



A Guide to the Homeless Liaison Role in California: Legal Guidelines and Implementation Strategies

This California Homeless Education Technical Assistance Center (HETAC) resource

- outlines the responsibilities of local educational agency (LEA) homeless liaisons and LEAs under federal education statute and California Education Code,
- highlights additional responsibilities specific to the role of the county office of education (COE) liaison, and
- recommends strategies for implementing these responsibilities effectively.

This resource was developed in partnership by the California HETAC and SchoolHouse Connection.

Context

Homeless education liaisons (hereafter *liaisons*) play a vital role in the identification and support of students experiencing homelessness, enabling them to fully participate and succeed in school. Under the federal [Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#) (hereafter *McKinney-Vento Act*), all local educational agencies (LEAs) must designate an appropriate staff person to serve as the [LEA liaison](#) [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)]. This person must be able to carry out the [liaison duties required by law](#) [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)].

In addition to fulfilling statutorily required liaison duties, homeless liaisons often oversee the implementation of broader LEA homeless education responsibilities. This California Homeless Education Technical Assistance Center (HETAC) guide outlines the responsibilities of homeless liaisons and LEAs under federal education statute and California Education Code and recommends strategies for implementing these responsibilities effectively.

California County Offices of Education

In California, an LEA is defined as a school district, county office of education (COE), nonprofit charter school, or a special education local plan area [Cal. Educ. Code § 56026.3]. Given the inclusion of COEs in the definition of *LEA*, and the important intermediary role COEs play in a state the size of California, COEs must appoint a [COE homeless liaison](#). COE liaisons fulfill responsibilities specific to their location within a COE in addition to those required of school district liaisons. See the [Additional COE Liaison Responsibilities and Implementation Strategies](#) section below.

Homeless Liaison and LEA Responsibilities and Implementation Strategies

The table below outlines the responsibilities of homeless liaisons and LEAs (as often overseen by the homeless liaison), and strategies for their implementation.

Homeless Liaison and LEA Responsibilities	Strategies for Implementation
Identification Liaisons shall ensure that homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administer a housing questionnaire to all LEA students annually to ensure the identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

<p>through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(i); Cal. Educ. Code § 48851(a)]. LEAs shall administer a housing questionnaire annually to all parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth within the LEA for purposes of identifying homeless children and youth, including unaccompanied youth (Cal. Educ. Code § 48851).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Become familiar with various identification tools (see below) and share them within the LEA to ensure all staff are informed about potential indicators of homelessness, the educational rights and supports available to students experiencing homelessness, and next steps to take if they believe a student may be experiencing homelessness. ● Identification resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HETAC: Identification webpage ○ SchoolHouse Connection: Tools to Identify Students Experiencing Homelessness
<p style="text-align: center;">Enrollment</p> <p>Liaisons shall ensure that homeless children and youth are enrolled in school immediately, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in schools within the LEA [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(C); 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(ii); Cal. Educ. Code § 48850(3)(A)].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure all schools within the LEA are informed about the rights of students experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act, including immediate enrollment. ● Ensure enrolling schools within the LEA contact students’ previous schools to ensure the smooth transfer of academic records. ● Support LEA and school staff in understanding the intersection between The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the McKinney-Vento Act as it relates to access to and the transfer of academic records. ● Assist children and youth experiencing homelessness with obtaining needed immunizations, screenings, or immunization or other required health records requested as part of school enrollment, while ensuring immediate enrollment as immunizations or records are obtained.
<p style="text-align: center;">Referrals for Early Childhood</p> <p>Liaisons shall ensure that homeless children, youth, and families have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible, including services through Head Start programs (including Early Head Start programs), early intervention services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and other LEA-administered preschool programs [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(iii)].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify early childhood contacts and partners to ensure seamless referrals and provision of services. ● Develop and implement a process for asking students and families with school-aged children if there are preschool-aged children in the household. ● Become familiar with local early childhood program options.
<p style="text-align: center;">Referrals for Health, Housing, and Other Services</p> <p>Liaisons shall ensure that homeless children, youth, and families receive referrals to health</p>	<p>Identify local contacts and partners to ensure seamless referrals and provision of services that consider the varied and unique needs of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness. Key partners to collaborate</p>

<p>care services, dental services, mental health and substance abuse services, housing services, and other appropriate services [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(iv)].</p>	<p>with include providers of services to children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● homeless response Continuums of Care, ● Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs, ● child welfare agencies, ● child care providers, ● mental health providers, and ● domestic violence agencies.
<p style="text-align: center;">Parent Involvement</p> <p>Liaisons shall ensure that the parents or guardians of homeless children and youth are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(v)].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop a plan for parental engagement that is trauma-sensitive and accommodating of the varied and unique needs of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.
<p style="text-align: center;">Posting Public Notice</p> <p>Liaisons shall ensure that the public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youth is disseminated in locations frequented children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens. Public notice shall be posted in a manner and form understandable to students and families experiencing homelessness [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(vi); Cal. Educ. Code § 48852.5(a)].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use the California Department of Education’s "You Can Enroll in School!" Homeless Education Posters. ● Ensure any public notice and outreach materials are translated into other common languages in the LEA to be easily understood by students and families experiencing homelessness whose first language is not English.
<p style="text-align: center;">Resolution of Disputes</p> <p>Liaisons shall ensure that enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(vii); Cal. Educ. Code § 48852.7(e)(1)].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review the California Department of Education (CDE) Homeless Education Dispute Resolution Process memo. Ensure the effective and timely implementation of the memo’s five key dispute resolution components, including those related to the district liaison role in assisting unaccompanied youth, parents, and guardians in engaging in the dispute resolution process and the COE liaison role in responding to and resolving any appeals of district-level dispute decisions. ● Consider LEA-level strategies related to avoiding disputes when possible, issuing written notice to students and families during disputes, ensuring student and family access to the dispute resolution process, gathering information needed to resolve

	disputes, and documentation of dispute-related efforts.
<p>Transportation</p> <p>Liaisons shall ensure that the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, and is assisted in accessing needed school transportation [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(viii); Cal. Educ. Code § 48852.7(e)(1)].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure students and families experiencing homelessness are informed of all transportation services available to them under the McKinney-Vento Act. ● Build strategies to eliminate any barriers to the timely provision of transportation.
<p>Training and Technical Assistance</p> <p>Liaisons shall ensure that school personnel providing services to children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness receive professional development and other support [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(ix); Cal. Educ. Code § 48852.5(c)].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop and implement a training plan to provide professional development and other support to LEA and school personnel. ● Make use of CDE downloadable PowerPoint presentations on a variety of homeless education topics when providing professional development. ● Become familiar with training opportunities available from the COE by contacting the COE liaison in your county. ● Become familiar with training opportunities available from the HETAC on its events webpage. ● Become familiar with training opportunities and other resources from CDE by signing up for their homeless education resources listserv.
<p>Meeting the Needs of Unaccompanied Youth</p> <p>Local liaisons shall ensure that unaccompanied youth are enrolled in school, have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as the State establishes for other children and youth, and are informed and receive documentation of their status as independent students on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(x)].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Become familiar with the unique needs of unaccompanied youth and build awareness within your LEA. ● Review and revise LEA policies that may create barriers to the full participation in school and academic success of unaccompanied youth. ● Ensure unaccompanied youth are provided meaningful opportunities to explore post-secondary education options and have the proper support to complete the FAFSA.


Additional COE Liaison Responsibilities and Implementation Strategies

In California, COEs provide a support infrastructure for local school districts and schools. This infrastructure is generally comprised of student, administrative, and instructional services. COE liaisons play an invaluable role

in supporting the capacity of all districts and schools (including nonprofit charter schools) in their county as they seek to identify and address the educational and related needs of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness. The table below outlines the responsibilities of COE liaisons specific to their county-level role and strategies for their implementation.

COE Liaison Responsibilities	Strategies for Implementation
<p>Facilitating Communication and Collaboration COE liaisons shall facilitate communication and collaboration between CDE, the COE, and districts within the county to ensure the effective planning and implementation of LEA homeless education programs and provision of educational and related services to children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Become familiar with supports available from the CDE Homeless Education Program Office and the HETAC. ● Build connections with district liaisons in the county to help better understand their needs and resources available in their communities. ● Facilitate regular engagements (e.g. quarterly or biannual meetings) with district liaisons in the county to share important updates and new resources. ● Work collaboratively across COE program offices that serve special populations, such as migrant education and early childhood education, to better support students experiencing homelessness who have intersecting identities.
<p>Training and Technical Assistance COE liaisons shall provide training and technical assistance to all district liaisons within the county, including those designed by charter schools, on the McKinney-Vento Act and the rights of students and families experiencing homelessness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop and implement a training plan to provide professional development and other support to LEA and school personnel. ● Make use of CDE downloadable PowerPoint presentations on a variety of homeless education topics when providing professional development. ● Become familiar with training opportunities available from the HETAC on its events webpage. ● Become familiar with training opportunities and other resources from CDE by signing up for their homeless education resources listserv. ● Develop a simple Q&A tracking document or spreadsheet to monitor technical assistance requests received, including who submitted the request, the topic of the request, and responses provided to help ensure consistency across responses and identify areas where more technical assistance may be needed. ● Leverage county-wide homeless education data on enrollment, discipline, absenteeism, and graduation to provide informed and targeted training and technical assistance.
<p>Meeting Reporting Requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administer the annual CDE survey designed to collect homeless student data from districts in the county if

<p>COE liaisons ensure the timely and accurate reporting to CDE of required homeless education data by the COE and districts within the LEA.</p>	<p>the COE receives Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) subgrant funding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Become familiar with the CDE Consolidated Application and Reporting System (CARS) and ensure districts within the county are aware of any other upcoming homeless education reporting requirements and deadlines.
<p>Assisting with the Resolution of Disputes COE liaisons ensure the timely and effective resolution of homeless education disputes within their county, including any appeals of district-level decisions to the COE.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support and provide technical assistance to district liaisons in the county on carrying out the McKinney-Vento dispute process in their district; this may include assistance in resolving informal disagreements before they reach formal dispute status and advising district liaisons on relevant statutory guidelines related to the circumstances of any disputes that arise. ● Per the California Department of Education (CDE) Homeless Education Dispute Resolution Process memo, make a determination regarding any homeless education disputes appealed from the district level to the COE level within five working days.
<p>Building School-Community Partnerships COE liaisons shall work collaboratively with school, district, and community partners in their county to assist with the development of mutually beneficial partnerships that support children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Become familiar with the HETAC School-Community Partnerships Toolkit and share these and related resources with school, district, and community partners in the county. ● Become familiar with relevant task force or working group meetings in the county and seek out agencies that may make good partners. Relevant collaborative groups may include the local homeless response Continuum of Care board or a board working group and the regional or local homeless coalition. ● Develop memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with agencies within the community to guide the establishment and implementation of school-community partnerships.



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