to school every day on time
- If you are transferring your child, enroll her in the new school right away
- Immediately ask the school for transportation assistance if you need it
- Ask for special tutoring or counseling to help make up for lost time
- Meet with your child's teacher regularly to make sure your child is getting every appropriate program
- Insist on what you think is the best education for your child

Please note: If you are an older youth, living away from your parents, and you lack permanent housing (maybe you are staying in a shelter or temporarily with friends or relatives) these same rights apply to you. *You do not need an adult in order to enroll in school.*

Preschool age children also have these same rights. Access to preschool for children with housing instability must be allowed by all school districts.

For more help contact:

The Law Project of CCH

(Providing free legal services to families and youth experiencing housing instability in Chicago and the collar counties)

1-800-940-1119

Chicago Public Schools "STLS" Program
(Educational Support for Students in Temporary Living Situations)
125 S. Clark St. 10th Floor
Chicago, IL 60603
Ph: 773-553-2242/ Fax: 773-553-2182

Illinois State Board of Education
1-217-782-2948
1-800-215-6379



www.chicagohomeless.org

A Guide to the Educational Rights of Children and Youth Experiencing Housing Instability



Public schools have a special responsibility to provide immediate access, services and support to students experiencing housing instability. If that is your situation, this brochure has important information about your rights.

You (or a child or youth that you know) may qualify for special educational supports and services if you lack a fixed, regular, or adequate place to live”, including:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters, on the street, in a car, or similar substandard arrangements.

Choosing a school

With every change of school, a child or youth can fall as much as 6 months behind academically and socially. For many students, staying in the same school where one feels comfortable can be very important when other changes are happening. If you don't know where you are going to live next, keeping your child in the same school for the rest of the school year may be the best thing you can do. You have a choice:

- Keep your child in the school your child was attending before you lost housing
 - Keep your child in the school last attended even though your temporary living arrangements have changed (maybe you moved to another shelter or are staying with relatives for a few weeks). The above two school selection choices are referred to as the "school of origin."
- Or,**
- Enroll your child in the school nearest to where your child is staying that other children in the neighborhood attend.



Immediate enrollment

By law, Illinois schools must allow a child or youth experiencing housing instability to enroll in school immediately without requiring any records, transfer forms, proof of immunizations or physicals or proof of the living arrangement. The school may ask for

contact information to be able to reach the parent/guardian. Immediate enrollment ensures that a child or youth, first and foremost, is attending school.

- After enrollment, the school must provide the student with low-cost or free medical referrals, to provide any necessary immunizations or physicals.
- Whether or not you lack stable housing, if your child lawfully begins the academic year in a school, your child has the right to finish the academic year in that school.

What about previous school records?

- If you are sending your child to a new school, the school must immediately enroll your child even if you cannot produce the previous school records, including immunizations, transcripts or transfer forms.
- It is the duty of the new school to assist in getting the records from the last school your child attended. The last school must provide these records within 10 days of the new schools request.

Transportation



- If you choose to keep your child in the same school during a period of housing instability, the school is required to inform you and your child of the availability of transportation services and provide them to you.
- Your child can remain at the same school for as long as your housing instability lasts and even after you obtain permanent housing until the end of that school year. If you live in one school district but your school is in another, both districts must work together to arrange transportation.

TIP: Transportation must be promptly arranged so tell the school as soon as you think you need help transporting your child.

- Transportation should be available for extra-curricular events and parent teacher meetings, too

In Chicago...

If your child requires transportation to attend the "school of origin", transportation by the Chicago Public Schools is provided in one of two ways:

- CTA fare cards are provided for you and your child from preschool through 6th grade
OR
- A school bus is arranged if your child is in 6th grade or lower and you:
 - work or are in job training,
 - are in school
 - are in court-ordered or DCFS-imposed services
 - must take your children to different locations
 - are not allowed to leave the shelter at those times
 - have a disability which prevents CTA travel
 - have any other good cause that prevents you from transporting your child to/from school, such as the late stages of a pregnancy or an infant and toddlers to care for.
- The parent/guardian has a right to receive CTA fare cards to attend parent/teacher meetings and to pick up report cards
- The child has a right to receive transportation to attend before/after school activities.

Fee Waivers and Supportive Services

Your child has a right to:

- Receive fee waivers for all school fees such as uniforms, books, field trip charges, graduation costs, and locker deposits
- Participate in hot meals and lunch programs
- Participate in special education, bilingual, vocational and gifted programs
- Participate in before and after school programs
- Receive counseling
- Participate in at least one hour of tutoring a week in Chicago Public Schools, or participate in any tutoring or academic support programs that a school provides

