**Overview**

Homelessness exists in our community. A combination of high housing costs and poverty causes many families to lose their housing. Many young people leave their homes due to abuse, neglect and family conflict. Children and youth who have lost their housing live in a variety of places, including motels, shelters, shared residences, transitional housing programs, cars, campgrounds and others. Their lack of permanent housing can lead to potentially serious physical, emotional and mental consequences. This school district will ensure that all children and youth receive a free appropriate public education and are given meaningful opportunities to succeed in our schools. This district will also follow the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.

It is the policy of our district to view children as individuals. Therefore, this policy will not refer to children as homeless; it will instead use the term “children and youth in transition.” Under federal law, children and youth in transition must have access to appropriate public education, including preschool, and be given a full opportunity to meet state and local academic achievement standards. They must be included in state- and district- wide assessments and accountability systems. Our schools will ensure that children and youth in transition are free from discrimination, segregation and harassment.

Information regarding this policy will be: distributed to all students upon enrollment and once during the school year; provided to students who seek to withdraw from school; and posted in every school in the district, as well as other places where children, youth and families in transition receive services, including family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels, campgrounds, drop-in centers, welfare departments, health departments and other social service agencies.

Students who are identified as homeless or youth in transition also need a quality education program. The standards of the district youth in transition program are:

Student Achievement:

All youth in transition students will take the state assessment(s) required for their grade level.

All youth in transition students demonstrate academic progress.

District/School Outcomes:

All children in homeless transition situations are identified.

Within one full day of an attempt to enroll in school, homeless students are in attendance.

All homeless students experience stability in school.

All homeless students receive specialized and comparable services when eligible.

All preschool-aged homeless children enroll in and attend preschool programs either in the district or community based services.

All school aged homeless children enroll in and attend school.

Collaboration Outcomes:

All parents [or persons acting as parents] of homeless children and youth are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided meaningful opportunities to participate in their children’s education.

District staff will help with the needs of all homeless children and youth through collaborative efforts within and beyond the district.

This policy is divided into the following sections:

Section 1: Definitions

Section 2: Identification

Section 3: School selection

Section 4: Enrollment

Section 5: Transportation

Section 6: Services

Section 7: Dispute and Resolution

Section 1: Definitions

*Children and youth in transition* means children and youth who are otherwise legally entitled to or eligible for a free public education, including preschool, and lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, camping grounds or trailer parks due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for, or ordinarily used, as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;

children and youth who are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting; and

migratory children and youth who are living in a situation described above.

A child or youth shall be considered to be in transition for as long as he or she is in a living situation described above. It is understood that “homelessness or youth in transition” is a temporary experience of residential loss or instability, and that this status is not a permanent or definitional label.

*Unaccompanied youth* means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who is in transition as defined above. The more general term *youth* also includes unaccompanied youth.

*Enroll* and *enrollment* means attending school and participating fully in school activities.

*Immediate* means without delay.

*Parent* means a person having legal or physical custody of a child or youth.

Sugar-Salem School District’s *“Awaiting Foster Care”* will be defined as the following:

A temporary shelter placement or shelter care order after the child/youth has been removed from home and before the child is placed in the legal custody of the Department of Health and Welfare [at the adjudicatory hearing, approximately 30 days after the child has been removed from home] ***OR***

A situation in which a child/youth is initially placed in foster care setting that cannot commit to caring for the child/youth for the duration of the foster care placement, ***OR***

A hospital or other institutional placement only when the child/youth’s release is being delayed due to a lack of placement.

The district liaison, to the extent possible, will make every effort to coordinate school placement, transportation, and other educationally related services with the Child Protection and/or Foster Care representatives.

*School of origin* means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

*District representative* is the staff person designated by our LEA and each LEA in the state as the person responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the district representative by the McKinney-Vento Act.

**Section 2: Identification**

In collaboration with school personnel and community organizations, the district representative will identify children and youth in transition in the district, both in and out of school. The district representative will train school personnel on possible indicators of homelessness, sensitivity in identifying families and youth in transition, and procedures for forwarding information indicating homelessness to the district representative. The district representative will also instruct school registrars and secretaries to inquire about possible homelessness upon the enrollment and withdrawal of every student, and to forward information indicating homelessness to the district representative. Community partners in identification may include: family and youth shelters, soup kitchens, motels, campgrounds, drop-in centers, welfare departments and other social service agencies, street outreach teams, faith-based organizations, truancy and attendance officers, local homeless coalitions and legal services.

The processes for identification and servicing youth in transition include:

Initial and Annual Enrollment Periods:

When a student enrolls in a given school answering “yes” or marking any of the following items will be considered “alerts” for school registration staff [i.e. secretary, principal, counselor, food service, transportation] to forward the registration form to the liaison for further investigation:

Living with:

one parent and another adult

a relative, friend, or adult who is not the parent or legal guardian

Resides in:

Shelter, transitional housing, foster care

More than one family in an apartment/house due to loss of housing or economic hardship

In a temporary trailer, campground, car, park, hotel, or motel

During the year:

If a student’s status was to change through out the year, the process would be the same as at the time of enrollment.

The liaison will conduct an investigation to determine if the child meets the criteria for “youth in transition” and will notify the appropriate staff of this qualification. Qualification for this program will be evaluated at least annually to determine if the child continues to meet the eligibility requirements.

The district representative will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the district, where they are living, their academic achievement (including performance on state- and district-wide assessments), and the reasons for any enrollment delays, interruptions in their education or school transfers.

Section 3: School Selection

Each child and youth in transition has the right to remain at his or her school of origin, or to attend any school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend. Maintaining a student in his or her school of origin is important for both the student and our school district. Students who change schools have been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. High mobility rates have also been shown to lower test scores for stable students. Keeping students in their schools of origin enhances their academic and social growth, while permitting our schools to benefit from the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity.

Therefore, in selecting a school, children and youth in transition shall remain at their schools of origin to the extent feasible, unless that is against the parent’s or youth’s wishes. Students may remain at their schools of origin the entire time they are in transition, and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a child or youth loses his or her housing between academic years.

Feasibility shall be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent’s or youth’s wishes. Potential feasibility considerations include:

·Safety of the student;

·Continuity of instruction;

·Likely area of family’s or youth’s future housing;

·Time remaining in the academic year;

·Anticipated length of stay in temporary living situation;

·School placement of siblings; and

·Whether the student has special needs that would render the commute harmful.

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin within the school district boundaries (see below) and services under federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.

Section 4: Enrollment

Consistent, uninterrupted education is vital for academic achievement. Due to the realities of homelessness and mobility, students in transition may not have school enrollment documents readily available. Nonetheless, the school selected for enrollment must immediately enroll any child or youth in transition. Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document normally required for enrollment, including:

·Proof of residency;

·Transcripts/school records (The enrolling school must contact the student’s previous school to obtain school records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available can be made based on the student’s age and information gathered from the student, parent and previous schools or teachers.);

·Immunizations or immunization/health/medical/physical records (If necessary, the school must refer students to the district representative to assist with obtaining immunizations and/or immunization and other medical records. Health records may often be obtained from previous schools or state registries, and school- or community-based clinics can initiate immunizations when needed.);

·Proof of guardianship;

·Birth certificate;

·Any other document requirements;

·Unpaid school fees;

·Lack of uniforms or clothing that conforms to dress codes; and

·Any factor related to the student's living situation.

Unaccompanied youth must also be immediately enrolled in school. They may either enroll themselves or be enrolled by a parent, non-parent caretaker, older sibling or district representative.

Section 5: Transportation

Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his or her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, at a parent’s request, transportation shall be provided to and from the school of origin for a child or youth in transition. Transportation shall be provided for the entire time the child or youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during the pendency of disputes. The district representative shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will only be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin based on potential harm to the student, as discussed above. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance.

Schools and the district representative shall use the district transportation form to process transportation requests. Requests shall be processed and transportation arranged without delay. If the student in transition is living and attending school in this district, this district shall arrange transportation. If the student in transition is living in this district but attending school in another, or attending school in this district but living in another, this district will follow the inter-district transportation agreement to determine who must arrange transportation. It is this district's policy that inter-district disputes shall not result in a student in transition missing school. If such a dispute arises, this district will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention of the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin upon request, children and youth in transition shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to housed students.

Section 6: Services

Children and youth in transition shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school selected, including:

·Transportation (as described above);

·Title I (as described below);

·Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria, including special education and related services and programs for English language learners;

·Vocational and technical education programs;

·Gifted and talented programs;

·School nutrition programs; and

·Before and after school programs.

The district recognizes that children and youth in transition suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability shall be given priorityand coordinated with students’ prior and subsequent schools as necessary, to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. When necessary, the district shall expeditiously designate a surrogate parent for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability. If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the enrolling school shall immediately implement it. Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use good judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal will be to avoid any disruption in appropriate services.

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child’s or youth’s living situation shall be excused. Our school district will follow state procedures to ensure that youth in transition and youth who are out of school are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. School personnel shall refer children and youth in transition to appropriate health care services, including dental and mental health services. The district representative will assist the school in making such referrals, as necessary.

School personnel must also inform parents of all educational and related opportunities available to their children and provide parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children’s education. All parent information required by any provision of this policy must be provided in a form, manner and language understandable to each parent.

Free meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day a child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student’s name to the district nutrition office for immediate processing.

Title I

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness puts students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The district shall reserve such funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title I students to children and youth in transition attending non-participating schools. The amount reserved shall be determined by a formula based upon the per-pupil Title I expenditure and developed jointly by the district representative and the Title I director. Reserved funds will be used to provide educationally related support services to children and youth in transition, both in school and outside of school, and to remove barriers that prevent regular attendance.

Our district’s Title I plan will be coordinated with our McKinney-Vento services, through collaboration between the Title I director and the district representative. Children and youth in transition shall be assessed, reported on and included in accountability systems, as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance.

Training

The district representative will conduct training and sensitivity/awareness activities for the following LEA and school staff at least once each year: principals, assistant principals, federal program administrators, school secretaries, school counselors, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, and teachers. The trainings and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with this policy, and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition.

Coordination

The district representative shall coordinate with and seek support from the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, public and private service providers in the community, housing and placement agencies, the pupil transportation department, district representatives in neighboring districts and other organizations and agencies. Coordination will include conducting outreach and training to those agencies and participating in the local continuum of care, homeless coalition, homeless steering committee, and other relevant groups. Both public and private agencies will be encouraged to support the district representative and our schools in implementing this policy.

Preschool

Preschool education is a very important element of later academic success. Children in transition have experienced many difficulties accessing preschool opportunities. To facilitate preschool enrollment and attendance, the provisions of this policy will apply to preschools. Our district will ensure that children in transition receive priority enrollment in preschool programs operated by the district, including exempting children in transition from waiting lists.

Children in transition with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Children in transition under age three will be referred for at-risk services under Part C of IDEA and screened to determine if referrals for additional Part C services are appropriate. The district representative will collaborate with Head Start and Even Start programs and other preschool programs to ensure that children in transition can access those programs.

Section 7: Disputes

Overview:

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy, the child or youth in transition shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending final resolution of the dispute. The student shall also have the rights of a student in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals and Title I services while the dispute is pending.

The school where the dispute arises shall provide the parent or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its decision and the right to appeal and shall immediately refer the parent or youth to the district representative. The district representative shall ensure the student is enrolled in the school of his or her choice and receiving other services to which he or she is entitled and shall resolve the dispute as expeditiously as possible. The parent or unaccompanied youth shall be given every opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute. The district representative shall keep records of all disputes in order to determine whether particular issues or schools are repeatedly delaying or denying the enrollment of children and youth in transition.

The parent, unaccompanied youth or school district may appeal the district representative's decision as provided in the state’s dispute resolution process.

**Resolution Procedure:**

In compliance with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Title VII, Subtitle B, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act, and Section 33-1404, Idaho Code, the following procedures are established by the Sugar Salem Joint School District Board of Trustees to promptly resolve disputes regarding the educational placement of students experiencing homelessness, and shall be implemented in all District schools.

A student is considered homeless, under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, if the student lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as outline previously in this policy.

If there is a dispute regarding the educational placement of a homeless student in a particular school, or if the District denies a child homeless status:

a. Written notice explaining such decision shall be promptly provided to the

parent/guardian of the student, or to the student, if unaccompanied by a parent/guardian. Such notice shall:

1. be in language the parent/guardian or unaccompanied student can understand,

2. include a description of how to dispute the decision, and shall include a summary of the dispute resolution process.

The District shall promptly refer the parent/guardian or unaccompanied student to the homeless liaison selected by the District, who shall carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible.

The District’s homeless liaison shall:

a. advise the parent/guardian of the student’s rights, and assist in the dispute resolution process.

b. ensure that the dispute resolution process is followed with respect to unaccompanied students.

For the duration of the dispute resolution process:

a. the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school of choice selected by the parent/guardian, or by the student, if unaccompanied by a parent/guardian.

b. the student shall receive all educational services for which he/she is eligible, such as attending classes and full participation in all school activities.

4. If agreement cannot be reached between the parties regarding the educational placement or enrollment status of the student, the District shall:

promptly seek assistance and review from the State Department of Education to determine within ten {10} business days how the student’s best interests will be served.

All interested parties will be expeditiously informed of the State’s determination in writing.

The decision of the State Department of Education shall constitute final resolution.

**References**:

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§11431 – 11436.

Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§6311 – 6315.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§1400 *et seq*.

April 6, 2002 Policy of the Child Nutrition Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

June 5, 1992 Policy of the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.