

Local Educational Agencies' Guidance for Completing the Housing Questionnaire

The California Department of Education (CDE) provides California local educational agencies (LEAs) with a model housing questionnaire that can be used as part of LEA enrollment processes to identify children and youth experiencing homelessness, as required under California *Education Code (EC)* Section 48851(b). This guidance provides additional information about the housing questionnaire and should be used to train and support staff with its implementation.

Purpose of a Housing Questionnaire

Identifying children and youth experiencing homelessness is an important first step to ensure that these children and youth have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youth. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) and California *Education Code* require that LEAs ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies (42 United States Code [42 U.S.C.] Section 11432[g][6][A][i]; California *EC* Section 48851.5). In keeping with longstanding best practice, effective January 1, 2023, California *Education Code* requires all California LEAs—defined as county offices of education (COEs), school districts, and charter schools—to administer a housing questionnaire at least annually (California *EC* Section 48851[b]).

Who Should Complete the Housing Questionnaire?

Every student, preschool through grade twelve, should complete the housing questionnaire, at least annually, upon enrollment. The housing questionnaire can be completed by the child's parent/guardian, caregiver, or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, by the student directly. If needed, the homeless liaison should be available to assist. Preschool programs include any LEA-administered, LEA-funded, and state preschool program, such as Head Start.

Information Sharing

Please inform parents/guardians, caregivers, and unaccompanied youth that this information will be kept confidential and will only be shared with those LEA/school staff that are responsible for providing services to the student and their families, as well as those staff responsible for keeping track of how many homeless students are identified in the LEA.

LEAs may share this information to LEA/school staff such as:

- Homeless liaisons
- Enrollment staff or registrars
- Student's teachers
- Guidance counselors
- Staff members that are responsible for reporting student-level data

Language about housing questionnaire confidentiality is included in the CDE model housing questionnaire and should be included in all housing questionnaires used by California LEAs. Housing questionnaires and/or the information collected via the questionnaire should not be a part of a student's permanent record, such as a cumulative folder.

Discussing the Housing Questionnaire with Students and Families

In reviewing the housing questionnaire with parents/guardians, caregivers, and unaccompanied youth, LEAs should emphasize that the purpose of gathering this information is to ensure that children and youth who are experiencing homelessness are provided the rights and services to which they are entitled to under the McKinney-Vento Act. These rights may include:

- Immediate enrollment in the school they last attended (school of origin) or the local school where they are currently staying, even if you do not have all the documents normally required at the time of enrollment.
- Continue to attend their school of origin, if requested by you and it is in the best interest.
- Receive transportation to and from their school of origin, the same special programs and services, if needed, as provided to all other children, including free meals and Title I.
- Receive the full protections and services provided under all federal and state laws, as it relates to homeless children, youth, and their families.

It is also important for the LEA to explain that the information provided on the housing questionnaire should be accurate and true. Verification of the information provided on the housing questionnaire usually is not necessary. School districts must enroll students experiencing homelessness in school immediately, even when documentation normally required for enrollment is not available, including proof of residence, proof of guardianship, birth certificates, medical records or immunizations, previous academic records, etc.

Completing the Housing Questionnaire

If the parents/guardians, caregivers, and unaccompanied youth enrolling in school indicates that the student is living in one of the four categories (sheltered, doubled-up, unsheltered, or motel/hotel), the school/school district does not need to have proof that verifies their living arrangement. However, it is important that the school/school district have some sort of contact information for the parent/guardian, caregiver, or unaccompanied youth, especially for emergency situations.

The federal McKinney-Vento Act and California *Education Code* require that LEAs ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies (42 U.S.C. Section 11432[g][6][A][i]; California *EC* Section 48851.5). Federal and state law also require that LEAs ensure that children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness have access to and receive preschool services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, early intervention, and other preschool programs administered by the LEA (42 U.S.C. Section 11432[g][6][A][iii]; California *EC* Section 48850[a]). To ensure that preschool-age children experiencing homelessness are identified by schools, it is essential that LEAs and schools ask parents, guardians, caregivers, and unaccompanied youth to include preschool-aged children under their care on the housing questionnaire.

If you have any questions regarding this subject, please contact the California Department of Education's Homeless Education Program within the Integrated Student Support and Programs Office by phone at 866-856-8214 or by email at HOMELESSED@cde.ca.gov.