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## Homeless Education Policy

Blue Ridge Academy is committed to ensuring that homeless students are provided equal access to the same free, appropriate public education provided to other children and youth. Homeless students will be given access to the education and other services that such students need to ensure that they have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards to which all students are held. Homeless students will not be stigmatized or segregated in a separate school or program based on the student's status as homeless.

The purpose of the Blue Ridge Academy Governing Board approving this Homeless Education Policy is to accomplish the following:

1. Define Homeless Children and Youth
2. Identify the Homeless Liaison's Responsibilities
3. Explain the Requirements for Enrollment of Homeless Children and Youth
4. Identify Enrollment Disputes and the Dispute Resolution Process
5. Define Comparable Education Services for Homeless Children and Youth

### 1. Definitions:

- ***Homeless children and youths*** means individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence and includes children and youths:
  - Who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks (not including mobile home parks), or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
  - 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;
  - Who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
  - Who are migratory children who qualify as homeless for purposes of this part because the children are living in circumstances described above.
- ***Unaccompanied youth*** includes a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.
- ***The Charter School is the school of origin*** when the student attended the Charter School when permanently housed or was last enrolled when the student became homeless. The

Charter School will not be considered the school of origin when it is contrary to the wishes of a student's parent(s) or guardian(s), or is not in the best interest of the student.

In determining the best interest of the child or youth, the School shall:

- Presume that keeping the child or youth in the school of origin is in the best interest of the child or youth, less it is contrary to the request of the child's or youth's parent or guardian, or unaccompanied youth;
- Consider student-centered factors related to the child's or youth's best interest, including factors related to the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless children and youth, giving priority to the request of the child's or youth's parent or guardian or unaccompanied youth;
- If, after conducting the best interest determination based on consideration of the presumption identified above and the student-centered factors identified above, the School determines that it is not in the child's or youth's best interest to attend the School, the School shall provide the child's or youth's parent or guardian or the unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of the reasons for its determination, in a manner and form understandable to such parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, including information regarding the right to appeal; and
- In the case of an unaccompanied youth, ensure that the School liaison assists in placement or enrollment decisions, gives priority to the views of such unaccompanied youth and provides notice to such youth of the right to appeal.

A child or youth or unaccompanied youth shall be considered homeless for as long as he/she is in a living situation described above.

**2. Homeless Liaison Responsibilities:** The Charter School's homeless liaison is required to do all of the following:

- Ensure that homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
- Ensure that homeless children and youth enroll in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in the School;
- Ensure that homeless children and youths have access to and receive educational services for which such families, children, and youth are eligible, including referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health and substance abuse services, housing services and other appropriate services;
- Ensure that the parents or guardians of homeless children and youths are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
- Ensure that enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the dispute resolution process outlined below;

- Ensure that public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youths is disseminated in locations frequented by parents or guardians, including schools, shelters, public libraries and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to the parents and guardians of homeless children and youths, and unaccompanied youths;
- Ensure that school personnel providing services participate in professional development and other technical support as determined appropriate by the State Coordinator;
- Ensure that unaccompanied youths 1) are enrolled in school; 2) have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as the State establishes for other children and youth, including implementation of procedures to identify and remove barriers that prevent youths from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school; and 3) are informed of their status as independent students and that the youths may obtain assistance from the liaison to receive verification of such status for purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

- 3. Enrollment:** All homeless students are required to follow the school's process for enrolling students, including filling out and submitting the school's enrollment packet on time. As with all students, enrollment depends upon availability. In the event of an oversubscription in a grade, homeless students will participate in the lottery as with any other student.

**I.**

**II.** If the homeless student seeking to enroll is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of residency or other documentation, this will not serve as a basis for non-enrollment. Provided that the enrollment process has been followed in all other respects, a homeless student will be enrolled in the School despite the missing paperwork. Upon enrollment, the School will contact the school last attended by the students to obtain relevant academic and other records.

**III.**

**IV.** If the student needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the School will immediately refer the parent or guardian of the student, or the unaccompanied youth, to the Homeless Liaison, who shall assist in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records.

- 4. Enrollment Disputes and the Dispute Resolution Process:** If a dispute arises over enrollment in the Charter School of a homeless student, the student will be immediately enrolled to the Charter School in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. "Enrolled" means attending classes and participating fully in school activities.\_

**V.**

**VI.** The Charter School will refer the student and/or his/her parents or guardians to the Homeless Liaison, who will carry out the dispute resolution in accordance with the process set forth below, as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the Homeless Liaison will ensure that the youth is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

**VII.**

**VIII.** Parents, guardians and unaccompanied youth may provide written or oral documentation to support their positions about enrollment and may seek assistance of social

services, advocates, and/or service providers in the dispute process.

**IX.**

**X.** The Charter School will provide the parent or guardian of the student with a written explanation of the Charter School's decision regarding enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth's appeal the decision. The written explanation will be complete, as brief as possible, simply stated and provided in a language that the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth can understand.

**XI.**

**XII.** If the dispute remains unresolved at the Charter School level or is appealed, then the Charter School Homeless Liaison will forward all written documentation and related paperwork to the homeless liaison at the county office of education (COE). The COE's homeless liaison will review these materials and determine the school selection or enrollment decision within five (5) working days of receipt of the materials. The COE homeless liaison will notify the Charter School and parent/guardian/unaccompanied youth of the decision.

**XIII.**

**XIV.** If the dispute remains unresolved at the COE level or is appealed to the State, then the COE homeless liaison will forward all written documentation and related paperwork to the State Homeless Coordinator. Upon review, the CDE will notify the parent/guardian/unaccompanied youth of the decision relating enrollment in the Charter School within ten working days of receipt of the materials.

**5. Comparable Education Services:** Each homeless student will be provided access to services comparable to services offered to other students in the Charter School, including but not limited to the following:

- Educational services for which the homeless student meets federal, state and local program eligibility criteria
- Programs in career and technical education

\*This policy was adapted from the Charter School Development Center- Homeless Youth Policy.