

Date of Hearing: January 7, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 673 (Jackson) – As Amended January 5, 2026

[Note: This bill was double referred to the Assembly Human Services Committee and may be heard by that Committee as it relates to issues under its jurisdiction.]

SUBJECT: Unaccompanied homeless pupils: Unaccompanied Youth Support Grant Program

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to administer the Unaccompanied Youth Support Program as a pilot program, offering five-year competitive grants to local educational agencies (LEAs) for the purpose of providing temporary housing and to support transitional housing projects for unaccompanied homeless youth who are 16 and 17 years of age and not in foster care. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the CDE, in consultation with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and county offices of education (COEs), to administer competitive grants as part of a pilot program, known as the Unaccompanied Youth Support Grant Program, for purposes of enabling LEAs to partner with local nonprofits and to offer five-year grants to fund temporary housing for unaccompanied homeless youth who are 16 and 17 years of age who are not in foster care.
- 2) Requires, as a condition of receiving grant funds, an LEA to partner with one or more local housing authorities, including, but not limited to, local nonprofit organizations, continuums of care, local health and human services departments, or homeless liaisons, for the purposes of implementing and operating transitional housing projects.
- 3) Requires eligible uses of grant funds allocated under the program to include all of the following:
 - a) Authorizing school staff to support connections and establish referrals to existing structures, including county welfare departments, foster care placement options, Youth Homelessness Prevention Centers administered by the CDSS, Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs, local continuums of care, COE Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs, homeless education liaisons, and other related services, with an emphasis on finding stable housing options for the pupils served by this grant;
 - b) Provisioning of basic needs supports, including items such as clothing, nutritious meals, and stipends for transportation, to enable the youth to maintain school attendance and engagement;
 - c) Educational support services and tutoring provided directly by the LEA or through a partner nonprofit organization or service provider;
 - d) Case management, employment readiness and skills development, independent living services, and access to health, behavioral health, and other supportive services, provided by a nonprofit organization or appropriate partner agency; and

- e) Financial support, including subsidies, rental assistance, or direct payments, made to a nonprofit organization, housing provider, or other eligible agency for the purpose of securing housing for unaccompanied homeless youth, provided that the LEA is not the operator of the housing program.
- 4) Requires funding preference under the program to be given to LEAs partnering with nonprofits that demonstrate the following:
 - a) A record of providing effective services to unaccompanied homeless youth;
 - b) Longstanding and successful partnerships with transitional housing units; and
 - c) Significant experience working with unaccompanied homeless youth.
 - 5) Requires the grant application to include all of the following information:
 - a) A description of the LEA and its partnering nonprofit organization or organizations;
 - b) A detailed plan describing how grant funds will be used to provide transitional housing and related services; and
 - c) A description of the methods and metrics the LEA will use to measure progress toward program goals.
 - 6) Authorizes the CDE to establish additional application requirements or criteria necessary to ensure effective program administration, accountability, and equitable geographic distribution of grant awards.
 - 7) Requires an LEA awarded grant funds under the program to submit an annual report to the CDE, in the form and manner prescribed by the CDE, describing the expenditure of the funds, the number and characteristics of unaccompanied homeless youth served, the services and housing provided, and measurable outcomes related to housing stability, school attendance, and educational attainment.
 - 8) Requires the CDE to submit a report to the Legislature upon completion of the five-year grant cycle.
 - 9) Authorizes, notwithstanding the rulemaking provisions of the Administrative Procedures Act, the CDE to implement this grant program through management bulletins or similar letters of instruction.
 - 10) Defines the following:
 - a) LEA to mean a school district, COE, or charter school;
 - b) “Nonprofit” to mean a nonprofit public benefit corporation;

- c) “Transitional housing” to mean a residential setting that provides time-limited housing and supportive services designed to help unaccompanied homeless youth achieve stable housing and educational success; and
- d) “Unaccompanied homeless youth” to mean a youth that is both homeless and unaccompanied. “Unaccompanied homeless youth” includes “homeless children and youths” and “unaccompanied youth,” as defined in Section 11434a of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 11301 et seq.).

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Defines, in the McKinney-Vento Act, “homeless children and youths” as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and includes:
 - a) Children who are sharing the housing of others due to economic hardship, are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations, are living in emergency or transitional shelters, or are abandoned in hospitals;
 - b) Children who have a primary nighttime residence not designed or ordinarily used for sleeping;
 - c) Children who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - d) Migratory children who are living in the circumstances described above. (USC Title 42 Section 11434(a))
- 2) Provides a homeless student with specific rights and protections, including the right to immediate enrollment, and the right to continue education at the student’s school of origin for the duration of the student’s homelessness, according to the child’s or youth’s best interest. (USC Title 42 Section 11432 (g))
- 3) Requires an LEA to ensure that each school within the LEA identifies all homeless children and youths and unaccompanied youths enrolled at the school. (Education Code (EC) 48851)
- 4) Requires each LEA liaison for homeless children and youths to ensure that homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies. (USC Title 24 Section 11432(g)(6)(A)(i))
- 5) Requires a school district, charter school, or COE to create a website containing the list of LEA liaisons for pupils in foster care and pupils who are homeless with contact information, and information on homelessness, including educational rights and resources in that school district, charter school, or CDE. (EC 48852.6)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “As the author of AB 673, I am committed to addressing the critical issue of homelessness among unaccompanied youth in California. These vulnerable minors often face significant challenges as they navigate life without the support of a parent or guardian, including limited access to safe housing, education, and essential services. This bill aims to provide a tangible solution by establishing the Unaccompanied Youth Support Grant Program which will offer five-year grants to fund referrals to housing supports, provisions of basic needs, educational supports, employment readiness, and supportive services.

By implementing this program, we can offer unaccompanied homeless youth the opportunity to rebuild their lives, pursue their education, and contribute to their communities. California cannot afford to ignore the plight of these young people, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. I respectfully ask for your support for this critical piece of legislation.”

This bill’s purpose and corresponding grant program lack the clarity and alignment necessary to meet the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth. The bill requires the CDE, in consultation with the CDSS and COEs, to administer competitive grants as part of a pilot program, for purposes of enabling LEAs to partner with local nonprofits and offer five-year grants to support transitional housing projects for unaccompanied homeless youth who are 16 and 17 years of age. Supporting the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth is a laudable goal, however, ***the Committee may wish to consider that*** this proposal lacks alignment between the stated purpose and grant program necessary to ensure positive youth outcomes, including:

- The goal of the pilot program and grant is unclear. Is it to provide temporary housing for unaccompanied homeless youth? Is it to provide permanent housing for unaccompanied homeless youth? Is it to connect them with other services so the youth are neither homeless nor unaccompanied by the time they are no longer eligible for the grant at age 18? Is one of the goals to establish relationships between LEAs and local nonprofits? Is it to improve school connectedness and student achievement?
- The CDSS, among other federal, state, and local governments, provide a variety of programs to support this student population. It is unclear how this bill would avoid duplicating existing programs aimed at serving unaccompanied homeless youth, which could potentially create confusion and use public funds inefficiently. Unaccompanied homeless youth may have an existing guardian. They may be emancipated or have yet to be connected to the foster care system.
- The bill states that the purpose of the pilot grant program is to provide temporary housing or temporary housing projects for unaccompanied youth. Other social service agencies and nonprofits, including county services, are more experienced and better equipped to directly meet the needs of unhoused individuals. It is recommended that school staff establish connections with housing-related services beyond the K-12 educational infrastructure on behalf of the students they serve, rather than directly providing these services themselves or providing direct payments to housing providers. Further, the proposal focuses on finding housing for unaccompanied homeless youth who are 16 or 17 years of age and not in foster care. No specificity or requirements are included related to the adults charged with the supervision and care of the unaccompanied youth when financial support is provided directly by the LEA to a housing provider.

- The bill would require that eligible uses of grant funds include case management, preemployment and training and skill development, independent living, and health support and services. The bill does not specify that the case management and other services need to be aligned with existing efforts being made by other public agencies or the LEA.
- The bill creates a new definition for transitional housing that is different from those used in the policy area of publicly subsidized housing, which will likely further contribute to confusion between the K-12 education, human services, and housing policy areas.

In light of these concerns, *the Committee may wish to consider* whether this proposal may benefit from additional time to develop a more complete proposal and to assess any unintended consequences.

How many California students experience homelessness? California schools identify homeless students using the definition of homeless students in the federal McKinney-Vento Act, which defines “homeless children and youths” as:

- Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- Children and youth who may be living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or shelters;
- Children and youth 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;
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are children who are living in similar circumstances listed above.

According to the CDE, in 2023-24 there were 286,853 California public school students who met the federal definition of homelessness, of which 8,831 are reported as unaccompanied homeless students. All homeless youth represent 4.8% of the total California public school student population. Over 17% of the students experiencing homelessness in the U.S. reside in California (Federal Data Summary, Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2020). According to a 2020 report by the UCLA Center for Transformation of Schools titled *State of Crisis: Dismantling Student Homelessness in California*, African American and Latino students are disproportionately represented among students experiencing homelessness.

2023-24 Homeless Student Enrollment by Dwelling Type, Unaccompanied Youth

Race / Ethnicity	Cumulative Enrollment (All students)	Homeless Student Enrollment	Tempo rarily Dou- bled Up	Temporary Shelters	Hotels/ Motels	Tempo -rarily Unshel tered
African	303,380	952	71.3%	16.2%	4.8%	7.7%

American						
American Indian or Alaska Native	26,542	184	78.8%	9.8%	5.4%	6.0%
Asian	595,658	232	71.1%	18.5%	4.3%	6.0%
Filipino	132,555	67	82.1%	14.9%	1.5%	1.5%
Hispanic or Latino	3,382,089	5,258	80.4%	11.4%	2.0%	6.2%
Pacific Islander	24,994	53	84.9%	11.3%	1.9%	1.9%
White	1,216,294	1,536	81.8%	9.4%	1.9%	6.8%
Two or More Races	277,099	473	79.1%	8.9%	3.8%	8.2%
Not Reported	65,240	76	61.8%	19.7%	5.3%	13.2%
Statewide (Unaccompanied Homeless Youth)	6,023,851	8,831	79.2%	11.7%	2.6%	6.6%
Statewide (All Homeless Youth)	6,023,851	286,853	83.3%	7.0%	5.9%	3.9%

Source: CDE Dataquest

Unaccompanied homeless youth. The U.S. Department of Education notes that the presence of a custody or guardianship issue alone does not make a student eligible for McKinney-Vento services; rather, the student's living arrangement also must be considered homeless. With this federal definition in mind, the term "unaccompanied youth" typically refers to youth who are both unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness.

According to a 2022 brief from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), "Each year, as required by the U.S. Department of Education, schools collect data on the enrollment of children and youth experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youth. During the 2014-2015 school year, U.S. public schools enrolled 95,032 unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness, up 21% from 78,654 during the 2012-2013 school year (NCHE, 2016, p. 17). And yet, these data represent only school-age unaccompanied youth who were identified and enrolled by U.S. public schools. Actual numbers of youth experiencing homelessness on their own vary widely, depending on the definition and methodology used. With this in mind, experts estimate that as many as 1.7 million youth experience homelessness on their own in any given year (Hammer, Finkelhor, Sedlak, 2002)."

Several existing programs to support homeless youth. There are a number of existing programs to support California's homeless youth, and many focus on serving young adults who are no

longer minors. *The Committee may wish to consider* the value of adding another program targeting the same population.

- *Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Grant Program:* Administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, HHAP makes available grant allocations to cities, counties, and continuums of care with flexible funding to prevent and end homelessness in their regions. The grant program requires at least 10% of each HHAP allocation must be spent on services for homeless youth. Eligible uses of grant funds include operating expenses for new or existing non-congregate shelter sites and transitional housing for youth, youth-focused services in transitional housing, and motel or hotel vouchers.
- *California Emergency Solutions and Housing (CESH) Program:* Administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, the CESH Program provides funds for a variety of activities to assist persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness. CESH funds may be used for five primary activities: housing relocation and stabilization services (including rental assistance), operating subsidies for permanent housing, flexible housing subsidy funds, operating support for emergency housing interventions, and systems support for homelessness services and housing delivery systems. In addition, some administrative entities may use CESH funds to develop or update a Coordinated Entry System, Homeless Management Information System, or Homelessness Plan. Eligible applicants are Administrative Entities (AEs) — local governments, non-profit organizations, or unified funding agencies — designated by the Continuum of Care (CoC) to administer CESH funds in their service area.
- *Transitional Housing Program for Non-Minor Dependents (THP-NMD):* Administered by the CDSS, the THP-NMD is a supervised, supportive housing program for young adults (ages 18-21) who are in California's Extended Foster Care program. This program helps NMDs transition from foster care to independent living by providing safe housing, case management, and life skills development. NMDs have the right to voluntarily remain in (or re-enter) foster care, live in approved housing options, and receive support to develop life skills and self-sufficiency. County government supports the implementation of THP-NMD through licensed THP-NMD providers, subject to Health and Safety Code and Community Care Licensing regulations.
- *Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus):* Administered by the CDSS, the THP-Plus Program provides housing options for young adults who exited foster care (including those supervised by the Juvenile Probation) on or after their 18th birthday, and offers housing and supportive services for 36 cumulative months or until the age of 25, whichever comes first. The goal of THP-Plus is to provide a safe living environment while helping participants develop the life skills needed to live independently. The housing models which may be offered in the THP-Plus program include apartments, single-family dwellings, condominiums, college dormitories, Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs) or Group Homes, and host family models.

Youth experiencing homelessness have poor educational outcomes. Research suggests that students experiencing homelessness hold educational aspirations like those of their peers—to graduate from high school and go on to college. What separates students experiencing homelessness from their peers are the challenges of their circumstances, often due to the

cumulative effects of poverty and the instability and disruption of social relationships associated with high mobility. (Burns, 2021)

California students who experience homelessness have a significantly higher risk of poor educational outcomes than other students. The CDE's 2022 California School Dashboard data shows:

- 45.1% of homeless students were chronically absent versus 30% of all students;
- 5.5% of homeless students were suspended from school one or more times, versus 3.1% of all students;
- Homeless students scored 62.9 points below standard on the Smarter Balanced Assessment in English Language Arts (versus all students at 12.2 below standard);
- Homeless students scored 101.8 points on the Smarter Balanced Assessment in Mathematics (versus 51.7 points below for all students); and
- 74.4% of homeless students graduated from high school versus 87.4% of all students.

Liaison for students experiencing homelessness. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act requires every school district, county office of education, charter school, and special education local plan area to designate an appropriate person as liaison for children and youth experiencing homelessness. LEA liaisons have an obligation to support children and youth experiencing homelessness who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (unaccompanied youth). LEA liaisons must help unaccompanied youth select a school of attendance, receive transportation to and from the school of origin, and obtain a prompt and fair resolution of any disputes. LEA liaisons must also inform unaccompanied youth of their status as “independent” students for the purpose of applying to FAFSA and help verify their status.

Federal funding for homeless youth. The federal Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program is a formula grant made to the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico based on each state's share of Title I, Part A, funds, which include McKinney-Vento. The program supports an office for coordination of the education of homeless children and youths in each state, which gathers comprehensive information about homeless children and youths and the impediments they must overcome to regularly attend school. These grants also help state educational agencies ensure that homeless children, including preschoolers and youths, have equal access to free and appropriate public education (FAPE). States must review and revise laws and practices that impede such equal access. States are required to have an approved plan for addressing problems associated with the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children in school. States must make competitive subgrants to LEAs to facilitate the enrollment, attendance, and success in school of homeless children and youths. This includes addressing problems due to transportation needs, immunization and residency requirements, lack of birth certificates and school records, and guardianship issues. LEAs may receive competitive subgrant funds, and LEAs offer such activities as coordination and collaboration with other local agencies to provide comprehensive services to homeless children and youths and their families. LEAs also offer expedited evaluations of the needs of homeless children to help them enroll in school, attend regularly, and achieve success.

Recommended Committee Amendments. *Staff recommends that the bill be amended* as follows:

- State the purpose of the grant is to provide the supports necessary to improve school attendance, student engagement, student graduation rates, and student wellbeing for homeless youth who are 16 and 17 years of age, including connecting youth with resources to find stable housing.
- State that eligible uses of grant funds include authorizing school staff to support connections and establish referrals to existing structures, as specified, providing basic needs supports, providing educational support services and tutoring, providing employment readiness skills and development, and supporting connections and establishing referrals to health and behavioral health services.
- Remove language related to transitional housing.
- Use a single term “unaccompanied youth” to mean a homeless child or youth that is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian as defined in Section 11434a(6) of the federal McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 11301 et seq.), replacing and streamlining the terms “unaccompanied homeless youth” and “unaccompanied youth” in the current version of the bill.

Related legislation. AB 373 (Gipson), Chapter 327, Statutes of 2023, requires an LEA operating an intersession program to grant priority access to homeless and foster children and youth.

AB 408 (Quirk-Silva), Chapter 904, Statutes of 2022, requires LEAs to establish homeless education program policies consistent with federal law, requires homeless education liaisons to offer training to specified school staff, and requires the CDE to develop a risk-based monitoring plan for homeless education requirements.

AB 2375 (Luz Rivas), Chapter 912, Statutes of 2022, requires LEAs and charter schools to identify all homeless children and youth and unaccompanied youth enrolled at the school by administering a housing questionnaire based on specified best practices.

SB 532 (Caballero) Chapter 918, Statutes of 2022, expands the rights for foster youth, homeless youth, former juvenile court school students, children of military families, migratory children, and students participating in a newcomer program (highly mobile students) to be exempted from local graduation requirements if certain conditions are met; requires LEAs to provide these students the option to remain in school for a fifth year to complete the statewide coursework requirements if certain conditions are met; specifies the contents of transcripts when transferred to a new LEA; and requires LEAs to annually report to the CDE on the number of students, who in the prior school year, graduated with an exemption from the LEA's local graduation requirements.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Apartment Association

California Department of Education

Opposition

None on file

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