

#1 Enrolling in and Attending School after a Natural Disaster

Did your family have to leave your home because of damage from Hurricane Helene? Are you having a hard time enrolling your child in a new school after moving? A law called the **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act** (“McKinney-Vento”) may help you enroll your child faster.

What is McKinney-Vento?

McKinney-Vento protects homeless students so they can enroll in and attend school. Homeless students may be at a shelter, living in a doubled-up situation, or a temporary place like a car, or abandoned building. Students who left their homes because of Hurricane Helene can ask to enroll in school under McKinney-Vento. Schools must decide this on a case-by-case basis.

What are the main rights McKinney-Vento gives students affected by a natural disaster?

- **Schools must enroll students right away**, even if the student does not have all the documents they need to enroll. A school must ask the student’s previous school for records. The school cannot put off enrollment while they wait for the records.
- **Choice between home school and new school.** The student may stay at the school they attended before Helene or enroll in the school where they moved because of the storm.
 - The school must make enrollment decisions based on the student’s “best interest.” It is usually in the student’s best interest to stay at the school they attended before the storm (the “home school”). But, a school should treat a student/guardian’s preference as the most important consideration.
 - Once a school is chosen, the student has the right to stay there for the rest of the school year. Even if they find permanent housing in the attendance zone of another school or district!
- **Transportation.** After the student enrolls in a school, that school district must provide transportation. NOTE: The district does not have to provide transportation for extracurricular activities.

How do I get McKinney-Vento protections for my child?

- When you enroll your child, tell staff you believe your child can enroll under “McKinney-Vento.”
- Contact the McKinney-Vento coordinator for the school district if you need help. (See below for a listing of McKinney-Vento Coordinators)

GOLD STAR TIP If the school disagrees with your request for McKinney-Vento protections:

- They must give you a **written explanation** about why they won’t enroll your child. This explanation must include instructions about how to appeal the decision.
- The school must **enroll** your child and give **education services** during all levels of appeal.

McKinney-Vento Coordinators for Districts Impacted by Hurricane Helene

District/LEA	Name	Phone	Email
Alexander County	Jessica Anderson	828-632-7001 x205	jessanderson@alexander.k12.nc.us
Alleghany County	Melissa Fitzgerald	336-372-4345	fitzgeraldmp@alleghany.k12.nc.us
Ashe County	Jamie Little	336-246-7175	jamie.little@ashe.k12.nc.us
Buncombe County	Shannon Boyd	828-775-1898	shannon.boyd@bcsemail.org
Burke County	Dillon Sain	828-448-1156	dsain@burke.k12.nc.us
Caldwell County	Carol Sturgis	828-728-8407	csturgis@caldwellschools.com
Catawba County	Maria Ballard	828-464-8333	Maria_Ballard@catawbасchools.net
Clay County	Terri Hager	828-389-8586	thager@clayschools.org
Cleveland County	Sandy Hamrick	704-476-8000	smhamrick@clevelandcountyschools.org
Gaston County	Justine Bartlett	704-866-6236	jhbartlett@gaston.k12.nc.us
Haywood County	Graham Haynes	828-456-2400	ghaynes@haywood.k12.nc.us

McKinney-Vento Coordinators, continued

District/LEA	Name	Phone	Email
Henderson County	Shannon Auten	828-697-4733	scauten@hcpsnc.org
Jackson County	Laura Dills	828-586-2311 x1950	ldills@jcpsmail.org
Lincoln County	Kennan Eaddy	704-732-2261	kennan.eaddy@lincoln.k12.nc.us
Macon County	Annie Wishon	828-421-0324	annie.wishon@macon.k12.nc.us
Madison County	Marshay Huskins	828-649-9276	mhuskins@madisonk12.net
McDowell County	Ashley McCartha	828-652-4535	ashley.mccartha@mcdowell.k12.nc.us
Mitchell County	Paula Holder	828-766-3358	pholder@mhslive.net
Polk County	Linley Foster	828-894-3051	lfoster@polkschools.org
Rutherford County	Karen Davis	828-288-2360	kdavis@rcsnc.org
Transylvania County	Courtney Owen	828-884-6173	courtneyo@tcsnc.org
Watauga County	Lauren Carter	828-963-4712	carterla@wataugaschools.org
Wilkes County	April Marr	336-667-1121	marra@wilkes.k12.nc.us
Yancey County	Kristin Buchanan	828-682-6101 x319	kamayberry@yanceync.net

If the district in which you are trying to enroll a student is not on this list:

- Check: <https://hepnc.uncg.edu/local-liaisons/>
- Call the district's main office and ask to speak to the McKinney-Vento Coordinator
- Call the state office at 1-800-659-3204 to ask for help finding a local contact

School calendar and testing changes related to Helene

Many schools may shut down for days or weeks. The Department of Public Instruction will make the decision about school calendar flexibility in the wake of Helene. Usually schools are able to excuse up to 20 days of missed instruction, but more could be granted. Contact your school to find out how they are handling student absences and testing.

#2 Address School-Based Emotional or Academic Impacts of the Disaster

Students may be traumatized from losing their home or seeing their friends or family lose their homes during a natural disaster. Students experiencing trauma may have trouble concentrating, participating, or behaving at school. If your child is having struggles in school after the hurricane, you could ask for a meeting to talk about getting support through a school-based plan. Some examples of school-based plans include:

- **Multi-Tiered System of Supports** (“MTSS”). An intervention plan that starts with whole-classroom interventions, followed by individual student supports. A student does not need to have a disability.
- **Section 504 Plan**. A plan that helps remove disability-related challenges that make it harder for a student to take part in and learn at school. Examples of accommodations that students could receive include: extra time on tests and assignments, modified schedules, quiet spaces, etc.
- **Individualized Education Program** (“IEP”). A holistic plan for students with disabilities, including emotional disabilities such as PTSD, who need specialized instruction. IEPs include accommodations, specially designed instruction, and services (such as occupational therapy or counseling) to address a student’s disability-related needs. IEPs have the highest level of protections and support for students

The Right to Education Project of Legal Aid of North Carolina

www.legalaidnc.org/education

You may want to contact a lawyer if a school refuses to enroll your child or doesn't give necessary school-based supports. The information included here is not legal advice and does not cover all rights, remedies, and does not apply to every situation.