

## IDENTIFICATION OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act mandates that LEAs identify and serve youth experiencing homelessness. The law requires this identification to occur annually but does not provide a definitive way to conduct this identification. The California Department of Education recommends for LEAs to utilize a questionnaire that allows the parent/guardian or an unaccompanied youth a way to self-identify. Previously this was referred to as the “Student Residency Questionnaire”; however, once translated into Spanish, the title has proven to be problematic so the LACOE is suggesting the title Student Housing Questionnaire (SHQ). With that said, a family or youth does not have to submit any documentation to verify that they are homeless. The questionnaire is merely a tool for LEAs to use to assist with identification and is not required.

- The student’s nighttime residence needs to be determined upon enrollment to see if it is fixed, regular and adequate. It will also help determine school of origin vs. school of residence rights.
- A similar form should be provided to all students on an annual basis in an effort to identify students who have become homeless after enrollment. This form may include:
  - In a shelter;
  - In a motel or hotel;
  - In a transitional housing program;
  - In a car, trailer or campsite, temporarily, due to inadequate housing;
  - In a rented trailer/motor home on private property;
  - In a rented garage due to loss of housing;
  - Temporarily in another family’s house or apartment due to loss of housing, due to financial problems (e.g. loss of job, eviction, or natural disaster);
  - Temporarily with an adult that is not the parent/legal guardian due to loss of housing;
  - Other places not designed for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (*ask for an explanation*); or
  - Living alone, without any adult (unaccompanied youth).
- The form should explain to parents, guardians, caregivers, or unaccompanied youth that services are being offered based upon the provided information.
- The California Department of Education recommends that the form note consequences for providing false information to the LEA. An example of this statement is  
*“Under penalty of perjury under the laws of this state, I declare that the information provided here is true and correct and of my own personal knowledge and that, if called upon to testify, I would be competent to do so.”*

If the liaison has determined that a family or youth qualifies as experiencing homelessness but the parent declines to fill out an SHQ or receive services, the family or youth should still count the student(s) in the LEAs count as homeless for that school year. The experience of homelessness is re-assessed annually.

## DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY: FIXED, REGULAR AND ADEQUATE

**Fixed:** A residence that is stationary, permanent and not subject to change. Factors to consider:

- Is the location on wheels? Does it move to various locations?
- Does the family have any legal right to be in that home?
- Is the arrangement permanent or temporary or is the family seeking another place to live?
- Did the families move in together to save money? Is this a permanent plan?
- How soon does the family plan to move?
- What brought the family to the current living situation? Where was the family living previously?
- Where would the family go if they could not stay in their current location?
- Could the family be asked to leave at any time?
- Is the housing shared equally?

**Regular:** A residence that is used on a regular, nightly basis. It is consistent. Factors to consider:

- Does the family move frequently or does the family stay in the same place each night?
- Does the family have a key to the place they are staying? Can the family come and go freely?
- How long has the family been there?
- What is their residence plan?
- How long did they live in the last place? Why did the family leave?

**Adequate:** A residence that is sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in a home environment. The residence has adequate privacy, space, security, lighting and ventilation, etc. Factors to consider:

- How large is the residence? How many people reside at that location?
- Is the family sharing a room? How many people share one room?
- Where does the family sleep? Is it in a bedroom, or in a public area such as a dining room or living room?
- Does the place have running water, electricity, and heat? Is there a basic functional part such as a working kitchen or a working toilet?
- What is the condition of the place? Is it safe, warm and dry? Is there glass in the window panes? Are there holes in the structure? Is it infested with vermin or mold?

**Sub-standard Housing:** Housing that may cause significant injury, illness or death. Issue to consider may include, but is not limited to:

- Health and safety issues
- Number of occupants vs. number of square feet
- Age of occupants
- Local and state building codes

*Example:* A one-room apartment housing 10 people is inadequate space. Families that opt to reside together as a means to afford mortgage or rent as a long-term plan, and their housing is fixed, regular and adequate, the family may not be considered homeless. **For more information:**  
[https://ncche.ed.gov/ibt/sc\\_eligibility.php](https://ncche.ed.gov/ibt/sc_eligibility.php)