

HOW TO DECIDE WHERE TO SEND YOUR CHILDREN TO SCHOOL

These guidelines are meant to help you decide where your children should go to school. Sometimes it makes sense to transfer schools. Other times, it's better to stay. Every family is different, and there is a lot to think about. But answering these questions now will help your children get a better education.

- **Children have the right to attend the local school in the school district where the shelter is or continue to go to their previous school, called the school of origin.**
 - **What is “school of origin”?** School of origin is the school your child was attending before the family became homeless. It is usually the school the child attended right before the family entered the shelter system. But in some cases the school of origin can be the school the child attended at an earlier time. For example, the school the child attended when the family lived in permanent housing, before moving and doubling up with family members or friends could be the school of origin.
- **Do you like the school of origin? Why or why not?**
 - **Do you like your children’s teachers?** Other than yourself, your children’s teachers usually are the most important factor in your children’s education. Do they give challenging work to your children? Do they provide help when your children are having difficulty? Do they tell you when your children are having trouble in the classroom or talk to you about what can be done to improve the situation?
 - **Do you like the subjects, teaching methods, and extra-help programs?** If your children are doing well, you may not want to change schools because the same programs and resources may not be available at the new school. On the other hand, if your children have continually done poorly in school, this may be an opportunity to find a more appropriate program at another school.
 - **Are there special classes or after-school programs that your children like? (For example, drama or sports.)** These programs can be very important to children because they can help children build friendships and make children more interested in school. However, not all schools have the same programs or resources. By transferring schools, your children may not be able to continue to participate in such activities.
 - **Do your children generally get along with the other students in their school? Do they have close friends?** If your children go to a new school, they may feel lonely because they are separated from their old neighborhood and from their friends. If children continue to attend the school of origin, they may feel better and do better in school because they can continue to be around their friends even though they are no longer living in the community.

- **Do you like the community where the school is located?** Many families have strong ties in their neighborhoods. If the child continues to attend the school of origin, the child has a better chance of continuing visits to friends and family members in the community and may feel less upset about the family's move.
- **Do your children like their schools?** It is important to talk to your children about how they feel about their schools and neighborhood. If your children have found strong friendships and relationships, you should try to make sure they are not disrupted more than they have to be. This will help your children deal with the difficulties of living in a shelter—at least they get to be with their friends and teachers they know. It will also help you as a parent because your children will have important support outside of the family that may relieve some of the stress you are feeling from your children.
 - **Do your children have friends at their schools of origin? Who do your children play with in school and after school?**
 - **Do your children like their teachers at the school of origin?**
 - **Do your children like the programs they participate in while in school and after school?**
 - **Do your children have friends or family in the community? How would your children feel if they couldn't see these people often?**

OTHER ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- **Distance.** Traveling a long time to and from school can be very tiring. If it takes too long to get to school, your children may miss early periods or be too tired to pay attention in class. If they are too young to go by themselves, you will have to take them to school, so be honest with yourself about whether you can or want to travel long distances every day. Bus or train fare shouldn't be an issue: If you are on public assistance, you are entitled to a transportation grant that should cover the cost of taking your children to and from school on public transportation.
- **How long you will be in a shelter.** You must be realistic about how long your family may be in the shelter system when making decisions about schools. The average stay in the shelter system is 10 months, but it could be longer. This fact may make you want to switch schools, to cut down on distance. However, most families will move to a Tier II shelter before getting permanent housing, so if you want your children to transfer schools, it may make more sense to wait until you have moved to a Tier II shelter.
- **Special Education.** Are your children getting special education services? Do you like the services they are getting? It takes time to transfer services from one district to another, so if you change your children's schools, the services may take a while to catch up.

**If you have any questions, please call Kristen Woolf
at The Partnership for the Homeless
1-800-235-3444, ext. 135.**