



News

MCS serves homeless

Nehring: Family services, district 'work very well together'

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The Marion Community Schools board began reviewing a policy for the services and enrollment of homeless students in the district as a legal requirement and to avoid any possible confusion in the future.

Family Services Society Inc. Coordinator of Social Services and Education Barb Nehring said homelessness in the area has grown over the years because of the ailing economy. She said more children are affected in the MCS district than the others in the county, but added that there are also more students in the district.

At the time of press no statistics on the amount of homeless students in the district could be provided. Superintendent Steve Edwards said it is hard to determine exact numbers because living conditions for a student can change over the duration of the school year.

"I can tell you, even though I don't know the number we are serving homeless children," Edwards said Wednesday night.

According to the first draft of the policy read at the Wednesday night board meeting homeless children do not only have to be living on the streets to be considered homeless. Homelessness also includes living in or awaiting foster care or being doubled up with family or friends for lack of better conditions. Living in cars, trailers, motels and abandoned buildings for the same reasons are also considered being homeless according to the policy.

"It's not always living under a bridge or on a street corner," Nehring said.

The classifications of a homeless student in the MCS policy closely resemble the classifications provided by the Indiana Department of Education.

If a student is classified as homeless by the above conditions the student is given several rights. A student is able to remain in the district of origin or of temporary residence as a student. The student doesn't need to provide medical, immunization or similar records. Title I, transportation and other services are also available to the students, according to the first draft policy.

Nehring said these additional services which are provided by family services and the district include providing meals and immunizations, helping them obtain the proper uniforms required by MCS and payment of field trips.

Edwards said policies like the one read to the board on Wednesday night have been followed in the past. But, by adopting a policy there can't be any confusion on enrollment and provided services to a homeless student in the future.

Nehring said there has always been a strong working relationship between family services and the district.

"We work very well together," she said. "We get a pretty good grip on things."

The first draft policy provided to the board closely resembles the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act which was established in 1986 to provide federal money for the homeless. The goal is to help ensure the enrollment, success and attendance of homeless children, according to the IDOE.

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