



California Early Care and Education Resource Guide

Access to quality early care and education (ECE) programs helps both the child and the family by addressing the developmental needs of the child and enabling parents to focus on education or employment while their child is cared for. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires local educational agency (LEA) homeless liaisons to refer families experiencing homelessness to housing and other appropriate services and to ensure that these families and their children have access to Head Start, Early Head Start, early intervention, and other preschool programming administered by the LEA. This resource aims to help California (CA) County Office of Education (COE) and LEA homeless liaisons understand their local ECE landscape and how to connect families experiencing homelessness to ECE programming.

Getting to Know ECE Program Options

The ECE system includes public and private childcare and preschool centers, school-based programs, and home-based programs. Local federally and state funded ECE program options may include:

- **Child care subsidy programs:** The federally-funded [Child Care and Development Fund \(CCDF\) program](#) assists low-income families who are working or participating in education and training by helping them pay for child care via subsidy payments. CCDF serves families with children younger than 13 years or through age 18 if the child is mentally or physically incapable of self-care or is under court supervision. In addition to CCDF, the CA Department of Education and the CA Department of Social Services administer a [variety of subsidy-based programs](#) that blend federal and state funds to provide low- or no-cost access to ECE for low-income families.
- **Head Start and Early Head Start (HS/EHS):** Federally-funded HS/EHS programs are free programs designed to promote school readiness for children from low-income families. EHS serves pregnant women and families with children under age three. HS programs serve children between three and five years old.
- **Early intervention** (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], Part C): The [Early Start program](#) is CA's early intervention program for infants and toddlers birth through 36 months with disabilities and their families. Early Start services are available statewide and are provided in a coordinated, family-centered system.

- **CA State Preschool Program (CSPP):** CSPP is a state-funded program that offers part- or full-day developmentally appropriate preschool instruction for eligible three- and four-year-old children. The program also provides meals and snacks to children, parent education, and referrals to health and social services for families. CSPP is administered through LEAs, colleges, community action agencies, and private nonprofits.
- **Transitional Kindergarten (TK):** TK is a state-funded program that serves as the bridge between preschool and kindergarten for CA children by blending social and emotional experiences with academic learning. TK is offered by CA public (and some non-public) schools and is available for children whose fifth birthdays are between September 2nd and December 2nd of the school year. In 2021, [Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill \(AB\) 130](#), which will expand TK availability to all CA 4-year-olds by the 2025-26 school year.

Families experiencing homelessness are categorically eligible for, prioritized for program enrollment in, and/or eligible for transportation to and from many ECE programs. Learn more from the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) in its [Early Care and Education for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness](#) issue brief or by speaking with the local ECE provider.

Connecting Families to ECE Programs

Child Care Resource & Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) help families by providing information about the availability of child care and other community resources in their area. CCR&Rs are available in all 58 CA counties. [Find your local CCR&R.](#)

While CCR&Rs help connect families to a variety of ECE programs, COE and LEA liaisons may want to be aware of the following ECE program contact information webpages.

- [CA Department of Social Services: Find Childcare](#)
- [CA county HS agency list](#) or [HS/EHS Center Locator](#)
- [Regional Center Early Start Intake and Family Resource Centers](#)
- Early Start Baby Line: 800-515-BABY (800-515-2229) or earlystart@dds.ca.gov

Liaisons also may want to connect with their COE or LEA ECE director to learn more about local ECE programming and supports for families experiencing homelessness.

CCR&Rs



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[Find your local CCR&R](#)