



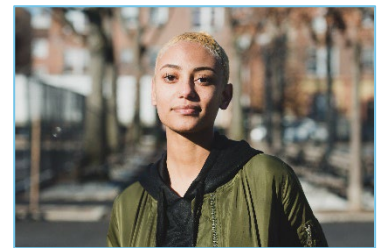
Unaccompanied Youth: Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness on Their Own

This California Homeless Education Technical Assistance Center (HETAC) tip sheet:

- provides basic information about unaccompanied youth,
- summarizes the key educational and related rights of unaccompanied youth under federal and California law,
- recommends strategies for supporting unaccompanied youth in school, and
- links to additional informational and implementation resources.

Context

Unaccompanied youth are young people who are experiencing homelessness on their own rather than under the care of a parent or guardian. While these youth face many of the same educational and other challenges as youth experiencing homelessness with their family, they often face unique barriers. To address these unique barriers, federal and California laws include specific provisions designed to ensure access to education and other needed services for unaccompanied youth.



This HETAC tip sheet provides basic information about unaccompanied youth, summarizes the key educational rights of unaccompanied youth under federal and California law, recommends strategies for supporting unaccompanied youth in school, and links to additional informational and implementation resources.

Who are Unaccompanied Youth?

Definition of Unaccompanied Youth

The term *unaccompanied youth* is defined in the [education subtitle of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#) (hereafter *McKinney-Vento Act*) as “a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian” [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(6); Cal. Educ. Code § 48850(3)(C)(ii)]. For a child or youth to meet the definition of *unaccompanied youth*, two eligibility criteria must be met:

1. The child or youth’s primary nighttime residence must meet the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of *homeless* (see sidebar on page 2) and
2. The child or youth must not be in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Given these two criteria, schools and community partners may refer to unaccompanied youth as “unaccompanied homeless youth” to underscore that the young person is both unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness.

When determining whether a child or youth meets the McKinney-Vento definition of *unaccompanied youth*, it is helpful to remember the following:

- An unusual custody or guardianship arrangement alone is insufficient to qualify a student as an unaccompanied youth; the student’s housing arrangement also must meet the McKinney-Vento definition of *homeless*. For more information on determining whether a student’s living arrangement

meets the definition of *homeless*, see the National Center for Homeless Education’s [Determining Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Rights and Services](#) brief.

- There are no age-specific eligibility criteria established in the McKinney-Vento Act, including for unaccompanied youth; while the term “youth” may call to mind a teenager, it is possible for a younger child to meet the definition of *unaccompanied youth*. If a child or youth qualifies for [Transitional Kindergarten \(TK\)](#) through 12th grade (TK-12) public education in California and meets the McKinney-Vento definition of *unaccompanied youth*, the student may be enrolled and served as unaccompanied youth consistent with California Education Code age criteria [Cal. Educ. Code § 4800; Cal. Educ. Code § 46300.1; Cal. Educ. Code § 56026(c)].
- A student may be considered an unaccompanied youth regardless of whether the student was forced from the home (“kicked out”) or ran away, even if the parent/guardian would allow the student to return home. In instances where the student can return home, the home environment may not be safe or stable.
- The cause of student/parent/guardian separation may not be disclosed readily to school officials due to its sensitive or private nature. In some cases, a simplified explanation for the separation may be provided to school officials and may not represent the relational dynamics between the student and parent/guardian accurately.
- Schools should make determinations of McKinney-Vento eligibility for unaccompanied youth on a case-by-case basis focusing on whether the student’s circumstances meet the Act’s definitions of *homeless* and *unaccompanied*, rather than on evaluating whether the perceived reasons for student/parent/guardian separation are “valid” from the school’s perspective.

Data on Unaccompanied Youth in California

According to the California Department of Education (CDE), California public schools enrolled a total of 246,480 children and youth experiencing homelessness during the 2022-2023 school year (California Department of Education [CDE], 2023a); 8,573 (3.5%) of these were unaccompanied youth (CDE, 2023b). By comparison, averaging across recent school years, approximately 9% of the students identified as homeless at the national level (across all 50 states and territories) qualified as unaccompanied youth (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], n.d.).

While the comparatively low percentage of students identified as unaccompanied youth in California may reflect a unique state context, it may reflect an under-identification and/or under-reporting of students experiencing homelessness who meet the

The McKinney-Vento Definition of *Homeless*

The term *homeless children and youths*

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and

(B) includes

- i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
- ii. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- iv. [migratory children](#) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this part because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)

definition of unaccompanied youth. See the [Strategies for Supporting Unaccompanied Youth in School section](#) below for recommended practices for identifying unaccompanied youth.

Causes of Youth Homelessness

While adult and family homelessness often are linked to economic factors, including experiences of poverty and lack of affordable housing, homelessness among youth usually is driven by family conflict or breakdown related to

- parental abuse or neglect;
- changes in family structure, including through the death of a parent or caregiver;
- a parent's/guardian's or youth's alcohol or drug use;
- the youth's sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy; or
- other challenging household dynamics, including economic hardship (Samuels et al, 2019).

Research also tells us that certain youth subpopulations are at a higher risk for homelessness. Through its [Voices of Youth Count initiative](#), Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago found that

- youth with less than a high school diploma or GED have a 346% higher risk of experiencing homelessness;
- unmarried parenting youth have a 200% higher risk of experiencing homelessness;
- youth from low-income households (earning less than \$24,000 a year) have a 162% higher risk of experiencing homelessness;
- youth identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) have a 120% higher risk of experiencing homelessness;
- Black or African American youth are at an 83% higher risk for experiencing homelessness; and
- Hispanic, non-White youth have a 33% higher risk of experiencing homelessness (Morton et al, 2017)

Impacts of Homelessness on Youth

Given the upheaval and trauma that accompany homelessness, particularly when experienced without the support of a parent or guardian, it is not surprising that youth in homeless situations experience disproportionately high rates of

- unmet basic needs;
- poor physical health;
- untreated mental health issues;
- substance use;
- sexual, physical, or criminal exploitation; and
- school disengagement (Landers, 2019).

Further, research finds that the youth-adult pathway was the most common pathway to adult homelessness, with 35% of people experiencing homelessness as an adult having experienced homelessness in their formative years, as well. This finding underscores the importance of childhood and youth experiences on adult homelessness (Cohen-Cline et al, 2021).

The Role of Education in Breaking Cycles of Poverty and Homelessness

While lack of a high school credential places youth at a significantly higher risk of experiencing homelessness, higher educational attainment may act as a protective factor against experiences of homelessness as a youth or adult. Research demonstrates that people with higher levels of education

- have higher levels of income (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2023),
- are more likely to have access to employer-provided benefits (Ma & Pender, 2023),
- are more likely to be able to afford safe and stable housing (National Low Income Housing Coalition [NLIHC], 2024),
- are more likely to move up the socioeconomic ladder (Ma & Pender, 2023),
- are less likely to be unemployed (BLS, 2023), and
- are less likely to be receiving public benefits (Ma & Pender, 2023).

As we consider common experiences among unaccompanied youth, it is important to recognize that this youth subpopulation is comprised of individual young people with unique experiences and characteristics. And while there are patterns of challenges experienced across these youth, research also speaks to pathways into and out of homelessness, with hopeful points along the way for effective prevention and intervention. Further, whether through their own internal resources or by receiving the support of caring adults, youth experiencing homelessness have the potential for tremendous resilience and the ability to make a sustainable exit from homelessness, with education playing a key role in many young peoples' ability to achieve stability and thrive as they transition to adulthood.

Key Educational Rights of Unaccompanied Youth under Federal and California Law

Rights Under the McKinney-Vento Act

Children and youth experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youth, have the right to:

- receive a free, appropriate public education [42 U.S.C. §11431(1)].
- enroll in school immediately, even if lacking documents normally required for enrollment or having missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(C)(i); Cal. Educ. Code § 48852.7(c)(3)]. *Enrollment* is defined as attending classes and participating fully in school activities [42 U.S.C. §11434a(1)].
- enroll in school and attend classes while the school gathers needed documents [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(C)].
- enroll in the local school or continue attending the school of origin (the school the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled), according to the student's best interest [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(A); Cal. Educ. Code § 48852.7].
- receive transportation to and from the school of origin, if requested [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(J)(iii); Cal. Educ. Code § 48852.7(e)].
- receive educational services comparable to those provided to other students, according to each student's needs [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(4)].

In addition, the McKinney-Vento Act includes provisions specific to the educational rights of unaccompanied youth. Under the Act,

- unaccompanied youth can enroll in school immediately, even without a parent or guardian [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(C)(i); 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(H); 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(7); Cal. Educ. Code § 48852.7(c)(3)];
- the wishes of the unaccompanied youth are given priority in school selection decisions (determining whether the local school or the school of origin is in the student's best interest) [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(B)(ii)]; and

- unaccompanied youth must receive assistance from the local educational agency (LEA) homeless liaison¹ with
 - obtaining needed records once immediate school enrollment has occurred [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(C)(iii)],
 - accessing school of origin transportation [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(J)(iii)],
 - accessing the McKinney-Vento dispute resolution process [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(B)], and
 - receiving determinations of independent student status for purposes of applying for federal financial aid for higher education [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)(x)(III)].

Access to Financial Aid for Higher Education

According to the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), as amended, the definition of *independent student* includes unaccompanied youth, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act [20 U.S.C. §1087vv(d)(1)(H)]. An independent student doesn't need to provide their parents' personal or financial information on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); further, only the student's financial resources are considered when calculating the student's ability to pay for college and resulting financial aid package. See the Office of Federal Student Aid's [Dependency Status webpage](#) for more information.



According to the HEA, the following are authorized to provide determinations of independent student status for unaccompanied youth:

- the LEA homeless education liaison (or the liaison's designee) [20 U.S.C. §1087vv(d)(1)(H)(i)];
- the director of a recognized emergency shelter, transitional living, street outreach, or other program serving people experiencing homelessness (or the director's designee) [20 U.S.C. §1087vv(d)(1)(H)(ii)];
- the director of a federal [TRIO](#) or [Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program](#) (or the director's designee) [20 U.S.C. §1087vv(d)(1)(H)(iii)];
- a financial aid administrator (FAA) at an institution of higher education [20 U.S.C. §1087vv(d)(3)]; and
- an FAA who verified the student's circumstance in a prior award year [20 U.S.C. §1087vv(d)(1)(H)].

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, LEA liaisons must inform unaccompanied youth of their independent student status and provide documentation of their status for the student to submit to higher education financial aid offices, as needed [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)(x)(III)]. While no single form is required at the federal level for documenting an unaccompanied youth's independent student status, LEAs may wish to use [this sample form letter developed by SchoolHouse Connection](#).

Special Education Rights

The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) is a federal law that ensures the provision of a free, appropriate public education and related services to eligible children and youth with a disability. Under IDEA, a parent usually serves as the student's educational decision maker, playing a key role in issues such as requesting an evaluation of their child's need for special education, participating in meetings related to their child's special education needs and services, and being part of the team that develops and reviews their child's [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#).

¹ Under the federal McKinney-Vento Act, local educational agencies (LEAs) must designate an appropriate staff person as the homeless liaison to serve as the LEA's key homeless education contact and oversee the Act's implementation in schools throughout the LEA [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)]. See the HETAC's [A Guide to the Homeless Liaison Role in California: Legal Guidelines and Implementation Strategies](#) for more information.

Under IDEA, the term *parent* means:

- a natural, adoptive, or foster parent;
- a guardian (but not the state if the child is a ward of the state);
- an individual acting in the place of a natural or adoptive parent (including a grandparent, stepparent, or other relative) with whom the child lives, or an individual who is legally responsible for the child's welfare; or
- an individual assigned to be a surrogate parent [20 U.S.C. § 1401(23); Cal. Educ. Code §56028(a)].

While unaccompanied youth may have someone in their life who meets the IDEA definition of *parent* and can serve as their educational decision maker for special education purposes, there may be instances where no such person is available or willing to serve in that role. In instances where the parents of the child are not known or the LEA cannot, after reasonable efforts, locate the parents, the LEA must appoint someone to act as the child's surrogate parent and educational decision maker; this person may not be an employee of the state educational agency (SEA), the LEA, or any other agency that is involved in the education or care of the child [20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(2)(A); Cal. Educ. Code § 56050; Cal. Gov. Code § 7579.5]. Reasonable efforts must be made to ensure the assignment of a surrogate not more than 30 days after there is a determination that the child needs a surrogate [20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(2)(B); Cal. Gov. Code § 7579.5(a)].

In the case of unaccompanied youth, IDEA allows for the immediate appointment of a temporary surrogate parent until a surrogate parent can be appointed; unlike surrogate parents, temporary surrogate parents may be involved in the education or care of the child [34 C.F.R. § 300.519(f)].

In most cases, educational decision-making rights under IDEA transfer to the student at age 18 (34 C.F.R. § 300.520; Cal. Educ. Code § 56041.5).

For more information, download the HETAC's [Addressing the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness Who Have Disabilities](#) or CDE's [Surrogate Parents in California Special Education: An Overview](#).

Rights Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) is a federal law that governs access to and protects the privacy of student education records. In most cases, parents maintain FERPA rights for minor students. Under FERPA, a parent includes a natural parent, a guardian, or an individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or a guardian (34 C.F.R. § 99.3). FERPA rights transfer to the student when they turn 18 or attend an institution of postsecondary education. Students to whom FERPA rights have transferred are called "eligible students."

FERPA permits schools to allow students under age 18, including unaccompanied youth, to have access to their education records and provide consent for disclosure as long as those rights do not supersede the FERPA rights of their parents and the school deems the student to be responsible enough to exercise those rights; however, if a parent or guardian is present and attempting to exercise FERPA rights, their rights supersede the rights of others [34 C.F.R. § 99.5(b)].

For more information on FERPA, consult these U.S. Department of Education resources:

- [An Eligible Student Guide to FERPA](#)
- [A Parent Guide to FERPA](#)
- [Forum Guide to the Privacy of Student Information: A Resource for Schools](#)
- [Privacy and Datasharing webpage](#)

Child Welfare Involvement

Some schools mistakenly believe they are required to report all minor youth experiencing homelessness on their own to child welfare; however, California law clarifies that this is not the case. [Assembly Bill 652](#) establishes that the fact that a child is homeless or is classified as an unaccompanied minor is not, in and of itself, a sufficient basis for reporting child abuse or neglect. Rather, mandated reporters should only report cases to child welfare when the reporter has knowledge of or observes an unaccompanied minor whom the reporter knows or reasonably suspects to be the victim of abuse or neglect (Cal. Pen. Code § 11165.15).

Missing Children and Law Enforcement

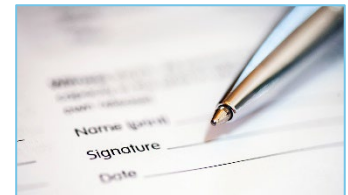
Some schools mistakenly believe they are required to report all minor youth experiencing homelessness on their own to law enforcement in case the youth has been reported missing; however, California law clarifies that this is not the case. California law specifies the following related to missing children and communications with law enforcement:

1. Law enforcement agencies responsible for the investigation of a missing child must inform the LEA or private school where the student is enrolled that the child is missing within 10 days of the child's disappearance. The notice must be provided in writing and include a photo of the child, if available.
2. If notified of a missing child by law enforcement, the school must place a notice that the child has been reported missing on the front of the missing child's school record.
3. If a school receives a record inquiry or request from any person or entity for a missing child about whom the school has been notified by law enforcement, the school must immediately notify the law enforcement authorities who informed the school that the child is missing (Cal. Educ. Code § 49068.6).
4. Upon initial enrollment or transfer of a child into a new public or private elementary school, the principal is urged to check to see if the child resembles a child listed as missing in quarterly missing persons bulletins provided to the school by the California Department of Justice (Cal. Pen. Code § 14204).

In instances where a school must notify law enforcement of an inquiry about a child reported missing by that law enforcement agency, schools are encouraged to share any knowledge the school has about potential safety concerns in alerting the inquirer about the student's whereabouts, such as in the case of an abusive parent/guardian or some other person who may pose a danger to the student. LEAs are encouraged to [seek technical assistance from the California HETAC](#) should they have questions or concerns about issues related to reporting.

Applications and Signatures

Schools and other youth-serving agencies often have questions about who can provide a signature for unaccompanied youth when applying for services or consenting for the youth's participation in a particular activity. In many instances, the youth themselves or an adult providing caregiving or other support can fulfill this role. Under California law, youth who have turned 18 have reached the age of majority and, in most cases, can sign their own school paperwork and applications for benefits or services.



School Enrollment Forms

In most cases, a student's parent or guardian signs school enrollment forms on behalf of their child. Unaccompanied youth, however, may not have a parent, guardian, or caregiver who is available or willing to

sign school enrollment paperwork. In these instances, it is important to remember that the McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to enroll students experiencing homelessness even when lacking documentation normally required for enrollment and in cases where a parent or guardian is unavailable to sign enrollment documentation. Providing immediate access to school for unaccompanied youth and other students experiencing homelessness not only ensures compliance with federal and state laws, but also ensures that youth are in a safe environment during the school day and do not fall further behind academically due to school absences.

While the specific procedures used to ensure immediate school enrollment for unaccompanied youth are left to the discretion of each LEA, many LEAs allow one of the following to sign enrollment paperwork: an adult caregiver, the LEA homeless liaison, or the unaccompanied youth. A tool that many California LEAs use is the [Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit](#) provided by the California courts. This form allows the caregiver who signs the affidavit to enroll the child in school and consent to school-related medical care.

Work Permits

California's minimum legal age to work is generally 14 years old;² however, California law requires anyone under age 18 to have a work permit, called a "Statement of Intent to Employ a Minor and Request for a Work Permit". The minor's school typically issues this permit. Under California law, a parent, guardian, foster parent, caregiver with whom the minor resides, or residential shelter services provider may sign the student's work permit application [Cal. Educ. Code § 49110(c)].

For more information, visit the CDE [Work Permits for Students webpage](#).

Extracurricular Activity Participation Forms

The McKinney-Vento Act defines *enrollment* as attending classes and participating fully in school activities and requires LEAs to ensure that students experiencing homelessness who meet the relevant eligibility criteria do not face barriers to accessing extracurricular activities [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(1); 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(F)(iii)]. As part of participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities, many LEAs require students to submit a signed permission form. While the specific procedures used to ensure full participation in school, including extracurricular activities, are left to the discretion of each LEA, many LEAs allow the person who signed the unaccompanied youth's school enrollment forms to sign extracurricular participation forms.

Medical Treatment

In most cases, a parent or guardian must consent to health care on behalf of their minor child; however, there are situations where a minor must or may consent for their own care and opportunities in which other adults may consent to care on the minor's behalf. Learn more about [minor consent and confidentiality laws in California](#) from the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL).

Medi-Cal

[Medi-Cal](#) is California's Medicaid program, which is a public health insurance program that provides needed health care services for people with low income. California Family Code provides that a minor may receive certain services without parental consent; these services are known as [minor consent Medi-Cal services](#) and are categorized by age (Cal. Fam. Code §§ 6924, 6929, 6929.1).

² In limited circumstances, minors under age 14 may work in California. This may include performing irregular and odd jobs in private households, including babysitting, lawn mowing, and yard work; working in the entertainment industry, like as a child actor; or working in a self-employed capacity.

Under age 12

- Pregnancy and pregnancy-related care
- Family planning services
- Sexual assault services

Age 12 years and older

- Sexually transmitted diseases treatment
- Drug and alcohol abuse treatment/counseling
- Mental health outpatient care
- Pregnancy and pregnancy-related care
- Family planning services
- Sexual assault services

Young people under age 21 may apply for minor consent Medi-Cal services without their parents' consent or knowledge and the parents shall not be required to contribute to the cost of these services; however, [Medi-Cal regulations and procedures](#) are different for medical services not covered under minor consent services (full-scope Medi-Cal coverage) in the areas of

- parental informing of the child's need for medical care,
- parental consent to Medi-Cal coverage for the child,
- parental consent to medical treatment of the child, and
- parental financial responsibility for the child's medical costs.

CalFresh

[CalFresh](#), known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), provides monthly food benefits to individuals and families with low-income in the form of an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. Minor unaccompanied youth may apply for CalFresh benefits independently if they are living apart from their parents or guardians and are determined to be purchasing, preparing, and eating food separately from others in their household. Minor unaccompanied youth who are living with a group of people and sharing food with them must apply for CalFresh with everyone in that household. Learn more about access to CalFresh for unaccompanied youth in these resources:

- Bay Area Legal Aid: [CalFresh for Minors flyer](#)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): [SNAP for people experiencing homelessness flyer](#)
- USDA: [Clarification of Policy Barriers Facing Homeless Youth memo](#)

Strategies for Supporting Unaccompanied Youth in School

LEAs and schools can consider the following strategies to ensure immediate and full access to education and school-based supports for unaccompanied youth:

- **Policy review, revision, and development:** In keeping with federal and state law, LEAs should review their policies to ensure they remove barriers, including barriers related to guardianship, to the immediate enrollment and full participation in school for unaccompanied youth. If LEA policy language or omissions create barriers to school engagement for unaccompanied youth, existing policy should be revised and/or new policy should be developed to address identified barriers. Download the HETAC's [Local Educational](#)

[Agency Homeless Education Policies: Understanding and Implementing Federal and California Law](#) tip sheet for more information and to access a sample LEA homeless education board policy.

- **Identification:** LEAs should take intentional steps to ensure the identification of unaccompanied youth as a first step to ensuring these students’ access to education and school-based supports. The federal McKinney-Vento Act requires LEAs to 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. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(i)]. Further, California law requires LEAs to administer a [housing questionnaire](#) to all enrolling students for the purpose of identifying children and youth experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youth (Cal. Educ. Code § 48851).

Federal and state law also require LEAs to post information about the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness in locations frequented by homeless parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth in a manner and form understandable to them (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(vi); Cal. Educ. Code § 48852.5(a)). LEAs should distribute youth-specific homeless education awareness materials that include the contact information of the local liaison in places where youth may congregate. The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) provides free, downloadable [educational rights posters for youth in English and Spanish](#). CDE also provides [educational rights posters in English](#) and [11 other languages](#). LEAs also may want to leverage digital communication channels—including websites, email, texting, and social media—to connect with youth. For more information, including an LEA sample identification implementation plan, download the HETAC’s [Identifying Students Without Stable Housing: A Critical First Step](#) tip sheet.

- **Training:** LEA leadership and homeless liaisons should ensure that relevant LEA and school staff receive training on the rights and services available to unaccompanied youth under the McKinney-Vento Act and related federal and California statutes and programs. California Education Code, mirroring a similar federal requirement in the McKinney-Vento Act, requires LEA homeless liaisons to offer training at least annually to LEA employees who provide services to students experiencing homelessness [Cal. Educ. Code § 48851.3(c)(1)].
- **Building trust:** One of the most important things LEA and school staff can do in supporting unaccompanied youth is to build trusting relationships with these youth by creating a welcoming and responsive school environment. Educators will want to engage with youth in a trauma-sensitive way, communicate transparently, follow through on any commitments made to the youth, and ensuring youth are aware that reports to child welfare will only be made if the school knows or reasonably suspects that the youth is a victim of abuse or neglect.

For more information on supporting unaccompanied youth, visit the HETAC’s [unaccompanied homeless youth webpage](#).

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