

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 673 (Jackson)

As Amended January 12, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes the Unaccompanied Youth Support Grant Program to provide supports for unaccompanied youth who are 16 and 17 years of age, including connecting youth with resources to find stable housing.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires the California Department of Education (CDE), in consultation with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to administer competitive grants for a period of five years as part of a pilot program, to be known as the Unaccompanied Youth Support Grant Program, to local educational agencies (LEAs) to improve school attendance, student engagement, graduation rates, and wellbeing for unaccompanied youth.
- 2) Specifies that eligible grant funds include:
 - 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 CDSS, local continuums of care (CoCs), Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs, homeless education liaisons, and other related services, with an emphasis on finding stable housing options for the students served by this grant;
 - b) Providing provisions of basic needs supports, including items such as clothing, food, and stipends for transportation;
 - c) Providing educational support services and tutoring provided directly by LEAs or through a partner nonprofit or service provider;
 - d) Providing employment readiness and skills development, including skills related to independent living; and,
 - e) Supporting connections and establishing referrals to health, behavioral health, and other supportive services.
- 3) Requires the CDE, when awarding grants to LEAs, to prioritize grants for applications that demonstrate significant experience working with unaccompanied youth and existing partnerships with county welfare departments, CoCs, nonprofits working on youth homelessness, and other related services.
- 4) Requires LEAs seeking to receive a grant under the Unaccompanied Youth Support Grant Program to submit an application in the form and matter prescribed by the CDE.
- 5) Requires LEAs to submit annual reports to the CDE, in the form and manner as prescribed by the CDE, describing the expenditure of funds, the number and characteristics of

unaccompanied youth served, the services and housing provided, and measurable outcomes related to housing stability, school attendance, and educational attainment.

- 6) Requires the CDE, upon completion of the five-year grant cycle, to submit a report to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature, evaluating program outcomes and recommending whether the program should be expanded or made permanent.
- 7) Establishes the following definitions:
 - a) "LEA" means a school district, county office of education, or charter school;
 - b) "Nonprofit" means a nonprofit public benefit corporation; and,
 - c) "Unaccompanied youth" means a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, as defined in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

COMMENTS

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:

- 1) Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- 2) Children and youth who may be living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or shelters;
- 3) 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;
- 4) Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- 5) 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, *State of Crisis: Dismantling Student Homelessness in California*, African American and Latino students are disproportionately represented among students experiencing homelessness.

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.

- 1) *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.
- 2) *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.
- 3) *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.

4) *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)

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.

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."

Arguments in Support

The Superintendent of Public Instruction writes, "I have prioritized efforts that position schools as trusted access points for support and connection to strengthen partnerships between LEAs and community-based, county, and state systems that serve youth and families. Through initiatives such as the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act and investments in student support infrastructure, I have worked to reduce barriers to learning by addressing the non-academic challenges that interfere with student success. Ensuring that schools are equipped to identify

unaccompanied homeless youth and connecting them to appropriate services is critical to this work.

AB 673 advances this vision by providing LEAs with the resources and flexibility needed to coordinate supports for unaccompanied homeless youth, which include referrals to stable housing options, basic needs assistance, educational supports, and health and behavioral health services. By emphasizing cross-agency collaboration, accountability, and outcome measurement, this bill strengthens existing systems without placing schools in the role of housing providers. AB 673 will help improve attendance, engagement, and educational attainment for unaccompanied homeless youth while generating the data necessary to inform future policy investments.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

- 1) According to the CDE, this bill necessitates the creation of a new housing office within the department creating approximately \$844,334 in ongoing General Fund costs to support an additional four staff to oversee administration of the grant program. However, it is unclear to the committee whether the new administrative workload imposed by this bill warrants four additional staff.
- 2) One-time Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures of an unknown but likely significant amount, potentially in the millions to tens of millions of dollars, to fund the first five-year cycle of pilot grants.

VOTES

ASM EDUCATION: 7-0-2

YES: Muratsuchi, Wilson, Ortega, Bonta, Garcia, Lowenthal, Patel

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Castillo

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 4-0-3

YES: Lee, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson

ABS, ABST OR NV: Castillo, Celeste Rodriguez, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Stefani, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Bauer-Kahan, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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