




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner of Education 

DATE: August 22, 2017

SUBJECT: Guidance for Connecticut School Districts: Enrollment Process and Practice

The beginning of the school year is a busy time for school districts. The enrollment of first time students, collection of information concerning new students and returning students whose living arrangements may have changed, and similar tasks require a substantial commitment of resources. In preparation for the start of school, I want to remind all districts of the expectation created by federal and state law that all students – including students from other countries and homeless students – should be enrolled promptly, without having to answer questions, or provide documents, that are unnecessary for confirming residency in the district or age.

To support districts in their efforts to fulfill this important duty, I am pleased to offer the attached *Guidance for Connecticut School Districts: Enrollment Process and Practice*, which was prepared by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) after receiving input concerning enrollment issues from stakeholders, including the Office of the Child Advocate, Superintendents, and attorneys who represent school districts. I want to highlight certain key points covered by the *Guidance* and the accompanying federal guidance materials:

- While CSDE understands that school districts today operate under various data reporting obligations requiring them to collect additional information from families, this additional data collection should occur in a separate interaction *after* the student's parent/guardian has provided the limited information necessary for enrollment, though both may be completed in one visit. The *Guidance* and accompanying federal guidance materials offer suggestions on how to accomplish both goals in a lawful and effective way.
- As indicated in the enclosed 2014 “Dear Colleague” letter from the United States Departments of Justice and Education, school districts should, during the enrollment process, refrain from asking for information concerning citizenship and immigration status. Asking for this information when a family is seeking to enroll a child in school may have the unintended effect of discouraging the enrollment of immigrant children. The central legal principle explained in this letter is that “the undocumented or non-citizen status of a student (or his or her parent or guardian) is irrelevant to that student’s entitlement to an elementary and secondary public education.”
- Another federal law which directly affects the enrollment process is the McKinney-Vento Act. This law contains special protections for homeless students and may excuse a homeless child from providing documents that may be lawfully required of other students in connection with the enrollment process.

- Under Connecticut law, a child under the age of twenty-one who is not a high school graduate is entitled to attend the public schools in the district where the child resides.

CSDE offers the attached materials to help districts implement the enrollment process in a manner consistent with the law. Given governing law, we suggest that when enrolling students, districts: (a) focus on obtaining the limited information which is necessary to establish residency in the district and age; (b) take care not to require information which would discourage parents from seeking to enroll their children; and (c) admit the student to school when information which establishes residency is received.

The collection of additional information may, of course, occur, but it should not interfere with the process of enrolling the child and his/her attendance at school.

I hope these materials will assist you in approaching the enrollment process in a manner that will allow you to admit students without unnecessary delay and avoid possible violations of law. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Attorney Louis Todisco of the CSDE Legal Affairs office at (860) 713-6594 or Louis.Todisco@ct.gov.

DRW:lbt

cc: Ellen Cohn, Deputy Commissioner of Education
Peter M. Haberlandt, Director of Legal Affairs
Charlene Russell-Tucker, Chief Operating Officer
Desi Nesmith, Chief Turnaround Officer
Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer
Dr. Adrian Wood, Title IX Coordinator/Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator
Louis Todisco, Attorney
Louis B. Tallarita, Education Consultant

Attachments