

Guidance for Ohio Schools Receiving Puerto Rican Students Displaced by Storms



Overview

The devastating effects of Hurricane Maria led to an increase in the number of students and families relocating to Ohio from Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and other areas. A report from the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at the City University of New York¹ estimates that Ohio will be one of the top 10 states to receive displaced Puerto Rican migrants, and nearly 30,000 people could migrate to Ohio over the next three years. Some of these displaced students may remain in Ohio permanently and work toward a high school diploma. Others may stay temporarily and return home to complete their education. Either case has significant implications for Ohio schools. This document responds to questions the Department has received about students affected by the storms, providing guidance and resources for districts and community schools enrolling displaced students.

General Information

Districts should serve displaced students like any other students. Students coming into districts or community schools because of these disasters may come without their parents or guardians, documents, records, paperwork and other items typically required for enrollment in the school. **These students must be enrolled immediately despite the lack of records and documents.** Districts and schools should provide them with all services outlined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, a federal law that addresses the educational rights of students in temporary living situations. These should include nutrition, educational support (Title I) and transportation services, if applicable.

The Department encourages districts to be proactive in providing services and supports for displaced students and families. It's important to have systems and procedures in place to ensure seamless collaboration within the district and with community partners. Districts should reach out to faith-based organizations, local job and family services agencies, housing agencies and other community partners to be prepared to connect families to services promptly. Given the three-year projection for the influx of this population, all school districts should be prepared to address this concern.

¹ *Estimates of Post-Hurricane Maria Exodus from Puerto Rico*. Research brief from the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at the City University of New York. Issued October 2017. Centro RB2017-01:
https://centrop.r.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/RB2017-01-POST-MARIA%20EXODUS_V3.pdf

McKinney-Vento Act. The students from Puerto Rico displaced by the hurricane are likely to be protected under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. The definition of *homelessness* covers children and youth who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. This includes those living with friends or family due to loss of housing, those living in motels or hotels, and those living in shelters, vehicles, substandard housing or other temporary arrangements. Many of the children and youth are unaccompanied, meaning they are not in the physical custody of their parents or legal guardians and are temporarily housed in Ohio. Districts must make eligibility determinations for these students on a case-by-case basis. The McKinney-Vento Act allows students in temporary living situations to enroll immediately in schools in the districts where they are temporarily living, even if they have missed application or enrollment deadlines.

Additional guidance:

- [Meeting the Educational Needs of Students Displaced by Disasters: Youth on Their Own](#);
- [What Relief Agencies Should Know About the Educational Rights of Children Displaced by Disasters](#);
- [What School District Administrators Should Know About the Educational Rights of Children Displaced by Disasters](#);
- [School Help for Homeless Children with Disabilities: Information for Parents](#).

Title I Services. In addition to the immediate enrollment requirement, these students are entitled to Title I services and supports. Districts may use Title I Part A set-aside funds for services not ordinarily provided by Title I, including school supplies, school clothing, eyeglasses, fees associated with getting a birth certificate, and counseling to address issues, including those related to exposure to traumatic events that affect learning. Districts also may use set-aside funds to cover the liaison and excess costs related to transportation needs.

Nutrition Services. Students in temporary housing situations are automatically eligible to receive free school meals. Students do not need to complete applications to receive free meals.

Community Agencies. Districts should connect with outside agencies to support the needs of these students.

Migrant Student Information and Resources. School districts, community schools and educational service centers must attempt to locate and identify families who are eligible for migrant services during the process of enrolling displaced students. To do so, they should contact the Office of Migrant Education, Fremont, Ohio, (419) 332-6007, or fill out the Migrant Education Program lead form found under the Recruitment tab at <http://omec.nwoesc.org/>.

A child is a “migratory child” if the child is not older than 21 years of age and:

- Is entitled to a free public education (through grade 12) under state law; or
- Is not yet at a grade level at which the local education agency provides a free public education and the child made a qualifying move in the preceding 36 months as a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher, or did so with (or to join) a parent/guardian or spouse who is a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher, and the child moved due to economic necessity from one residence to another residence and from one school district to another.

A “migratory agricultural worker” is a person who, in the prior 36 months, made a qualifying move and, after doing so, engaged in new temporary or seasonal employment or personal subsistence in agriculture. (This may be dairy work or the initial processing of raw agricultural products.) An individual who did not experience this type of new employment soon after a qualifying move still may be considered a “migratory agricultural worker” if the individual actively sought such new employment and has a recent history of moves for temporary or seasonal agricultural employment.

Social Emotional Resources. In most cases, students’ lives will change greatly when they relocate to Ohio. This can have significant social and emotional effects on these children. Districts and community schools need to be sensitive to the trauma these students may be experiencing. Schools enrolling students in need of social and emotional support should consider using these resources:

- [Ohio Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports \(PBIS\)](#);
- [Tips for Talking with and Helping children and Youth Cope after a Disaster or Traumatic Event: A Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers](#);
- [How to Talk about Puerto Rico with Your Students](#);
- [Coping with a Disaster or Traumatic Event](#).

Identifying Displaced Students as Immigrants and English Learners: According to the federal definition of Immigrant Children and Youth, students from Puerto Rico are not considered “immigrant” students, despite their recent arrival to the mainland United States. However, these students could be considered English learners (EL) and their enrollment could contribute to a district’s or community school’s Title III allocation.

Like all new students enrolling in a district, these students must be screened as potential English learners. The Department provides [Guidelines for the Identification for English Learners](#) to support schools through the home language usage survey and English language proficiency screener. Lacking English learner identification records for these students, districts can administer the identification process, remembering the obligation to take affirmative steps to address language barriers so English learner students can participate meaningfully in schools’ educational programs. Districts also must inform and consult parents and guardians about the English learner identification.

Schools must design their English learner programs and services to enable English learners to attain both English proficiency and equal participation in the standard instructional program within a reasonable length of time. The U.S. Department of Education’s [English Learner Tool Kit](#) offers guidance and practical resources to help schools meet their legal obligations to English learners and provide them with the supports they need to attain English language proficiency while meeting college and career readiness standards.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) specialists who work with English learners displaced by disasters should know and collaborate with their districts’ homeless education liaisons to ensure more seamless services for vulnerable English-learning youth. For answers to questions about English learners, contact the Ohio Department of Education’s [Lau Resource Center](#) at (614) 466-5970 or lau@education.ohio.gov.

Accountability for Displaced Students. Ohio developed a series of [“Where Kids Count” business rules](#) to determine whether a student should be included at the building, district or state level for accountability purposes. In cases where two or more districts or schools share a student, the systemwide rules serve as filters to determine which building and district (if any) should be accountable for a student’s data.

Placement of Displaced Students

[Ohio law](#) states district policies for incoming students must include the requirement to accept the grade placement and credits the student may already have from any Ohio or out-of-state school. The receiving school must determine where the student’s learning falls in the local curriculum. It should award credit based on the student’s demonstration of the learning. This may include adding courses or credit to a student’s transcript that the student would have earned if he or she had been enrolled in that district. The Ohio Department of Education recommends that the transcript indicate where the learning took place, even if that educational institution did not award the credit.

Districts should follow their local policies for determining placement of incoming students. This may include interpreting existing formal transcripts, doing diagnostic or placement testing or, lacking student records, interpreting report cards and communication provided by the previous school, student or family.

Please note: Currently, once the district establishes a cohort for a student, it cannot be changed.

Resources for Transfer Students without Records.

The Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Education, Julia Keleher, reported that the agency is preparing a mechanism for sending transcripts for students who, following the storm, have made the decision to leave the island.

This mechanism, a web portal, will expedite the exchange of information to help receiving districts better support students in their new schools. A student's parent or guardian or the receiving educational institution may initiate the records request. This portal soon will be open.

Click [here](#) for more information regarding the web portal and to check for updates.

Click [here](#) for a list of schools in Puerto Rico that have reopened.

Testing Requirements

Districts and schools must administer Ohio's State Tests to all enrolled students. The following resources are available for displaced students who must take the tests.

Ohio's State Tests:

If students are identified as English learners, apply the provisions for English learners described in the [Ohio State Tests Rules Book](#) (pp. 44-46). Practice test resources are available for all tested subjects and grade levels. Access those [here](#).

Assessment Accommodations:

[Ohio's Accessibility Manual](#) lists accommodations and supports available to English learners and students with disabilities.

Graduation Requirements

To earn their high school diplomas, students in Ohio's class of 2018 and beyond must satisfy the [state minimum curriculum requirements](#), plus any local requirements, and satisfy the requirements of one of three pathways to graduation:

1. Earn [18 graduation points](#) on Ohio's State Tests;
2. Earn an [industry-recognized credential](#) or group of credentials totaling 12 points and a cumulative score of 13 on the WorkKeys test; or
3. Earn [remediation-free scores](#) in math and English language arts on the ACT or SAT.

Additional Options for the Class of 2018

State law authorized two new graduation options for the class of 2018 only. [Find more information here.](#)

Out-of-State Transfer Students

Students transferring to Ohio who will use the Ohio State Tests pathway to graduation may be eligible to have their required number of graduation points reduced. Find guidance on the testing requirements for out-of-state transfer students [here](#). In the absence of transcripts, districts should follow the guidance provided above for determining placement and awarding credit.

- [Graduation Requirements for the Class of 2018](#) (available [in Spanish](#));
- [Graduation Requirements for the Class of 2019 and beyond](#) (available [in Spanish](#));
- [Graduation Questions and Answers](#).

Transfer students and the New Graduation Options for the Class of 2018

Transfer students who entered grade nine between July 1, 2014, and June 30, 2015, and have not otherwise met the graduation requirements outlined in the [transfer student guidance](#) may use the new graduation options. These students must take all required Ohio's State Tests outlined in the transfer student guidance

found [here](#). They must retake any required math or English language arts state tests on which they scored a 1 or 2.

Example:

Based on an out-of-state transfer student’s prior completed courses, a district has determined the student must take three tests – English language arts II, geometry, and American government – and earn eight graduation points, five of which must come from English language arts II and geometry. If the student does not earn the required eight graduation points, the student must retake the English language arts II and geometry tests for which they scored a one or two to utilize the new graduation options.

Other Considerations

In cases where students are placed in a district for a short period and plan to return home to earn their diplomas, districts may continue to help these students meet graduation requirements outlined for students in Puerto Rico. These students will not earn Ohio diplomas, but they can stay on track to earn diplomas if or when they return home. This could be a viable option for students who are placed in grades 9, 10 and possibly 11.

Please note: If a student is enrolled in a tested course, a district must administer the corresponding state test to that student, regardless of his or her intent to earn an Ohio diploma.

Additional Resources

[FEMA Updates on Hurricane Maria](#). This is the main page for updated resources and information on the federal response to Hurricane Maria.

[How Can You Help Hurricane Victims in Puerto Rico](#). Almost all of Puerto Rico’s 3.4 million residents need help recovering from the storm. Here’s how you can help.

The [National Center for Homeless Education](#) offers resources for schools to help them comply with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requirements for students displaced by natural disasters. The act requires all public schools to enroll eligible students immediately, assess their needs, and provide or refer them to additional services as needed.

For answers to questions, contact Susannah Wayland in the Ohio Department of Education’s Office of Improvement and Innovation at (614) 387-7725 or at Susannah.Wayland@education.ohio.gov.

Additional Department Contacts

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