Awarding and Accepting Partial Credits for Students Experiencing Homelessness

DEVELOPED FOR
SchoolHouse Connection

DEVELOPED BY
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In the 2017-18 school year,

public school districts and charter schools identified over 1.5 million students experiencing homelessness, including 406,209 high school students. The current economic crisis and family stress related to the coronavirus outbreak are creating even higher levels of youth and family homelessness. These students face many challenges to accruing credits and staying on track for graduation, including:

- Frequent school transfers
  - Changing schools mid-term, before credit has been awarded
  - Changes in curriculum and graduation requirements from school to school
- Inconsistent attendance
  - Students experiencing homelessness are chronically absent from school at a rate at least twice that of the overall student population, and significantly more than their low-income, housed peers.
- Loss or destruction of educational records, and gaps in records
- Lack of support and advocacy
- Anxiety, trauma, and other mental health and physical health challenges associated with homelessness

The result of these challenges is that only 67.8% of students experiencing homelessness graduate high school on time, well below the national average of 85.3% and their low-income peers at 79.5%.

**High School Graduation Rates (2017-18 School Year)**

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<th>0%</th>
<th>25%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>75%</th>
<th>100%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless Students</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Low-income Students</strong></td>
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<td><strong>National Average</strong></td>
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**INTRODUCTION**

WWW.SCHOOLHOUSECONNECTION.ORG/AWARDING-AND-ACCEPTING-PARTIAL-CREDITS
The McKinney-Vento Act addresses the barriers to credit accrual and graduation by requiring states to have procedures to “identify and remove barriers that prevent [students experiencing homelessness] from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with State, local, and school policies.”[1] Local McKinney-Vento liaisons are required to implement those procedures.[2] Many states also have laws requiring the award of partial credits to students experiencing homelessness, those in foster care, and other students.

Ensuring that students experiencing homelessness receive partial credits has many benefits for students and schools, including:

- Prevents penalizing students for transferring schools or other challenges created by homelessness
- Prevents repeating coursework already completed
- Creates room in students’ schedules to take classes needed to meet graduation requirements and/or courses of interest to the student, keeping students engaged in school and on track to graduate.
- Increases high school graduation rates

Helping students graduate from high school also help prevent future homelessness, as the greatest single risk factor for young adult homelessness is the lack of a high school degree.[3] The following checklist is designed to help school counselors and registrars calculate, award, and receive partial credits, leading to increased high school graduation and decreased homelessness for youth. The overall process we recommend for awarding and receiving partial credits is:

- The sending school should calculate and award partial credits, placing them on the student’s transcript before sending records to the receiving school.
- If the sending school does not award partial credits prior to sending records, the receiving school should contact the sending school to start the process.
- If the sending school still does not award partial credits, the receiving school can and should award partial credits.
As you work through this checklist, keep in mind:

- Strive for equity. Fair is not always equal or the same.

- Awarding and accepting partial credits is a federal (and often state) legal requirement. Counselors, registrars, administrators, and liaisons are required to address barriers faced by students experiencing homelessness. These laws support school staff who innovate and advocate for students, even if it involves changing procedures or no longer doing things as they’ve always been done.
Immediate Enrollment

- Enroll students experiencing homelessness immediately, as required by the McKinney-Vento Act, regardless of the availability of records, proof of residency, guardianship, or other documents.[4]
- Immediately request all records from previous school, including transfer or “check out” grades and partial credits.
- If partial credits or transfer grades are missing from records, send a request to the sending school, and copy the McKinney-Vento liaison on the request. The liaison may be able to assist.
- Hold enrollment appointments with students as soon as possible (virtually if necessary), to speak with them directly about their previous courses and to outline a school enrollment history. This information will be very important if coursework, credits, and/or records are missing.
- Review students’ records and information from enrollment appointments, and strive to enroll students in equivalent courses, so they can continue earning equivalent credits. If the same course is not available, enroll students in equivalent credit types (see the Course Equivalency Table on page 11).
- If the same or equivalent courses are not available, provide students with options and support to complete partial credits, such as:
  - online course work
  - course completion packets
- In the absence of records, enroll students in classes based on graduation requirements and age-equivalent grade level courses.
- Provide teachers with students’ transfer grades. If you are unable to obtain transfer grades, allow students to “start fresh” from their first day in class.
- Check back with students after a couple of weeks to ensure course placements are working for them and are appropriate. Make adjustments as needed to meet student needs.
- If updated records arrive, and/or credits are discovered, move students into appropriate classes immediately and without penalty, regardless of drop/add deadlines.
Calculating and Awarding Partial Credit

Partial credits can be entered manually on the student’s transcript or clearly explained in notes for the receiving school. If the student is unable to enroll in an equivalent course at the new school for any reason, partial credits are essential to prevent the student from falling behind on graduation requirements. Credits are not awarded without some clear basis for the calculation, whether it is attendance, grades, or other strategies outlined below.

☐ Use a partial credit calculation formula, such as formulas used in California or Washington.
☐ A formula should not be a hard rule, but rather a guide.
☐ Use professional judgement, while always focusing on the best interest of the student.
☐ Take extenuating circumstances into account.
☐ Beware of “seat time.”
☐ If seat time is not a district requirement for all students, it should not be a requirement for students experiencing homelessness.
☐ If seat time is a district requirement for all students, it can be used to inform the amount of partial credit to award. However, tardies, absences, and missed seat time due to issues of homelessness cannot be a barrier to the student staying in school or receiving partial credits.

State and local educational agencies must review and revise policies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youths in school, including barriers to due to absences. 42 U.S.C. 11432(g)(1)(I). When students miss “seat time” due to frequent moves, lack of transportation, or physical or mental stressors of homelessness, those absences cannot impede the award of partial credits.
Award credit by exam. Many different types of exams can be used to award partial credits, such as the course mid-term or final exam, End of Course Test, state assessments, ACT, SAT, PSAT, WorkKeys, and others. Schools should develop credit by exam policies to benefit all at-risk students.

Award credit for work experience and/or community service, based on the type of experience and how it aligns with courses required for graduation, or electives.

Award credit for project-based learning, portfolios, or independent study projects that can show competency.

If the sending school will not award partial credit, the receiving school can award partial credits for work completed at the prior school. To gather information to determine appropriate credit types and amounts, use the name of the course, description, school website, consultations with counselors and/or teachers from the prior school(s), and consultation with the student and the receiving school’s counselor and/or registrar.

Award mastery of skill credits. For example, if a student passes Algebra II, but there is no record of Algebra I credit, the mastery of the skills in Algebra II content and/or assessment allows for Algebra I credit(s) to be awarded.

Look for opportunities to award multiple credits, where justified. For example, if a student completed a Food Science and Safety course, consider granting both a vocational and a lab science credit.

Be open to alternative options, using a common sense approach. For example, if a student failed or did not complete the first term of a year-long course, but the student passes the second term with a comprehensive final, the student can receive the first term credit(s).
Provide the receiving school with all the information it needs to give students all the credits they have earned.

Work with the registrar and/or database manager to enter partial credits into the student information system manually, so they appear on student transcripts. Most systems allow for manual entry or override. If it is not possible to enter partial credits in the student information system, provide detailed notes of partial credits for the receiving school.

Include with records any notes that might help the receiving school quickly and accurately enroll the student (including name and contact information for a sending school point person, in case the receiving school has questions).

Provide students a sealed (official) and unsealed (unofficial) copy of transcripts, test scores, current courses with grades (these are the transfer grades), and credit types.

Awarding Credit to International Students

If transcripts are received from a foreign school(s), enlist the help of English Language Learner (ELL) coordinators and teachers to determine equivalent courses and credit types.

Award equivalent term/year credits. For example, if the student successfully completed the first term or first year of secondary school in the home country, award all the 9th grade credits the average peer in the United States would have earned.
Accepting Partial Credits

- Honor and accept partial credits awarded by the sending school. Receiving schools do not have to offer a course at their school to give credit for it. Apply partial credits to the same or equivalent courses in your school.

- If partial credits were issued using a different credit scale (e.g., 1 credit per grading period, rather than 5 credits), convert the credits to your system. A partial credit calculator such as those used in California or Washington can help.

- At the end of the grading period, once final grades are posted, calculate the remaining partial credits after the student’s enrollment in your school. Add all grades and credits to the student’s official transcript.

- Do not add any additional requirements or criteria to honor credits earned and awarded at a prior school. For example, no additional evaluations, assessments, or proof of work, should be requested.

- Apply credits toward the requirement they were intended to meet, especially when graduation requirements vary from school to school. Do not give students elective credits for courses that are graduation requirements in the current or prior school.

- Give credit for repeated courses. If a student took and passed a course twice, the student should receive proper credit for both courses. Students should not be penalized for scheduling errors or historical record errors on the part of adults.

- Students can and should be exempted from end of year assessments if they completed a course in a prior school or district. If testing is absolutely necessary for some reason, students can take assessments even if they did not complete the course in that school or district.

- Students can be given a P (pass) grade for credit earned, to avoid awarding “unearned” letter grades or G.P.A. points.
Addressing Gaps in Enrollment

Students experiencing homelessness sometimes have gaps in their school enrollment, as the mobility and stress of homelessness may prevent them or their parents from enrolling in school immediately after moving or leaving a school, or they may confront barriers to enrollment at school, despite the McKinney-Vento Act’s requirements of immediate enrollment. When there is a gap in enrollment, records may not have been requested until after the end of a school term, and the sending school may not have awarded partial credits for the student. This gap in credits can be addressed easily by reviewing the student’s work and updating the transcript accordingly.

For Example:

A student started the school year at school A, but left school A in October. The student does not enroll in another school until starting at school B in February. School A’s academic term ended on December 20, and credits were awarded on that date. The student has no credits on her transcript, because she left the school prior to December 20.

- When school A receives the records request from school B in February, school A should go back and review the student’s attendance and grades, and manually transcribe partial credits from that term on the student’s transcript. Then, school A should send the updated transcript and other records to school B.
Course Equivalency Table

Science
- Group credits in categories, such as life science or physical science, lab or no lab.
  - Physical = earth, physics, chemistry, meteorology, astronomy, geology, forestry, conservation, natural resources management, environmental, etc.
  - Life = biology, animal science, cell biology, genetics, molecular biology, botany, microbiology, zoology, evolution, ecology, physiology, anatomy, biomedical science, other medical courses, etc.

Math
- Math often is the most difficult requirement for students who are transient to complete
- Focus on completing the required number of credits, rather than specific course names
- Award math credit in the best interest of the student and in line with the primary content of courses taken

Social Studies
- State government/history courses can transfer and are not required for every state attended. For example, if a student took Kansas state history/government and/or was assessed in that course, the student should be exempt from the equivalent class or test in other states.
- Award social studies credit for psychology, sociology, current/world events, etc.

English
- Focus on completing the required number of credits, rather than specific course names.
- If needed, award English credit for speech, debate, journalism, any communications course, reading course, writing course, etc.

Health/Physical Education (PE)
- Courses can be interchangeable to reach the required number of credits.
- Award PE and/or health credit for ROTC programs, weight lifting, wellness, nutrition, and other “activity” classes in this area, as needed.
- Dance classes can provide fine art and/or PE credit – award where needed.
Fine Arts
- Credits can be awarded for any art, music, theater/acting, drama, dance, etc.
- Credits can be awarded for any history or foundations of art class. There is no requirement that the course be performance-based.

Practical Arts
- Anything relevant to everyday living can qualify for credit. It is a very broad category.
- Award practical art credit for cooking, sewing, building, technology, business, etc.

Finance/Money Management
- Any course that addresses money management on some level can provide credits. Many business courses can meet this requirement.

General Electives
- Only classes that cannot possibly meet criteria for core requirements should be awarded elective credit.
- Every class can and should count toward credits, including duplicate courses.