

Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Homeless Education Services Program (HES)

Needs Assessment Report January 2024



**Los Angeles County
Office of Education**

University of California
San Francisco



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Overview

Through their Homeless Education Services Program (HES), the Los Angeles County Office of Education's (LACOE) Student Services and Programs Division provides support and resources to the 80 school districts in the county, Juvenile Court, Community Schools (JCCS), and county-wide charter schools to implement the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Each district designates a local liaison who serves as the primary contact to interface with the LACOE HES.

LACOE contracted with evaluators from the University of California, San Francisco's (UCSF) School Health Evaluation and Research Team to document the technical assistance LACOE provided and the broader impacts of these services.

As part of this evaluation, in Fall/Winter 2023, UCSF and LACOE distributed a survey to Homeless Education Liaisons throughout the County to assess needs, capacity, challenges, and strengths related to performing their roles. The following is a summary of the findings from the 92 liaisons who completed the survey.

Homeless Liaison Capacity and Responsibilities

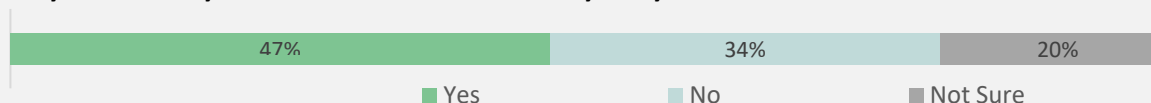
HOMELESS LIAISON ROLE

Two-thirds (63%, n=58) of *Homeless Liaison Needs Assessment Survey* respondents noted that they are the homeless services liaison for their entire district, 17% (n=16) reported being a site-level liaison or designee, and 20% (n=18) reported they were the homeless services liaison for their charter school. *Homeless Liaison Needs Assessment Survey* respondents reported spending an average of 13 hours per week on their homeless liaison work (range <1 hour to 60 hours). Many respondents (92%; n=85) reported holding other positions/titles in addition to their roles as COE Homeless Liaison, including:

- Director of Student Support Services
- District Counselor
- Foster Youth Services Coordinator/Liaison
- Superintendent/Principal/ Assistant Principal
- Student Support Services Director
- Special Education Director
- Director of State & Federal Programs
- Social Worker
- Director of Emergency Preparedness and Response
- Director of Curriculum & Professional Development

Less than half (47%) of the Homeless Liaisons felt that they had enough time to carry out their responsibilities, while one-third (34%) did not and another 20% were not sure.

Do you feel like you have sufficient time to carry out your homeless liaison duties?

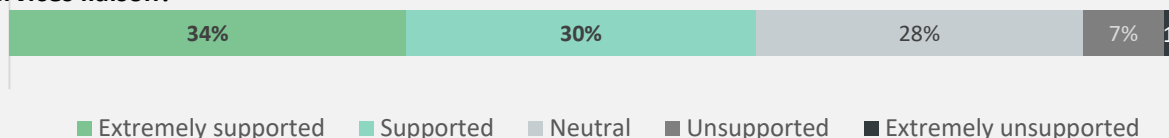


On a 5-point scale where 5 is "fully able to carry out" and 1 is "not able to carry out," the Homeless Liaisons reported their ability as 4 on average to "ensure homeless children and youth are identified and enrolled in school have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in school," and to ensure that "disputes over eligibility, school selection, or enrollment are mediated."

Nearly all Homeless Liaisons reported that they do have school-based points of contact whom they can rely upon to assist students experiencing homelessness (85%). Most of those who do have a contact reported that these contacts are formally designated (72%), while 43% reported that they are informally designated.

As shown below, most liaisons reported that they are "extremely supported" (34%) or "supported" (30%) by their district office/administration.

How supported do you feel by your district office/administration in your capacity as homeless services liaison?



USE OF HOMELESS LIAISON SERVICES

Most *Homeless Liaison Needs Assessment Survey* respondents reported that parents/guardians (78%) seek them out, generally via telephone or email, for TA consultation, and/or professional help related to homelessness issues. Under half reported that students (41%) request assistance, 35% reported that other school staff seek them out for assistance and 8% reported community partners do so.

AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT REFERRALS

Most Homeless Liaisons reported that they know where to make referrals for academic support (93%), mental health needs (92%), food/nutrition assistance (86%), housing (70%), medical needs (69%), and temporary shelter (68%). However, fewer reported that they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the availability of organizations providing these services, with notably low satisfaction reported for housing (15%) and temporary shelter (17%) services.

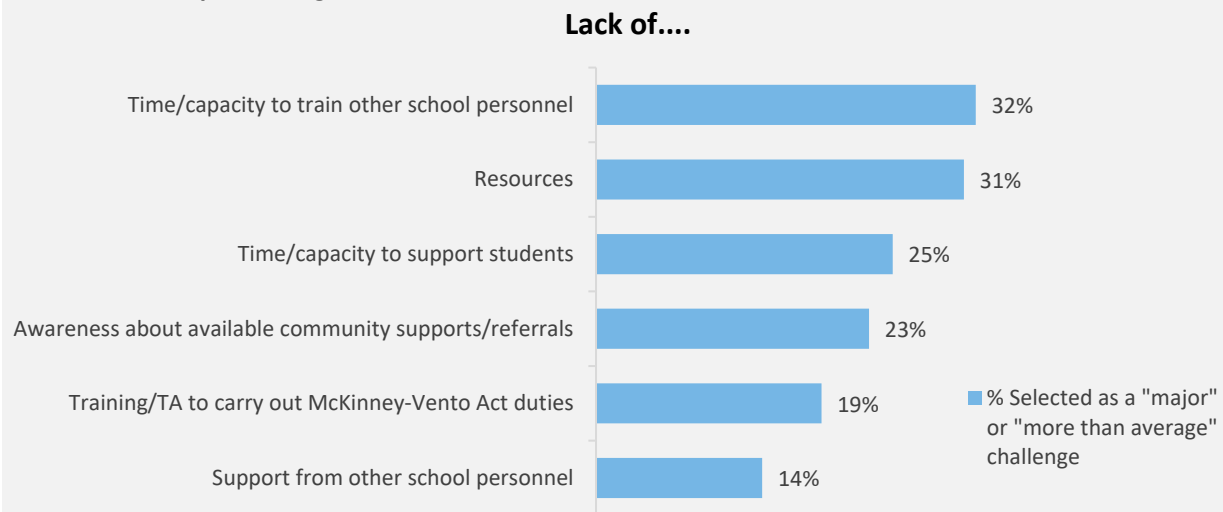
Services	Percentage who <u>know where to make referrals</u> for the service	Percentage who are <u>satisfied or extremely satisfied with the availability of organizations providing the service</u>
Academic support	93%	66%
Food/nutrition assistance	86%	57%
Housing	70%	15%
Legal aid	55%	21%
Medical needs	69%	47%
Mental health	92%	60%
Temporary shelter	68%	17%
Other	67%	14%

BARRIERS TO SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Homeless Liaison Needs Assessment Survey respondents reported that lack of resources (31%), time/capacity to train other school personnel (32%) and time/capacity to support HCY (25%) are the three most prevalent significant challenges they experience in providing support to students experiencing homelessness, as shown below.

“Due to the fact that our community is very affluent, when there are families experiencing homelessness, there is a greater stigma attached to it and they do not want to be identified.” - Homeless Education Services Liaison

% of Respondents Selecting the Following as a Significant Challenge in Providing Support for Students Experiencing Homelessness



Student Identification and Needs

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Nearly all Homeless Liaisons reported they find and contact students or families via referrals from teachers, counselors, or site administrators (89%). Most also find them through the Housing Questionnaire (83%) or school notices, e-mails, or other communications (67%).

How do you find and contact students or families?	n	%
Referral from teacher, counselor, or site administrator	82	89%
Outreach efforts based on Housing Questionnaire	76	83%
Outreach efforts via school notices, e-mails, or other communications	62	67%
Home visits	47	51%
Other (e.g., community agencies, self-report, enrollment, parents)	20	22%

Among *Homeless Liaison Needs Assessment Survey* respondents, 73% of respondents (n=67) described challenges or problems they face in identifying students experiencing homelessness in their schools/districts.

- **Families/students do not disclose that they are experiencing homelessness, or do not fill out housing questionnaires correctly due to stigma (n=36).** One respondent wrote, *"Families concern of being stigmatized or reported to DCFS for not being able to promote appropriate housing to their children. The label, 'homeless', is holding families from self-identification. Education on, 'housing security', is needed. [There is a] Fear that CALFRESH benefits will be reduced when families are identified as homeless."*
- **Systemic issues (n=13),** such as a lack of effort and/or supportive staff on school sites, keeping data updated, increases in homeless children and youth (HCY) due to housing evictions, and systemic challenges with meeting the unique needs of unaccompanied minors. One respondent wrote, *"The unaccompanied youth are more difficult to identify and they need the most help."*
- **Lack of resources (n=12),** such as sufficient transportation, housing/ temporary shelter, and sustainable funding streams to meet the needs of this growing student population. One respondent explained, *"I truly need help linking families to emergency shelters and stable housing. There are not enough places to refer around our service area."*
- **Changes in housing status mid-year, or difficulty reaching parents due to changing phone numbers (n=6).** One respondent wrote, *"Another challenge is the housing status of many students changes after [initial] enrollment."* Another respondent wrote, *"Phone numbers are constantly changing which makes it difficult to keep in touch with our families."*

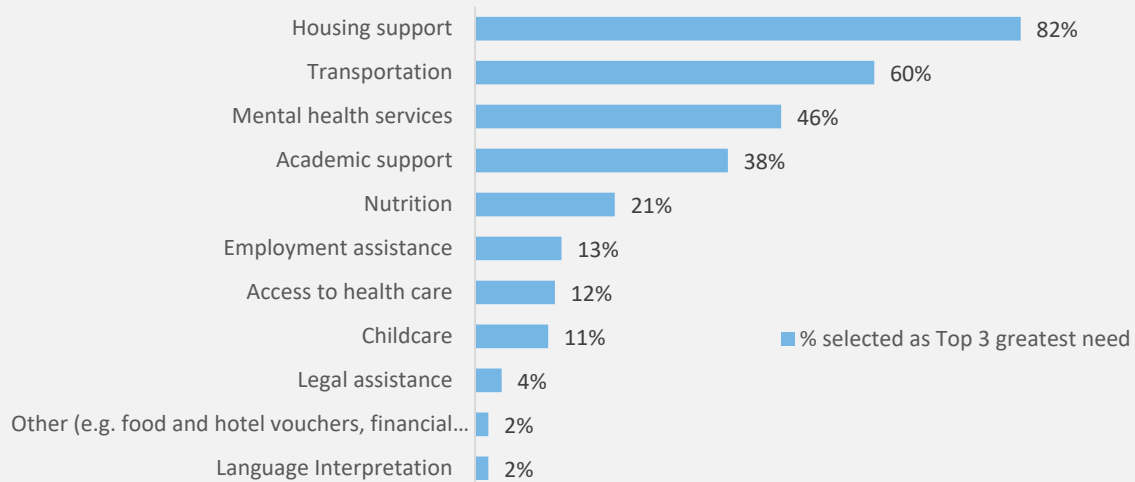
NEEDS OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

To assess the needs of students experiencing homelessness, 83% of Homeless Liaisons look out for red flags (e.g., attendance issues, behavior issues, lack of supplies, etc.). Other strategies include conducting one on one conversations/outreach (79%) and identifying students through enrollment forms/surveys (73%).

How do you assess the needs of your students experiencing homelessness?	n	%
Red flags (e.g., attendance issues, behavior issues, lack of supplies, etc.)	74	83%
One on one conversations/outreach	70	79%
Enrollment forms/surveys	65	73%
Other (e.g., Google surveys, school staff report, self-report, site referrals)	20	22%

As shown below, *Homeless Liaison Needs Assessment Survey* respondents reported that housing support (82%), transportation (60%), and mental health services (46%) are the three greatest needs of students experiencing homelessness.

What are the three greatest needs of students experiencing homelessness you serve?



LACOE HES Technical Assistance, Training, and Program Support

Overall, respondents were extremely satisfied (44%) or satisfied (31%) with their past experiences receiving support for their role as Homeless Services Liaison from LACOE. The table below shows satisfaction with specific aspects of supports received among those who reported receiving each type.

Question	Extremely bad/ Bad	Neither good nor bad	Good	Extremely good
Personal/one-on-one TA	0%	11%	26%	63%
Group trainings offered from LACOE	0%	7%	28%	65%
Group trainings provided for my specific school or district	0%	14%	27%	59%

When asked if there are any new trainings or tools they would like to see developed to be able to support their work, survey respondents provided the following ideas:

Trainings (n=18):

- *In person trainings with in-person staff. More staff to support school sites.*
- *Unaccompanied youth, their rights, laws when they fit McKinney Vento too. CIF and my role. Review of federal program monitoring expectations.*
- *How to better support unaccompanied youth.*
- *Guidance on how far to handle investigations around confirming residency or not when a family is claiming homelessness.*
- *Students with attendance issues - how to bring them in.*
- *Revising for all staff to have CPI and CPR training. I was called out for an incident to one of my schools and when I arrived a Special Ed Aid trained in CPI had to restrain a student that was extremely irate and out of control. She did such an amazing job , but this incident required outside help (police) and she sat there calming student down for a long time before help arrived. I would have liked to have been trained so I could have assisted her or relieved her.*
- *Let's go through some cases and let's figure out how we would support the student(s).*
- *How to use resources provided. Offer information regarding liaison contact information for additional support. More collaboration between districts and their homeless liaisons.*
- *Best practices from schools that have a good system for identifying and supporting homeless youth.*
- *More training on support post-secondary readiness and addressing mental health for homeless students.*
- *There needs to be more 101 trainings throughout the year.*
- *I need more support on steps to take to get things that Homeless families request like shoes, food, etc. This issue is that many of the resources that are shared are not available in the Antelope and Santa Clarita Valleys.*
- *Aside from the homeless office hours I would love to see more trainings on specifically material for liaisons. I love when we get to know what other districts are up to throughout LA county. The sharing of resources and connections is amazing.*
- *I would like different scenarios of students facing different challenges that would identify them as McKinney Vento that would help me better identify when a student qualifies.*
- *More training on how to support families who need housing resources.*

Tools (n=6):

- *A universal system for tracking students experiencing homelessness.*

- *I am new to this role so answering based on past experience is very hard. It is also difficult to know if I am lacking available trainings. I do know that finding housing and temp shelter is very difficult. There seems to be a lack of available space and resources.*
- *Access to a more organized way of tapping into resources, slide presentations, flyers, etc. provided by LACOE.*
- *I appreciate examples of events, letters and communication that other LEAs use to reach out to their homeless families.*
- *Housing resources--getting around wait lists for housing services.*
- *Direct housing app for immediate placement.*

When asked if they had any recommendations or additional feedback for improving the technical assistance provided by LACOE, **most respondents only offered positive feedback about the technical assistance provided by LACOE (n=18)**, for example:

- *Jennifer Kottke is absolutely amazing. She is always available to assist with any questions or issues that arise. I honestly do not know how she juggles it all. The women is an absolute saint.*
- *LACOE staff has been instrumental in my ability to provide any supports available and developing my capacity to work with families in need.*
- *I would just like to say LACOE has provided absolutely over and beyond support for our families.*
- *I love Dr. Kottke and staff. Dr. Kottke is always available to answer questions and guide me through processes.*
- *I appreciate all of the connections and training that LACOE provides so that we can be successful. I am grateful to know that we are not in this alone.*

Some Homeless Liaisons provided the following recommendations or additional feedback for improving the technical assistance provided by LACOE.

Provide more assistance to help with access to resources and funding (n=4):

- *Assistance with barriers to secure housing and temporary shelter.*
- *[We need a] call center.*
- *We need more resources for housing, temporary and permanent.*
- *More funds exclusively for unhoused or "homeless" would be beneficial.*

Provide more opportunities for meetings, trainings, , and updates (n=6):

- *Standing check-ins.*
- *More training on how funding decisions are made, more policy training.*
- *In-house training for staff on technical tools.*
- *On-site training.*
- *More in-person trainings as we have lost the networking accessibility with other liaisons since COVID.*

Other (n=5):

- *The homeless conference shouldn't be in the spring.*
- *Bring people from housing (harbor interfaith, 211, other shelters) to speak to us.*
- *Please understand that we have other roles.*
- *The conferences need to be free.*

Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Funding

In the *Homeless Liaison Needs Assessment Survey*, respondents were asked how the EHCY funds have helped students experiencing homelessness in their LEA in the past. The main ways were in providing funding to provide students with school supplies, basic necessities, and transportation. Homeless Liaisons reported that the following specific areas:

School supplies/school-related expenses (n=18):

- School supplies, PE clothes, yearbooks, prom, college field trips.
- Backpacks, Fieldtrips, Graduation activities.
- Uniform support, school supplies.
- We have been able to provide school supplies, clothing, personal hygiene.
- These funds have added an additional cushion to provide supports for students such as enrichment and supplies without having to worry about not having enough funds for all students that need it.
- Opportunities for involvement in school activities.
- Access to student event.

"The EHCY funds have been instrumental in providing essential support services, such as transportation, academic assistance, and counseling, to students experiencing homelessness in our LEA. These funds have significantly improved their access to education, stability, and overall well-being." - Homeless Education Services Liaison

Basic necessities/resources (n=17):

- It was very useful in getting basic necessities for students.
- Provide resources in the form of gift cards/services/necessary school materials.
- We have been able to provide basic needs, bus passes, and beds to our families.
- Provided some type of support for clothing and hygiene kits.
- Supported food and nutrition.
- Household products.
- Internet connection - routers have been extremely helpful.
- The funds have helped us by being able to purchase Walmart Gift Cards for our families.

Transportation (n=15)

- We have been able to provide more transportation options with these funds.
- Gas support.
- Bus passes.

Tutoring programs (n=5):

- Tutoring programs, services, and supports.

Short-term housing (n=4):

- Hotel stays.
- Housing vouchers.
- We did an MOU with a motel for emergency short-term housing.
- Providing temporary shelter.

"Provided clothing, washers, dryers, temporary shelter, medical needs, summer programs!! It has been SO valuable - with less restrictions than Title I & LCAP funds." - Homeless Education Services Liaison

Increased staff capacity and personnel (n=4):

- *Personnel hours.*
- *External field instructor to support our intern program/case management for McKinney Vento students & families.*
- *Funded our Senior Office Technician, Senior Parent Community Facilitator.*
- *Professional development.*

Other supports (n=10):

- *Allowed for greater mental health supports to be put into place.*
- *Raise awareness.*
- *The funds are of extreme need. It has helped greatly in emergency situations.*
- *The funds have allowed to better support our unhoused students.*
- *Mentorship program.*
- *Outreach during the holidays.*
- *Greater supportive services.*
- *Childcare.*
- *They've supported gaps that we typically could not have addressed without those funds.*
- *Being able to purchase items typically not allowed under school funding.*