

## **Georgia Balance of State Continuum of Care Education Policy**

### **Introduction**

As part of their work, homeless service providers in the Balance of State Continuum of Care (BoS CoC) assist in rehousing individuals and families within their community while connecting participants to mainstream benefits and support services. Part of this work includes connecting families with school-aged children and unaccompanied youth with all educational opportunities available to them based on each household's particular circumstances.

### **Connections with Education Providers across the CoC**

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), as the BoS CoC Collaborative Applicant works closely with state educational representatives as partners on the State Interagency Homeless Council on Homelessness. In addition, a representative from the Department of Education is on the CoC Board of Directors, directly influencing CoC planning efforts. On a local level, the Continuum requires that each agency receiving funding, either through the Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC) or Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Programs, coordinates with local education providers to ensure that homeless families and unaccompanied youth are aware of and access the educational resources available to them. Agencies should also ensure that local education providers participate in the local homeless coalition meetings and other relevant planning and service-related activities.

### **Agency Representative(s)**

Agencies receiving CoC or ESG funding must designate a staff member to be responsible for ensuring that children and youth access appropriate education services, by being enrolled in school, early childhood programs, or other relevant education programs within the community.

Agencies must designate a staff member to be responsible for ensuring that all families who are homeless understand the implications of this policy, and their decision-making rights under it. This must be a named person, one who will meet with families, initially and as needed, to explain all resources and opportunities available to the family so that families can make informed choices.

An agency representative should maintain regular contact with local school liaisons, and other community education representatives to ensure that the agency can offer immediate and balanced services to homeless families, as well as a breadth of resources available to the family outside of those provided directly by the agency.

### Relationships with Local Homeless Liaisons

Upon intake with a family with school-aged children or upon intake with an unaccompanied youth, the agency, at a minimum, should contact the local homeless liaison access resources on their behalf. Establishing close working relationships with local education establishments within the community is a priority for homeless service providers working within the Balance of State CoC. The CoC acknowledges the significant variation in structure and processes set forth by homeless liaisons and educational entities across the 152 county CoC region and instructs homeless service providers to respect the procedures set by local education entities, including homeless liaisons.

Working relationships with homeless liaisons and other education providers should help homeless service providers identify homeless families, particularly those meeting the HUD definition of homelessness and those at risk of homelessness to ensure that homeless families access resources available to them.

### Family Choice

Within the Continuum, agencies should address families' education needs and issues and any impact that changing schools may have on a family's stability. Children should be allowed to continue enrollment in their school of origin, unless the family chooses otherwise. Specifically, agencies should make every effort to place families in temporary accommodations and permanent housing in locations within close proximity to a child's school. In addition, the agency should assist in providing transportation resources to schools and education programs as necessary. Agencies should make reasonable allowances to ensure that families are able to access all education services such as those that take place in the evenings, including, but not limited to after school programs.

### Further Agency Obligations

Homeless service providers must ensure that any agency protocols or policies do not infringe on the rights of homeless families. Further, agencies should not replace schooling for homeless families with their own services or projects. Any programs offered by an agency should be supplemental to the formal educational opportunities available to the family.

### Discrimination

Service providers must use discretion in their work with local education entities to maintain the privacy of families they assist, particularly regarding the household's housing status. Discretion is critical to avoid any undue discrimination the family may incur based on their housing status.