

Little Learners, Big Barriers: Understanding Preschool and Other Early Childhood Homeless Education Requirements

March 19, 2026



Presenters

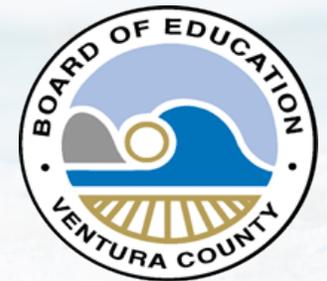
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Who's in the Room?

Homeless Liaison?



Early Education Partner?



About SchoolHouse Connection



SchoolHouse Connection works to overcome homelessness, from prenatal to postsecondary, through strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with youth, families, schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, and service providers.

Learn more:

schoolhouseconnection.org

Join our Newsletter:

<https://bit.ly/4brxboR>

Objectives:

- Understand the **prevalence of homelessness** among young children, and its impacts on child development
- Demonstrate an understanding of **federal and state program requirements** for prioritizing homeless children and families
- Identify at least one **best practice to implement**



Homelessness Defined:

Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

- Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons.
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations.
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters.
- Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.



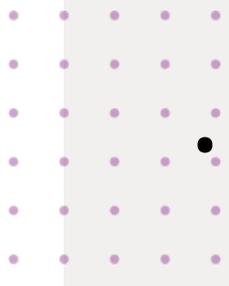
The Law: McKinney-Vento (1)

- Originally passed in 1987
- Reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which went into effect on October 1, 2016- definition
- Provides stability, access, and support for academic success for homeless children and youth, including preschool-aged children



The Law: McKinney-Vento (2)

- Under the 42 United States Code (U.S.C.) Section 11432(g)(6)(A), it states that **homeless liaisons should identify preschool aged children experiencing homelessness through outreach and coordination activities with outside agencies.**
- Coordinate with social service agencies, child development programs, early intervention programs, and other preschool programs (such as Head Start, State-funded preschool, etc.)



The Law: McKinney-Vento (3)

- Preschool programs are required to:
 - Enroll homeless children in their programs, even if the parent or guardian cannot provide the paperwork normally required such as immunizations, proof of residence, etc.
 - Offer comparable services, including transportation, to preschoolers who are homeless and collaborate these services with LEAs and other service providers



The Law: McKinney-Vento (4)

- Under ESSA, **school of origin now includes preschool** and school of origin refers to the school in which the homeless child was last enrolled.
- LEAs and preschool programs are required to continue the child's education in the school of origin for the duration of their homelessness.

Hidden Homelessness

Why Families with Children Might Stay Temporarily with Other People

- Lack of shelter availability
- Prioritization of single adults in available shelters
- Fear of child welfare system involvement

What this looks like:

- Renting a walk-in closet
- Staying with abusive/exploitive people (trading sex for housing)
- Unsafe sleep practices
- Inadequate play spaces

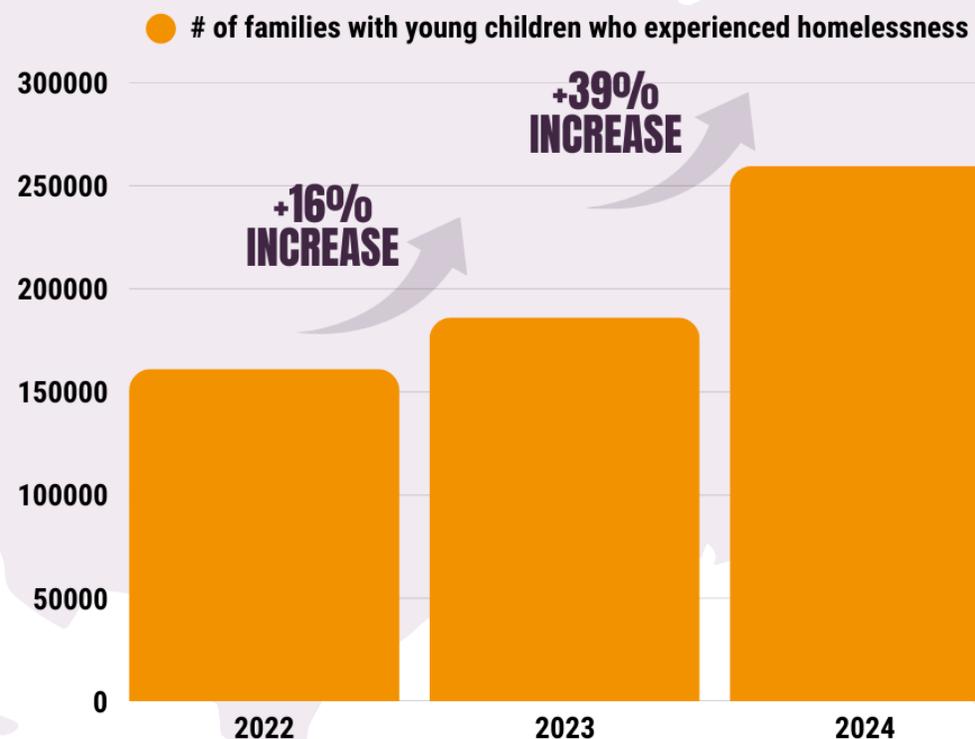


Infant & Toddler Homelessness Data

Increase in families staying in shelters and visibly homeless (HUD data)



CHILD & FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IS CLIMBING FAST: +16% IN 2023, +39% IN 2024 (HUD)



Data

How many infants and toddlers experience homelessness?



In 2022-23, approximately

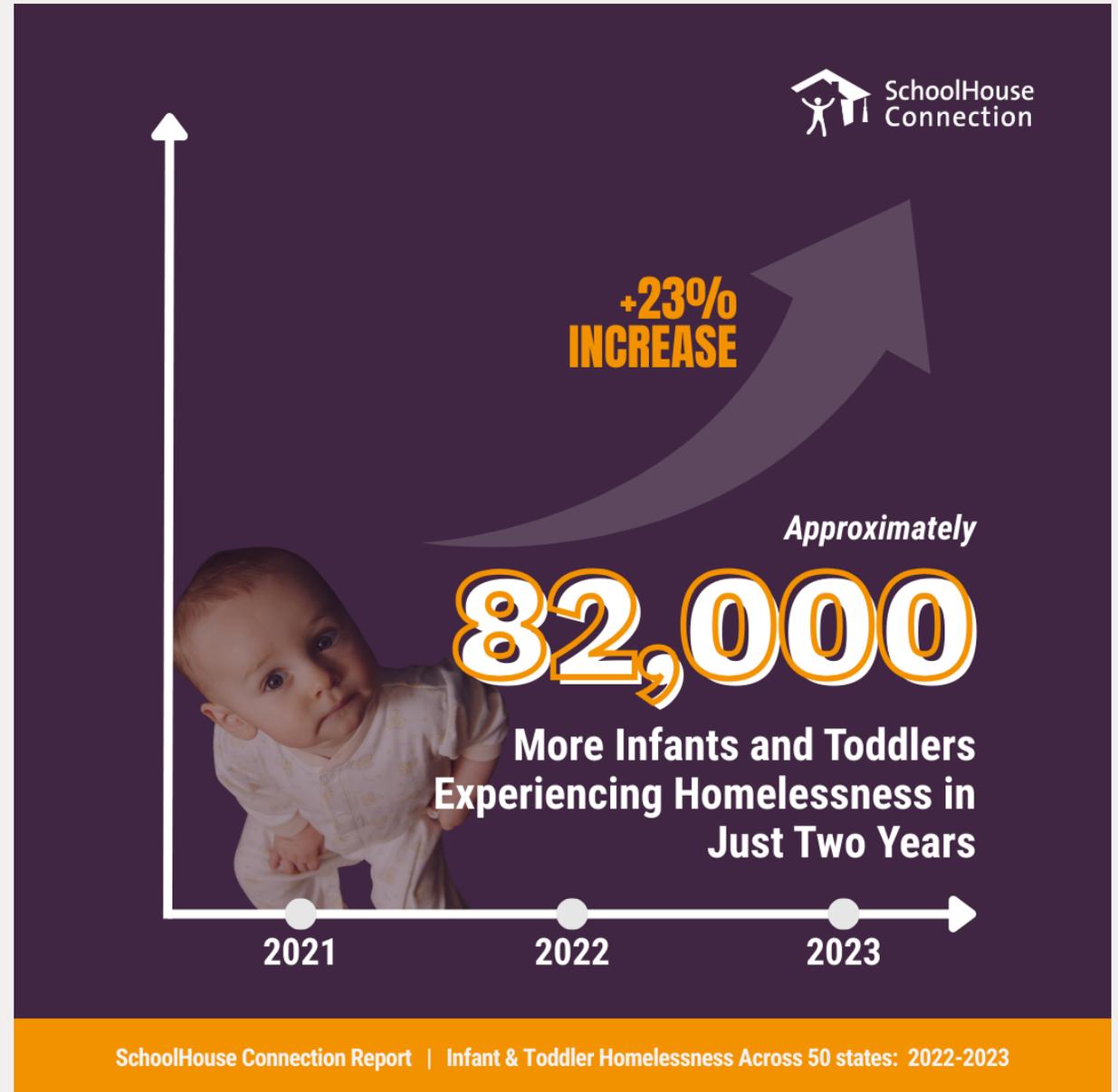
450,000

infants and toddlers **ages birth through three** experienced homelessness across the US.



Data

Infant and toddler homelessness is increasing



Data

Infants and toddlers need access to *both* early childhood development *and* housing – and for many families, safe shelter



 Just 10% of infants & toddlers experiencing homelessness were served in 2022–23 – a drop from 11.5%.

These babies are being left behind.



2% are served by Home Visiting programs



4% are served by Early Head Start programs



4.4% are served by a Local Education Agency



Unserviced (89.6%)

Access your state's data!



Infant and Toddler Homelessness Across 50 States: 2022-2023 | United States

United States

The period of life from prenatal to age three is critical for physical and social-emotional development. Experiencing homelessness in early childhood can jeopardize healthy growth and development, leading to negative consequences like impacts on life-long learning. Early childhood development programs can mitigate the impacts of homelessness on child development, and connect families to housing and other supportive services. These data profiles are intended to create greater awareness of the prevalence of infant and toddler homelessness, and gaps in access to early development programs. SchoolHouse Connection encourages you to also visit our report on [Infant and Toddler Homelessness Across 50 States: 2021-2022](#) to compare your state profiles' trends over time, identifying areas of needed improvement and strength.

Total Population Birth Through Age Three:
14,702,566

Estimated Total Population Birth Through Age Three Experiencing Homelessness:
446,696, or 3.04% of all infants and toddlers

Total population Birth Through Age Three experiencing homelessness enrolled in a program:
46,250 (10.35%)

Only 1 in 10 infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness is enrolled in a program.

Among the 446,696 infants and toddlers identified, only 46,250, which accounts for a mere 10.35%, are currently enrolled in a program.

Prioritizing Children Experiencing Homelessness through Federal Law

The Head Start statute and regulations specify that Early Head Start programs must identify and prioritize children experiencing homelessness and remove barriers to their participation.

Child Care and Development Fund law and regulations require homeless children to be prioritized; use funding for enrollment, outreach, and training to support children and families experiencing homelessness; and allow states to provide a number of additional accommodations for homeless families, such as waivers for work requirements and co-payments.

The Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program requires programs to collect data on the number of families and children experiencing homelessness.

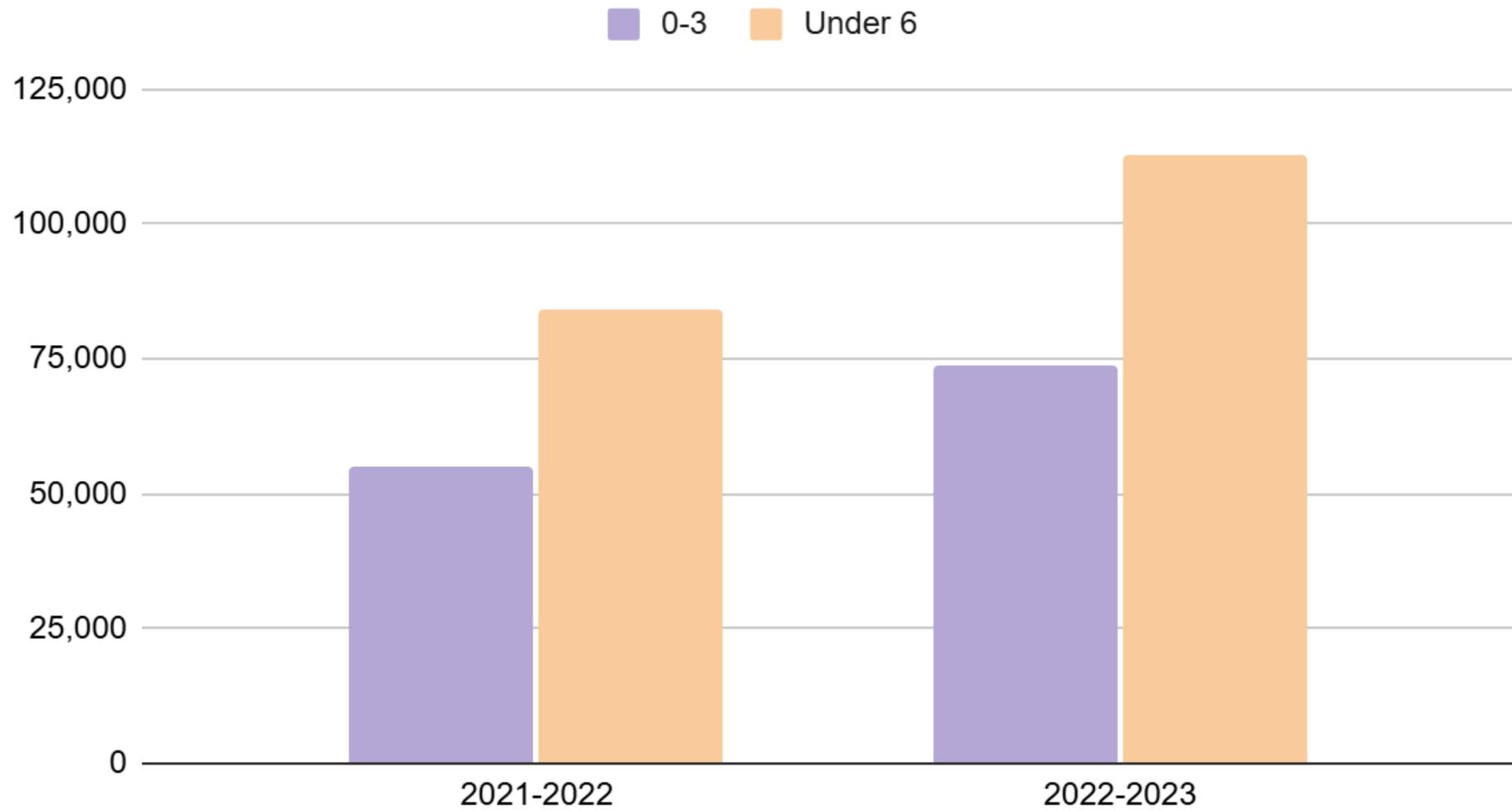
The McKinney-Vento Act requires all LEA-funded preschool programs to immediately enroll homeless children, keep them stable in the same pre-school if it is in their best interest, and provide transportation.

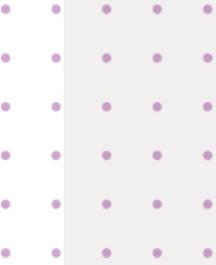
Estimated Total Population of Children Birth Through Age Three Experiencing Homelessness Enrolled in an Early Childhood Program:

- Home Visiting (8,622 or 1.9% of total)
- Early Head Start (17,978 or 4% of total)
- Identified & Served by an LEA (19,650 or 4.4% of total)
- Unserved (400,446 or 89.6% of total)**

<https://schoolhouseconnection.org/infant-and-toddler-homelessness/>

Homelessness among young children in CA is increasing





Homelessness Creates Barriers to Accessing Early Childhood Programs

- **High Mobility** of families moving in and out of motels, staying with others, living in cars, etc.
- **Lack of documentation** and other enrollment barriers, including child immunization and parent work requirements
- **Lack of transportation** to and from programs
- **Lack of awareness** among early care providers of both the definition of homelessness and the best ways to reach families

Dwindling federal housing support



Families are getting pushed out of federal housing support.



In 2009, they received 42% of HUD subsidies.

By 2022, just 33%.





Families with Young Children Face Unique Housing Barriers

If housing is available, families with young children experiencing homelessness are left out

- Only one in four families that qualify for housing assistance actually receive it; thirteen percent of extremely low-income renters are single adult caregivers of a young child. (National Low-Income Housing Coalition)
- Recent data show that the lowest-income renters in the U.S. face a shortage of 7.1 million affordable and available rental homes, with only 35 affordable and available homes for every 100 extremely low-income renter households. (National Low-Income Housing Coalition)
- **Babies and toddlers are the age group at highest risk of eviction.** The rate of eviction for families with children (10.4%) was more than double the eviction rate of those without children (5.0%) (Eviction Lab)

Families with Young Children Face Unique Shelter Barriers

Most families experiencing homelessness are not eligible nor prioritized for federal homelessness assistance

- HUD's restrictive definition of homelessness excludes families who stay with others temporarily due to lack of alternatives, and families in self-paid motels, despite their comparable vulnerabilities to other homeless situations.
- **More than 80% of children identified as homeless by public schools are excluded from HUD assistance.**
- The HUD homeless assistance system prioritizes single chronically homeless adults in "vulnerability assessments" used to triage access to resources.



Resources

- [Infant and Toddler Homelessness Across 50 States: 2021-2022](#)
- [Child Care for Children Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Case Studies in Supporting Infants and Toddlers](#)
- [Connecting our Youngest Children to Early Childhood Partners](#)
- [Deeper Dives for Schools: Practical Strategies to Serve Young Children Experiencing Homelessness](#)

Addressing the Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness through Early Childhood Programs

FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND HOMELESSNESS

EARLY HEAD START	EARLY INTERVENTION/ CHILD FIND	CHILD CARE	HUD HOMELESS ASSISTANCE	MATERNAL, INFANT, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD HOME VISITING (MIECHV)
<p>Homeless families are categorically eligible. Also requires proactive outreach, grace periods for immunizations, and prioritized enrollment. Allows programs to reserve slots for homeless infants and toddlers</p>	<p>States must make early intervention services available to homeless infants/toddlers; LEAs must identify and evaluate children with disabilities experiencing homelessness.</p>	<p>Requires lead agencies to prioritize children experiencing homelessness and use funds for outreach and enrollment of homeless families and expedited enrollment. Lead agencies also must use some grants/contracts to expand the supply of child care for all infants and toddlers.</p>	<p>Requires programs serving families experiencing homelessness to designate a staff person to ensure that young children (including infants and toddlers) are enrolled in early childhood programs.</p>	<p>Some data collection on homelessness is required by the Health Resource and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</p>

Data Collection Requirements for LEAs

- All LEAs that receive EHCY subgrant funds are required to collect and report data on **children ages 0-2 experiencing homelessness served by a program funded by a McKinney-Vento sub-grant;**
- All LEAs that receive EHCY subgrant funds are required to collect and report data on **children ages 0-5 experiencing homelessness served by a program funded by a McKinney-Vento sub-grant, even if those children are not enrolled in public school;**
- All LEAs – those with and those without EHCY subgrants -- are required to collect and report data on **children ages 3-5 experiencing homelessness who are enrolled in an LEA-administered preschool program, but who are not yet in kindergarten;**
- All **SEAs are required to report the above data to ED**
- All LEAs, regardless of sub-grant status, are required to designate a **liaison who is responsible for ensuring that all young children experiencing homelessness are identified and have access to early childhood development programs** for which they are eligible, including Head Start, Early Intervention, and preschool programs administered by the LEA. (Note: most children experiencing homelessness will be eligible for federally funded child care.)

Liaison Duties: Early Childhood Referrals

The liaison must be able to carry out the ten duties outlined in the law, including:

- **Identify** McKinney-Vento students
- Post **public notice** of McKinney-Vento rights to parents and youth
- Provide **professional development** and support on McKinney-Vento to school staff
- Ensure children and youths have **access to and receive educational services including services through Head Start programs** (including Early Head Start programs) under the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9831 et seq.), early intervention services under part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1431 et seq.), and other preschool programs administered by the local educational agency



TONY THURMOND
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

Homeless Education and Early Education- State Level

Karmina Barrales,
Education Programs Consultant
California Department of Education
March 19, 2026



Homeless Liaisons (1)

- All Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) districts, charters and county offices of education must designate a homeless liaison to assist homeless children and youth with identification, enrollment, accessibility, and success in school.
 - A list of all homeless liaisons can be found on the CDE Homeless Education web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/>.

Homeless Liaisons (2 of 3)

- LEA liaisons must ensure that:
 - Homeless children and youth are identified including infants, toddlers, and preschool age children.
 - Access is provided for enrollment and retention
 - Families are informed of and receive educational opportunities and services
 - Children and youth who do not have immunizations are assisted

Homeless Liaisons (3 of 3)

- Ensure that educational rights are at each “parent area” within each early education program
- Public notice of educational rights should be posted in locations frequented by parents and guardians of such children and youth, including schools, shelters, libraries, and soup kitchens, in a form understandable to the parents and guardians.

Homeless Education Poster (1 of 2)

Posters must be posted in areas frequented by parents, guardians, and unaccompanied homeless youth, in a manner and form understandable to them and include the Homeless Liaison contact information.



Even if you have:

- Uncertain housing
- A temporary address
- No current physical address

You are guaranteed enrollment in school by the federal McKinney-Vento Act and California state law if you live:

- In a house or apartment with more than one family due to loss of housing or economic hardship
- With friends or family because you are a runaway or an unaccompanied youth
- In substandard housing without electricity, water, or heat
- In a shelter, family, domestic violence, or youth shelter or transitional living program
- In a motel, hotel, or weekly rate housing
- In an abandoned building, in a car, at a campground, or on the streets

You can enroll in school immediately even without the documents normally required for enrollment, such as:

- Proof of residency
- Immunization records or other required health records
- School records
- Legal guardianship papers

Your child may:

- Participate fully in all school activities and programs for which he/she is eligible
- Receive transportation to and from the school of origin if you request it
- Continue to attend the school in which he/she was last enrolled even if you have moved away from that school's attendance area
- Qualify automatically for school nutrition programs

Your responsibilities are to:

- Make sure your child gets to school on time and ready to learn
- Stay informed of school rules, regulations, and activities
- Contact the homeless liaison for assistance in removing barriers to your child's education
- Attend parent/teacher conferences, Back-to-School Night, and other school-related activities

You can ENROLL in school!

To find the [homeless education poster](https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/cy/) visit our website at the link provided.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/cy/>

Homeless Education Poster (2 of 2)



- You can obtain free Spanish and English posters that will be mailed to you.
- You can download and print the poster in more than 8 languages.

Visit the CDE Homeless Education Program page or contact us directly by email at HomelessED@cde.ca.gov.

Early Education Programs (1)

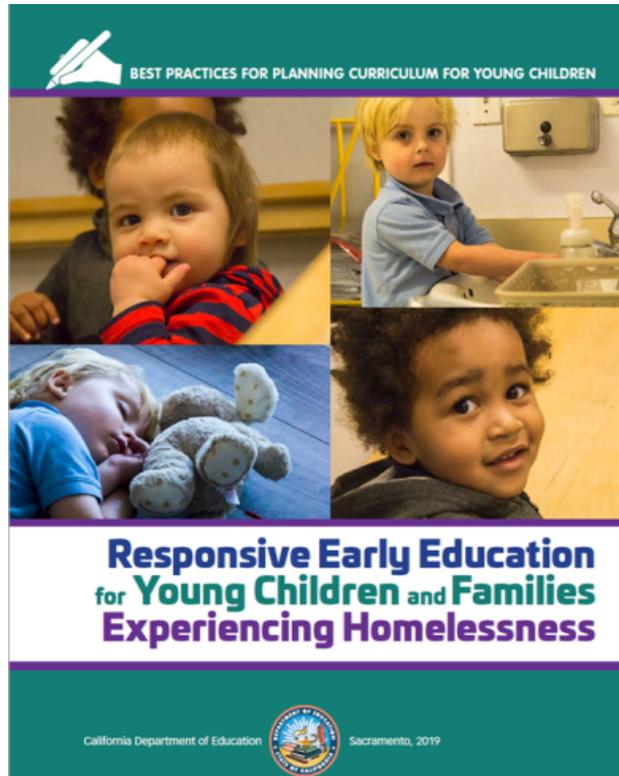
- There are different names and types of public preschool programs administered in California:
 - California State Preschool Programs
 - State-funded Family Child Care homes
 - First 5
 - Federal Head Start Programs:
 - Preschool and Early Head Start
 - Home visiting Programs

Early Education Programs (2)

- American Indian Early Childhood Education Programs
- State and Tribal Quality Improvement System
- Federal Title I Preschools
- State Alternative Payment Programs
- Migrant Education Preschool Programs



Connecting to Early Childhood



[Download this resource](#)

Chapter 1: Definitions and Policies Related to Homelessness

Chapter 2: Learning about the Families with Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

Chapter 3: The Impact of Homelessness on Young Children's Development and Learning

Chapter 4: The Important Role of Early Childhood Programs in Supporting Children Experiencing Homelessness

Chapter 5: Responsive Relationships and Partnership with Families

The final sections of the book include a conclusion, glossary, references, and a list of recommended children's books.



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Key Outreach Program Strategies

Outreach Strategies (2)

- Incorporate questions about housing status on enrollment applications for both preschool and through the required Housing Questionnaire
- Work with school personnel, including registrars, enrollment coordinators and liaisons, in identifying children under five years of age in the community

Outreach Strategies (4)

- Ensure that families receive information about preschool programs such as, Head Start, Early Head Start, and state-funded preschool programs
- Identify all infant/toddler programs, both public and private, as well as in-home childcare within the community

Outreach Strategies (5)

- Visit homeless shelters in your community to better gain awareness and reach out to the community
- Adjust program schedules to accommodate homeless families, particularly parents who work
- Participate in various “events” such health fairs, job fairs, parent activities, etc.

Outreach Strategies (6)

- Include the homeless liaison's contact information on preschool applications as a resource for families without proof of address or include a Homeless Ed poster with enrollment packets
- Connect and work with being appointed to your [Local Planning Council](#)

Visit: <https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-and-development/quality-improvement-initiatives/cdss-lpc-contacts>



Outreach Strategies (7)

- Be familiar and a part of the California Child Care Resource & Referral (R&R) Network.
- This is a coordinating entity that provides support, technical assistance, training, and a unified voice to the local R&Rs. For more information, please visit their web site at <https://rrnetwork.org/>



Connect with a child care specialist

- Visit the California Child Care Resource and Referral website and enter your zip code to be connected:
<https://rrnetwork.org/family-services/find-child-care>
- Connect with someone over the phone: **1-800-KIDS-793**
 - All providers are licensed by the State of California.
 - All providers and their employees are finger printed using TrustLine, California's official and most comprehensive background check for in-home caregivers (babysitters and nannies). Learn more: [Trustline](#)



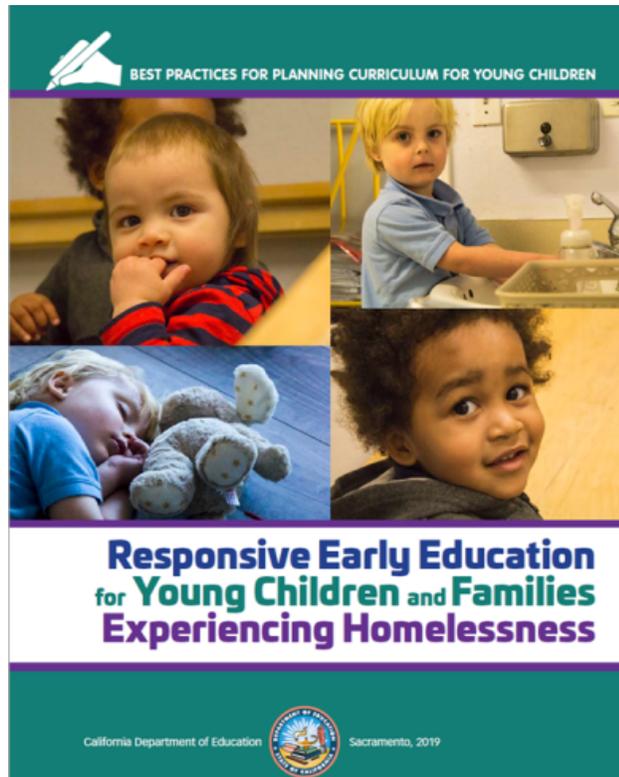
Management Bulletin 18-04 (1)

- The Early Learning and Care Division released Management Bulletin (MB) 18-04 in July 2018 which can be accessed on the CDE web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/mb1804.asp>.
- It provided the changes to the definition of homeless children and youth.
- These directives are in alignment with the Child Care and Development Block Grant regulations.

Management Bulletin 18-04 (2)

- The MB also provided detailed information regarding the requirements for the determination of both need and eligibility for homeless children and youth.
- Families may be enrolled before all documentation of need and eligibility is received, including immunization records.

Connecting to Early Childhood



[Download this resource](#)

Chapter 1: Definitions and Policies Related to Homelessness

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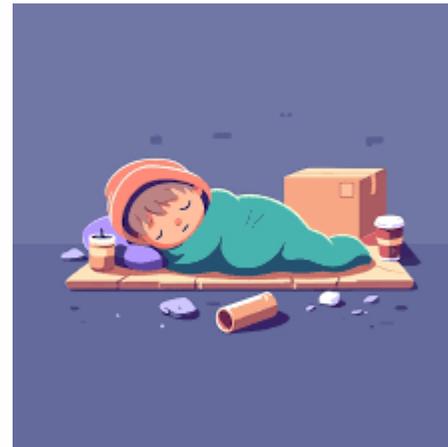
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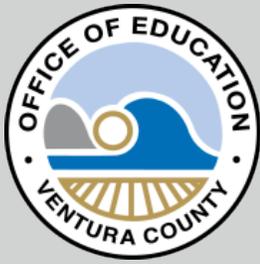
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Finding the “Littles” experiencing homelessness in Ventura County



Early Childhood Education Outreach Efforts 2024-25

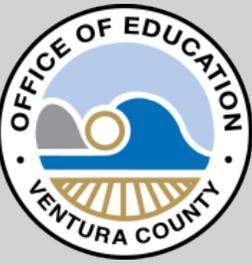


- Presentation to UPK group
- Presentation to Rainbow Family Resources (Regional Center)
- Joined Local Planning Council
- Provided PD to Early Childhood Education agencies serving Ventura County (CDR, Catalyst, First 5, Help Me Grow)
- Contacted 120 family care homes to provide information and resources
- Contacted 275 MKV families from Conejo, Rio and Hueneme districts that indicated they had younger children at home to provide resources and referrals
- Distributed 150 School Readiness Kits to preschool & childcare centers
- Participated in Local, State and National PD on developmental impact of unstable housing on children under 5 years of age
- Currently gathering data from all sources on numbers of known infants and toddlers in our county (whether they are enrolled in a program or not)



Supporting Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

WHAT CAN YOU DO?



- Be approachable
- Be aware and get to know your families
- Listen to parents
- Parents may call to advise of long absences and explanations may not always make sense
- Connect students and families with appropriate staff and services
- Keep information confidential – only share with parties that need to know, such as your Homeless Liaison
- Seek out your Liaison so they can provide support



VCOE Homeless Education Program Website & Newsletter



SPECIAL POPULATIONS • HOMELESS EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Homeless Education Program
- Distance and Family Resources
- District Liaison & School Staff Resources
- Early Childhood Resources
- Higher Education Resources

Homeless Education Program

The mission of the Ventura County Office of Education Homeless Education Program (HEP) is to help children and youth experiencing homelessness improve their academic skills and to reduce the educational barriers they face. Through collaboration with the local district McKinney-Vento Liaisons we strive to ensure that student supports are equitable throughout the county.

VCOE 6173 Board Policy VCOE 6173 Admin Regs
VCOE 6174 Dispute Resolution Form
VCOE McKinney-Vento Residency Questionnaire - English Spanish

What's New

- ARP EICY Authorized Activities
- ARP Resources & Ideas
- SLIC Brief How to use ARP funds
- Using Stimulus Funds to support students

OFFICE OF EDUCATION
VENTURA COUNTY

VENTURA COUNTY
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Dr. César Morales
County Superintendent of Schools

VCOE Homeless Education Program News

Volume 1 Issue 10
October 25, 2021

CDR wants YOUR "Littles" – Please refer families for services

**HEAD START PROGRAMS/
CALIFORNIA STATE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM**

Offering FREE preschool/childcare services for children ages zero to five years and their families, including services for pregnant women.

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION PROGRAM SERVICES

Services include early learning education, where instructional staff plan learning activities that promote school readiness.

HEALTH & NUTRITION PROGRAM SERVICES

Services include medical and dental care management to support the family's ability to keep their children healthy and ready to learn. Healthy meals and



<https://www.vcoe.org/Special-Populations/Homeless-Education-Program>

For More Information and Resources

- California Department of Education, Homeless Education website: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/>
- Homeless Education Technical Assistance Center's Early Education Resources <https://www.hetac.org/resources/ece>
- SchoolHouse Connection (Early Childhood Resources): <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/earlychildhood/>
- National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), Preschool and Early Childhood: <https://nche.ed.gov/preschool-early-childhood/>





Questions?



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