



California
Community
Colleges



Breaking Down Barriers: Guidelines for California Community College Homeless Liaisons 2025

Table of Contents

2025 Toolkit Update | 4

Acronyms Used in this Toolkit | 5

Introduction | 6

Homeless Student Basics | 8

Definitions | **8**

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act | **8**

Why College Students Become Homeless | **9**

Homelessness Data | **10**

Higher Education and Homeless Youth | 12

Barriers Homeless Youth Face in Higher Education | **12**

Identifying Homeless Students | **12**

Providing Trauma-Informed Support to Homeless Youth | **13**

Benefits for Homeless Youth | **14**

Definition of Homeless Youth | **15**

Verifying Homeless Status | **16**

Priority Enrollment and California College Promise Grant | **17**

Role of the Homeless Youth Liaison | **17**

Financial Aid and Homeless Youth Status | **18**

Satisfactory Academic Progress | **22**

Homeless Definition Crosswalk | **23**

Other Resources Available to Homeless Youth | 25

Housing Resources | **25**

Food Resources | **28**

Other Resources | **30**

Related Toolkits | 31

Success Stories | 32

Homeless Youth Liaison FAQ | 33

Sample Homeless Youth Liaison Job Description | 35

Appendix A – Using Dataquest | 36

Endnotes | 37

2025 Toolkit Update

The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office released the first Breaking Down Barriers Toolkit in 2021 to help colleges implement AB 801 and AB 806—state laws that expand benefits for students experiencing homelessness and require campuses to designate a foster and homeless student liaison within the financial aid office or another appropriate department. Since then, the landscape has evolved significantly, with basic needs centers now established systemwide and major updates implemented to both federal and state financial aid application processes.

The Chancellor’s Office has also renewed and updated its Vision 2030 strategic plan, building on the earlier Vision for Success to set new goals that prioritize equity in access, success, and support for students. Vision 2030 calls on colleges to expand basic needs services, strengthen financial aid, and connect low-income and underserved students to public benefits—all to promote student well-being and advance the statewide goal of ensuring that 70% of working-age Californians hold a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2030.

The 2025 update to the toolkit introduces several new elements, including:

- Explanation of how the homeless liaison role connects to the Chancellor’s Office’s Vision 2030 goals.
- Updated data on homelessness and new tools for determining the prevalence of youth and student homelessness in your local community.
- Outlined tools and strategies for identifying students facing homelessness or housing insecurity and proactively conducting outreach.
- Highlighted details on FAFSA and CADAA requirements reflecting recent federal changes.
- Revised information on Satisfactory Academic Progress standards following state law updates.
- Added resources from the Chancellor’s Office and partners, plus information about how to stay up to date and leverage peer support through the CCC Basic Needs listserv.
- Expanded content on benefits available to homeless students and housing resources, including housing resources tailored to specific subpopulations.

Acronyms Used in This Toolkit

AB: Assembly Bill

CADAA: California Dream Act Application

CalWORKs: California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids

CCC: California Community College

CCPG: Community College Promise Grant

CES: Coordinated Entry System

CoC: Continuum of Care

DSPS: Disabled Student Programs and Services

EOPS: Extended Opportunity Programs and Services

FAA: Financial Aid Administrator

FAFSA: Free Application for Financial Student Aid

HHIP: Homeless and Housing Insecure Pilot Program

HUD: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

ILP: Independent Living Program

LEA: Local Education Agency

SAP: Satisfactory Academic Progress

Introduction

Over the past decade, awareness of student basic needs insecurity has increased significantly. Driven by rising costs of living and an erosion of the value of financial aid, many students are unable to make ends meet, with college students at two-year institutions most likely to face food and housing insecurity. A 2023 [survey](#) of California Community College (CCC) students found that two out of every three CCC students grapple with at least one basic needs insecurity. Nearly half of CCC students are food insecure, almost 3 out of 5 are housing insecure, and about 1 in 4 experienced homelessness during the previous year.¹

The California State Legislature took an initial step toward meeting the needs of unhoused college students with the passage of [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 801](#) in 2016, subsequently amended by [AB 806](#) in 2019. These bills provide students experiencing homelessness with access to priority registration and the Community College Promise Grant (CCPG). They also require each CCC to designate a Homeless and Foster Student Liaison to assist students who have experienced homelessness throughout the enrollment process and as they progress through college.

During this same period, many CCCs established food pantries—and in some cases, comprehensive basic needs centers—supported by one-time funding allocations from the legislature. In 2021, the legislature included funding in the [state budget](#) for every CCC to establish a basic needs center with at least one Basic Needs Coordinator to serve as the single point of contact for students experiencing basic needs insecurity and to link students to on- and off-campus resources to assist with housing, food, mental health, and other basic needs.

These developments are part of a larger paradigm shift put forward in the Chancellor's Office's [Vision 2030](#), which acknowledges “the critical importance of supporting the whole student, delivering support to them where they are and when they need it,” and “remove[ing] student burdens related to accessing support.”

According to the strategic plan, “Equity in support necessitates a paradigm shift from the prevailing approach that predominantly relies on waiting for students to apply for services to a proactive approach that brings support directly to those in need. This shift acknowledges the inherent inequalities present in the existing structures, where students from marginalized communities must shoulder additional and compounding financial, administrative and psychological burdens to access services and support.”

This handbook is designed to equip basic needs staff, Homeless Youth Liaisons, and other CCC faculty, staff, and administrators with the tools to recognize students who may be experiencing a housing crisis and connect them to resources and support. Housing remains a critical challenge, with students often citing a lack of resources as a major service gap.² By linking students to available supports, colleges can begin to close this gap.

Topics covered include:

- **Understanding homelessness** in California, particularly as it relates to youth and young adults
- **Best practices** for supporting homeless youth on California’s community college campuses
- **Educational benefits** available to homeless youth
- **Guidelines for verifying** benefits eligibility
- **Financial aid guidelines** for homeless youth
- **Campus and community resources** that may be available to homeless youth students

While every student’s circumstances are unique, this handbook provides general guidance to help liaisons determine the most appropriate approach for each individual.

Note on terminology: While most legislation uses the term homelessness, some advocates and practitioners now prefer the term unhoused; this guide uses the terms interchangeably.

Homeless Student Basics

Definitions

There are multiple definitions of homelessness across different programs. The definition used to determine eligibility for priority registration and the CCPG is distinct from the definition used to determine eligibility for independent status when completing the Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act Application (CADAA).

Yet a different definition exists for most housing programs funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which itself may differ from how eligibility is defined for state-funded housing programs. Please see the Homeless Definition Crosswalk on [page 23](#) which provides a summary of how the various definitions differ across multiple programs and services.

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

Within the field of education, the most widely used definition of homelessness was established by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento), signed into law in 1987. This definition, shown below, offers a more expansive concept of homeless children and youth than that found in many homeless programs. Sometimes referred to as the “McKinney-Vento definition,” it guides eligibility for college-related benefits.

McKinney-Vento Definition of “Homeless Children and Youth”

The term “homeless children and youths”–

- A. Means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and
- B. Includes–
 - (i) Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
 - (ii) Children and youths 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 (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));
 - (iii) Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - (iv) Migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

McKinney-Vento guidelines also define the term **“unaccompanied youth,”** which includes youth in homeless situations who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. The significance of this distinction for determining dependent status on the FAFSA is explained in the section titled “Financial Aid and Homeless Youth Status.”

Guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education further states:

- ▶ ***“Children or youth who have run away from home and live in runaway shelters, abandoned buildings, the streets, or other inadequate accommodations are considered homeless, even if their parents have provided and are willing to provide a home for them.”***³

The most common type of living situation for unhoused youth is known as “couch-surfing,” where youth move between different homes of friends, relatives, or acquaintances for short periods of time. Many young people in these situations do not consider themselves homeless, yet this experience is included under the definition of homelessness that guides eligibility for priority registration, CCPG, and FAFSA/CADAA independent status.⁴

The McKinney-Vento Act requires each state to appoint a statewide coordinator for K–12 homeless students, and for each Local Educational Agency (LEA), or school district, to have a dedicated homeless education liaison. These liaisons are responsible for ensuring that students experiencing homelessness have full and equal access to education. They identify eligible students, ensure immediate enrollment without required documents, arrange transportation, connect families to resources, train school staff on student rights, and advocate to remove barriers and maintain educational stability.

Similarly, AB 801 calls for California’s public higher education systems to have homeless youth liaisons on each campus to address the needs of homeless current and prospective students. More information about the role of a homeless youth liaison and the support offered by AB 801—as well as information about how to verify homeless student status and eligibility requirements for certain benefits provided by AB 801—is discussed in “Higher Education and Homeless Youth.”

Why College Students Become Homeless

Researchers have identified several common causes for homelessness among college students:

Poverty and economic hardship: Youth from low-income backgrounds face heightened risk due to the inability to afford housing and basic needs. Many students, including low-income students, rely on parental assistance, and families who are already in a lower income bracket can very quickly end up in a homeless or near-homeless situation when one parent loses a job. Given California’s high cost of living, even employed individuals can be at risk of losing housing stemming from low wages or unexpected expenses.⁵

Lack of affordable housing: Insufficient access to affordable, stable housing—especially in expensive markets—directly increases student homelessness. Finding affordable housing can be particularly challenging, especially for young college students who do not have stable and consistent employment. In 2024, median rent was 18% higher than it was in 2020, and the National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates there is a shortage of 7.3 million units of affordable and available rental homes in the country.⁶

Family or parental conflicts: Youth overwhelmingly point to family conflict and breakdown (e.g., violence, neglect, abuse, drug activity, and other problems within the family) as a reason for homelessness. For many young people, living in shelters or staying temporarily with friends is a safer and more desirable alternative than living at home with their parent or guardian.⁷

LGBTQ+ identity and family rejection: LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately affected by homelessness, often due to rejection or discrimination at home. These youth are 120% more likely to be homeless than their peers.

Exiting foster care or juvenile detention facility: Former foster youth have a much higher risk of being unhoused as many foster children lose familial connections while in care, suffer from the impact of trauma, and exit care without the resources in place to maintain housing. The 2023 RealCollege Survey found that 68% of youth with experience in foster care had been homeless as compared to 21% of those who had not been in foster care.⁸

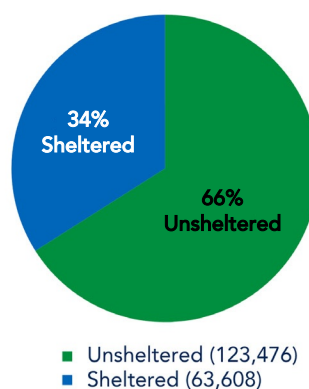
Youth exiting the juvenile justice system are also at elevated risk of becoming unhoused when they transition out of systems without appropriate support plans in place. A Washington State analysis found that 25% of youth and young adults exiting juvenile rehabilitation or adult corrections became homeless within 12 months.⁹

Homelessness Data

CALIFORNIA



47 in every **123,468**
people were experiencing
homelessness



Estimates of Homelessness

123,468	Individuals
25,369	People in Families with Children
38,170	Unaccompanied Homeless Youth
9,310	Veterans
66,548	Chronically Homeless Individuals

– California Homeless Youth numbers from the 2024 HUD Point-in-Time Study

Because homelessness is often both hidden and fluid, it can be challenging for researchers to collect accurate data. Individuals experiencing homelessness may move frequently, stay with friends, or camp outdoors, making their situation difficult to document. Some do not identify with the term homeless and may opt out of surveys or counts. Young people may avoid disclosing their housing status due to mistrust of authority or fear of stigma, and unaccompanied youth may not participate in activities—such as school enrollment—where they could self-identify as homeless.

HUD requires communities to conduct biannual point-in-time counts of both adults and youth experiencing homelessness. Of the nation's 771,500 people experiencing homelessness in January of 2024, over 187,000 (24%) resided in California. The count included 38,170 unaccompanied homeless youth, including 9,052 in California.¹⁰

The point-in-time counts are limited to those living on the streets or in shelters and are often criticized as an undercount, especially regarding youth. A 2017 nationwide study shows that 1 in 10 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 experienced some form of homelessness over the previous 12 months. That amounts to approximately 3.5 million young adults within that age range who have recently experienced some form of homelessness.¹¹

According to FAFSA data, 45,979 applicants indicated that they were homeless or self-supporting and at risk of being homeless in the 2023–2024 application cycle, including 7,332 applicants in California.¹²

Understanding youth homelessness within your local community can enable your college to understand the scope of the problem and make data-informed decisions about service implementation. There are several available sources that can provide the necessary information.

- **Point in Time Counts:** Each homelessness system service area—known as a “Continuum of Care” (CoC)—conducts a local point-in-time count, which is typically available on the CoC’s website. HUD maintains a [list of CoCs](#). Your local CoC can also be found by conducting an Internet search for the name of your county and the phrase “Continuum of Care.”
- **K-12 Homelessness:** The state’s DataQuest system provides data regarding the number of homeless K–12 students at the county, district, and school level. See Appendix A for instructions on how to use this system.
- **College Homelessness:** When applicants complete a CCCApply form, apply for CCPG, or complete the FAFSA/CADAA, they respond to question(s) regarding whether they are experiencing homelessness. Information from CCCApply is reflected in CCCCCO Management Information System Data Element SG16 and is publicly available.

You can use the DataVista system to view the number of students on your campus who identify as homeless.

- Go to https://datavista.cccco.edu/data_views/single_metric_nsa
- Expand the options under “Locale,” select Locale Type “College,” and select your college under “Locale Search” (district-level and regional searches are also available).
- Expand the options under “Drilldown” and scroll down to select “Homeless.”

Note: These numbers reflect only those who self-identify through CCCApply. Financial aid and admissions departments can access CCPG and FAFSA/CADAA data, which can be uploaded into your local student information system to supplement details obtained through CCCApply to better understand the number of students who have self-identified as being homeless.

Higher Education and Homeless Youth

Barriers Homeless Youth Face in Higher Education

Homeless youth encounter numerous barriers to succeeding in higher education. Beyond financial challenges, the instability of homelessness can severely undermine the emotional and mental well-being needed to focus and thrive in a college environment.

Homelessness rarely occurs in isolation. Many unhoused students also face economic hardship, food insecurity, the effects of abuse or neglect, the absence of a supportive adult, mental health challenges, and other factors that impact their well-being. Addressing these barriers requires robust support systems tailored to the complex needs of homeless students.

Because of the stigma and shame that can accompany homelessness, students may be hesitant to seek help. A Homeless Youth Liaison can play a vital role in creating a safe, welcoming environment, and reinforcing students' potential by offering empathetic guidance and practical assistance.

Identifying Homeless Students

Many students do not come forward to identify themselves as homeless—sometimes because they don't relate to the term, sometimes due to stigma or embarrassment, and sometimes simply because they are unaware of the resources and support available through their college. Therefore, it is essential to promote the availability of the Homeless Youth Liaison in a manner that is clear, welcoming, and free of stigma. Homeless liaisons are encouraged to:

- **Develop a strong relationship with the campus basic needs center.** A [report](#) from John Burton Advocates for Youth highlights opportunities for enhanced collaboration and coordination across financial aid and basic needs offices.
- **Communicate the availability of the Homeless Youth Liaison to faculty and staff.** Faculty often have the closest relationship with students and are therefore the first to learn about a student's circumstances. Faculty and staff can also be trained to recognize signs of possible housing insecurity and sensitively approach students.
- **Include information about the Homeless Youth Liaison during presentations regarding financial aid.** During financial aid presentations, briefly highlight the role and availability of the Homeless Youth Liaison so students know that there is a designated, supportive resource to assist those experiencing housing instability.
- **Discuss homelessness in a non-stigmatizing way.** Regularly discuss homelessness as an issue that affects college students, emphasizing that it is neither something to be ashamed of nor a personal failing.
- **Proactively reach out to students who indicate homeless status.** Students can indicate their housing status on CCCApply, the CCPG application, or the FAFSA/CADAA, allowing colleges to proactively connect with them and offer support.

If you notice signs that a student may be experiencing housing insecurity, you can approach the student privately, using open-ended, nonjudgmental language, such as, “Our college has resources for students who may be going through housing or financial challenges. Would you like to learn more about that?”

Signs that a student may be unhoused include:

- **Unstable or no address:** Using a shelter, P.O. Box, or the college as their mailing address.
- **Missing documentation:** Difficulty providing residency or parent/guardian information.
- **Irregular attendance:** Frequent absences, late arrivals, or dropping classes.
- **Comments about housing:** Mention of couch-surfing or living in cars, motels, or with friends.
- **Visible instability:** Carrying belongings, using campus showers, and appearing fatigued. Homeless liaisons can collaborate with local K–12 McKinney-Vento liaisons at local high schools to ensure that homeless students transitioning out of the secondary school system have continuity of services and are aware of benefits they may be eligible to receive while enrolled at California community colleges. A list of McKinney-Vento liaisons is available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/>.

SchoolHouse Connection also offers strategies in its publication, [Helping Homeless Youth Succeed in College: Strategies for Identifying Homeless College Students](#).

Tip: The Chancellor’s Office maintains a listserv for all staff engaged in supporting students with basic needs. Adding yourself to this list will ensure that you stay up-to-date on policy changes and new resources.

To subscribe:

1. Go to <https://listserv.cccnext.net/scripts/wa-CCCNEXT.exe?INDEX> and search for CCCBASICNEEDS.
2. Click on the list.
3. You will see a “Login Required” message. Click the three-line “hamburger” icon in the upper right corner.
4. Click on the “Subscribe or Unsubscribe” option, which will open the Subscription Management page for that list.
5. Fill in your name and email address and click on the “Subscribe” button.
6. You may be required to confirm your email address prior to your request being forwarded to the list owner for final approval.

Providing Trauma-Informed Support to Homeless Youth

Since student homelessness is often linked to other traumatic experiences, acknowledging and addressing trauma should be part of the services provided by a college’s Homeless Youth Liaison. Homelessness and other traumatic experiences can take a severe toll on students’

sense of resilience and ability to persist through academic challenges. Students who already feel a sense of embarrassment or stigma associated with homelessness or housing insecurity may experience compounded shame after receiving low grades or other indicators of academic struggles.

Students who doubt their ability to succeed in college may be less likely to seek support services in the first place. Additionally, traumatized students may either blame themselves for their situations or fear that institutions, such as colleges, will blame them for being underprepared to engage in their studies. Students with a history of trauma may be slower to develop trusting relationships with adults if such relationships were a source of trauma in the past, and therefore patience and flexibility are key when working with these students.

Colleges and their Homeless Youth Liaisons can help unhoused students feel safer and more supported by acknowledging that what goes on outside the classroom has a profound impact on how they engage inside the classroom. One way to accomplish this in a student services setting is to avoid asking homeless youth to repeat the details of their situation to multiple staff members across different offices. Discussing such details can re-traumatize them, while interacting with one designated point of contact can reduce the potential for re-traumatization.

Additionally, trauma-informed support promotes a strengths-based perspective that recognizes resilience and potential, whereas a deficit-focused one centers on limitations or problems. Highlighting the strengths of unhoused students helps liaisons build trust-based relationships that in turn support better service access. This could include highlighting a student's persistence, recognizing a student's resilience, acknowledging creative ways the student has adapted to barriers, or celebrating an academic, personal, or institutional achievement. Trauma-informed approaches support students' persistence in college, while the academic engagement they foster can also mitigate some of the neurological effects of trauma.¹³

Benefits for Homeless Youth

The Success for Homeless Youth in Higher Education Act, [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 801](#), was signed into law in 2016. The bill amended Sections 66025.9, 69614.5, 69561, and 76300 of—and adds Section 67003.5 to—the Education Code. Further amendments were adopted through [AB 806](#) in 2019 that removed a sunset clause and expanded the definition of homeless youth.

These bills (referred to collectively as AB 801 in the remainder of this toolkit) provide certain benefits to homeless youth students attending a California Community College. These benefits include:

- Requiring a staff member in the financial aid office, or another appropriate department, to function as a Homeless and Foster Student Liaison.
- Requiring the liaison to inform current and prospective homeless youth students about financial aid and other assistance available to them.
- Providing priority enrollment to verified homeless youth.
- Expanding automatic eligibility for the CCGP (formerly known as the Board of Governors, or BOG, fee waiver) to include verified homeless youth, contingent on maintaining required academic and progress standards.

- Placing homeless youth within the scope of California Student Aid Commission’s Community College Student Financial Aid Outreach Program and the Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP).

Additionally, previous legislation requests that community colleges give foster and homeless youth priority access to student housing.¹⁴ As more colleges begin to develop campus-based housing, it is essential to ensure that this priority access is provided and that homeless students are connected to their college’s housing department.

Finally, if a community college campus has shower facilities designated for student use, the college must grant access to those facilities to any homeless student who is enrolled in coursework, has paid enrollment fees, and is in good standing with the community college.¹⁵

Definition of Homeless Youth

For the purposes of eligibility for AB 801 benefits, “Homeless youth and former homeless youth’ means a student under 25 years of age, who has been verified, in the case of a former homeless youth, at any time during the 24 months immediately preceding the receipt of the youth’s application for admission by a postsecondary educational institution that is a qualifying institution pursuant to Section 69432.7, as a homeless child or youth, as defined in subsection (2) of Section 725 of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 11434a(2)).”¹⁶

This means that any student who is currently homeless or has been homeless at any point during the two years prior to applying to a CCC is eligible for benefits. Once a student is verified as a homeless youth, that designation remains valid for six years or until the student turns 25, whichever occurs first. Students who remain continuously enrolled at the same college do not need to be re-verified each year. However, if a student transfers to another college, re-verification is required. In such cases, the Homeless Youth Liaison at the new college may confirm the student’s prior verification by contacting the liaison at the previous institution. Guidance on the verification process is provided in the following section.

Tips for Understanding the AB 801 Homeless Definition

- Any student who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence qualifies as homeless. In addition to those in homeless shelters or those sleeping on the street, in cars, or at other places not meant for human habitation, this includes students who are “couch surfing.”
- Any student who qualified as homeless during the 24 months prior to applying for college is eligible and students maintain their status for six years or until they turn 25.
- Priority registration is not limited to “unaccompanied” youth; students who are or were homeless while in the custody of parents or guardians also qualify (unlike the stricter criteria used for financial aid independent status that limits homeless status to unaccompanied homeless youth).¹⁷

Verifying Homeless Status

AB 801 requires colleges to accept verification of a student's homeless status from any one of the following:

- 1. A homeless services provider** as defined in paragraph (3) of subdivision (d) of Section 103577 of the Health and Safety Code. This includes: a government or nonprofit agency receiving government funding to serve homeless persons, an attorney, a K–12 homeless liaison or school social worker, a social services or human services provider funded to serve homeless children or youth, or a local law enforcement officer designated as a liaison to the homeless population (see FAQ section for a complete description).
- 2. The director of a federal TRIO program or GEAR UP** (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) program, or a designee of that director.
- 3. A financial aid administrator** for an institution of higher education or their designee.
- 4. A Homeless Youth Liaison** or Foster Youth Liaison.

Tips for Verifying Homeless Youth Status

When interviewing students to determine housing status, it is important to approach the conversation with sensitivity. Students should not be asked to explain or justify their circumstances, but simply to establish whether they meet the definition of homelessness under AB 801. Because many students who qualify do not self-identify as homeless, it is often more effective to ask questions that reveal their housing situation rather than directly asking if they are homeless.

Try starting out with something like, "I would like to ask you a few questions to determine if your current housing situation qualifies you for certain benefits."

You can ask questions such as:

- Can you tell me about where you're staying right now? Do you stay in the same place every night?
- Could your friends/relatives that you are currently staying with ask you to leave if they wanted to? Where would you go if they asked you to leave?
- Do you feel like the place where you're staying is temporary or more long-term?
- Over the past two years, have you had to move around from place to place (sometimes referred to as "couch surfing") because you lost your housing or couldn't afford your own place to live?
- Have there been times over the past couple of years when you didn't have a regular place to stay?
- Have you had to move between different homes, hotels, or shelters in the past couple of years?

Consider using phrases such as “in a temporary living arrangement” or “without stable housing,” and remember that the McKinney-Vento definition refers to a “fixed, regular, and adequate” housing arrangement.

Be sure to remind the students that any information that they share will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone else unless they grant explicit permission.

Priority Enrollment and CCPG

Students who meet the criteria for homelessness per AB 801 are eligible for priority enrollment. Once verified as eligible, students should receive a priority enrollment status equal to that provided to California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs), Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS), Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), foster youth, and veteran students.

Students verified as homeless are also automatically eligible for the CCPG. Those receiving the CCPG must also meet minimum academic and progress standards, unless exempted from this requirement due to status as a current or former foster youth (see California Code of Regulations § [58621](#)).

The CCPG online application asks the following question that allows students to self-identify as homeless:

Has the Financial Aid Office or the college homeless student liaison verified that you have been without a fixed, regular, and adequate residence in the last 24 months (homeless)? If you have been homeless but not verified, check "Yes" and contact the college Financial Aid Office.

Yes No

It is important to understand the varied pathways through which students qualify for the CCPG, and determine which route is most beneficial for the student. Be aware that homeless youth may be better off if determined for a CCPG eligibility under methods A, B, or C. Students who qualify for method A, B, or C with \$0 Student Aid Index (formerly Expected Family Contribution) may be eligible for EOPS if they meet the additional EOPS eligibility criteria. These students may also qualify for other federal, state, and campus programs.

Eligibility for the CCPG under the homeless designation will not automatically qualify these youth for other programs that rely on means testing or need analysis. Decide with your students which path would be the most beneficial and suitable for them during the financial aid process.

Role of the Homeless Youth Liaison

As previously noted, AB 801 requires that each college designate a Homeless Youth Liaison. While the basic needs center is likely to be the first contact for many unhoused students, it is also best practice to designate a Homeless Youth Liaison in the Financial Aid Office.

The Homeless Youth Liaison can assist homeless students with verifying eligibility for AB 801 status, applying for financial aid, and providing other available services. The Homeless Youth Liaison can also assist homeless youth students, regardless of their AB 801 eligibility, by facilitating connections or providing referrals to both campus and community resources, including:

- Admissions and Records
- Academic Advising and Counseling
- Basic Needs Center
- Student Support programs, such as EOPS, DSPS, NextUp (foster youth), Rising Scholars (justice-impacted students), Dream Centers (undocumented students), and Veterans Centers
- Tutoring
- Community Resources and Social Services
 - CalFresh and other forms of public benefits
 - Programs for foster youth, including Independent Living Programs (ILP) and transitional housing programs (THP-Plus)
 - Food banks
 - Shelters and housing programs
 - Mental health services
 - Physical health services
 - Clothing and school supplies
 - Shower facilities (all community colleges with existing shower facilities must grant shower access to homeless students, even if those students are not enrolled in physical education classes)

Financial Aid and Homeless Youth Status

Financial aid is essential for the success of all low-income students, especially for those experiencing homelessness. A key responsibility of the Homeless Youth Liaison is to guide and support students in accessing every available source of financial assistance.

All students are asked about their homeless status when completing the FASFA or CADAA.

1 Personal Circumstances 2 Demographics 3 Financials 4 Colleges 5 Signature

Student Other Circumstances

At any time on or after July 1, 2023, was the student unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

Yes No

In many cases, students who meet the definition of homeless youth may qualify to be classified as independent when completing FAFSA or CADAA applications. Independent students are not required to provide parental income information or obtain a parent’s signature, which simplifies the application process and may increase their eligibility for financial aid.

To qualify as independent based on homelessness, students must also be “unaccompanied,” meaning they are “not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.” As such, students experiencing homelessness with their families—while still living together as a unit—do not meet the independent status requirement. However, they may still be eligible for a CCPG and priority registration as a homeless student under AB 801 guidelines (see the definition crosswalk below).

A student is considered homeless if they lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing. According to the [2025-2026 Federal Student Aid Handbook Application and Verification Guide \(AVG\)](#), this is broader than just living “on the street.” This definition includes:

- Youth sharing housing with other people temporarily because they had nowhere else to go.
- Youth living in emergency or transitional shelters, such as trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency after disasters.
- Youth living in motels, campgrounds, cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, substandard housing, or any public or private place not designed for humans to live in.
- Youth living in the school dormitory if they would otherwise be homeless.
- Youth who are migrants and who qualify as experiencing homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

The terms used in the definition of homelessness are defined as follows:

- **Fixed:** Stationary, permanent, and not subject to change
- **Regular:** Used on a predictable, routine, or consistent basis
- **Adequate:** Sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in the home

Finally, students qualify as independent if they are “at risk of being homeless” and “self-supporting.” At risk is defined as “when a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing.” Self-supporting is defined as “when a student pays for his or her own living expenses, including fixed, regular, and adequate housing.”¹⁸

Verification

When students respond “yes” to whether they qualify as homeless, they are asked about verification. Requirements related to verification were changed significantly with the adoption of the FAFSA Simplification Act, as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act in 2021, which went into full effect for the 2024–25 award year.

Did any of the following determine the student was homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?

Select all that apply.

Director or designee of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other program serving those experiencing homelessness

The student's high school or school district homeless liaison or designee

Director or designee of a project supported by a federal TRIO or GEAR UP program grant

Financial aid administrator (FAA)

None of these apply.

For unaccompanied homeless youth to qualify as independent students, they may have their status verified by any of the entities listed below.

Financial Aid Administrators (FAAs) must consider documentation from any of these entities—provided through a documented phone call, written statement, or verifiable electronic data match—to be adequate and no further documentation should be requested unless conflicting information has been recorded:

- A local homeless K-12 education liaison (McKinney-Vento liaison)
- Director or designee of a program or shelter that serves individuals experiencing homelessness (including emergency shelters, street outreach programs, homeless youth drop-in centers, or other programs).
- Director or designee of a director of a TRIO or GEAR UP program
- Financial aid administrator at current institution or another institution who previously made a determination¹⁹

If students do not have and cannot obtain documentation from any of the authorities listed above, FAAs must determine whether the students are unaccompanied youth who are homeless or self-supporting and at risk of being homeless. When students select "None of these apply," they can complete the form and are instructed to contact their school's financial aid office.



Your Dependency Status



Provisionally Independent Student

Based on your answers, you're a provisionally independent student. This means you don't need to answer questions about your parents to submit your application.

To complete your application, you'll need to contact your school's financial aid office and provide documentation to verify your circumstances.

We won't be able to calculate your Student Aid Index (SAI) until you confirm your circumstances with your financial aid office. Until then, we will provide only an estimate of your federal student aid eligibility as an independent student.

Note that while the screen uses the term "Provisionally Independent Student," this term refers to students who believe they may qualify for independent status due to unusual situations, such as parental abandonment, abuse, neglect, legally granted asylum, or student or parental incarceration. In these cases, FAAs have the discretion to exercise professional judgment (PJ) to provide independent status based on individual circumstances.

While homeless students are not considered provisionally independent, this screen will nonetheless appear when students select "None of these apply." Advocates have raised concerns about this occurrence, as homeless determinations are not considered PJ determinations. This may be updated in future FAFSA applications to direct homeless students to verify their status with financial aid without use of the term "provisionally independent."

The determination may be based upon a written statement from, **or a documented interview with**, students who confirm that they are unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting. **Third party documentation is not required to verify a student's status as homeless.**

The AVG reminds financial aid administrators to use discretion when gathering information and to respect students' privacy. Some information, such as that protected by doctor-patient privilege, is confidential. Also, documents such as police or Child Protective Services reports are not necessary. FAAs are advised that **the determination should be made without regard to the reasons that students are unaccompanied and/or homeless and that FAAs should not focus on why students are homeless** or unaccompanied but solely on whether the evidence shows that they are unaccompanied homeless youth.

Finally, FAAs must presume that students for whom their institution has made a determination of homelessness continue to be independent in each subsequent year at their institution unless they announce that their circumstances have changed or the institution has received conflicting

information. FAAs should also consider a determination from an FAA at another institution for the same or prior award year to be adequate documentation to make such a determination for the current year. **Homeless status does not need to be reverified each year as long as there is no conflicting information.**²⁰

Institutions must review all requests for a determination of independence as quickly as practicable, but no later than 60 days after the student enrolls. This is not intended to inhibit FAAs from making such a determination when a student requests one later in an award year and FAAs are encouraged to act on a request for a determination of independence within 60 days of the student making such a request.²¹

Homeless students should use a mailing address where they can reliably receive mail. That can be the address of a relative or friend who has given them permission to use it, or it can be their school's address if they have contacted the school for permission and instructions on how to retrieve mail that they will receive at the school. As soon as homeless students have more permanent housing, they should update their address in their StudentAid.gov account or on their FAFSA Submission Summary.

TIP: [SchoolHouse Connection](#) offers a template for a [verification letter](#), a [guide](#) to help students determine whether they meet the definition of homelessness, and a [tip sheet](#) for preparing for an interview with a financial aid administrator to verify homeless status.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

Under federal law, colleges must establish academic benchmarks—such as minimum grade point averages and course completion rates—that students must meet to remain eligible for financial aid. These standards, known as Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), are reviewed regularly, and students who underperform risk losing their aid. However, they typically have the option to appeal the school's decision.

In 2020, [AB 2416](#) was signed into law, adding homelessness as an acceptable reason for students to appeal the loss of financial aid due to unsatisfactory academic progress. This policy was further expanded in 2023 with the passage of [AB 789](#), which broadened the range of circumstances considered valid for appeal. Campuses should review their appeals processes to ensure that they comply with AB 789, including recognizing homelessness as a qualifying reason for aid reinstatement.

The trauma, instability, and constant stress associated with experiencing homelessness can significantly disrupt a student's education, often leading to missed classes, difficulty concentrating, and a decline in academic performance. As a result, many students facing homelessness fall below the minimum grade point average or course completion rate required to maintain SAP.

Recognizing homelessness as a standard, valid reason for financial aid appeals is therefore essential—not only to prevent students from losing critical financial support but also to give them a realistic opportunity to persist and complete their degrees despite these challenges.

Homeless Definition Crosswalk

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 11434a(2)) defines homeless students as:

- A. Students who lack fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residences
- B. Students who:
 - Share housing due to loss of housing resulting from economic hardship or similar reason
 - Live in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; emergency or transitional shelters; or abandoned in hospitals
 - Sleep in public places not intended or adequate for nighttime residence, including in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, and bus or train stations
 - Identify as migratory children who otherwise meet this definition

	ABH 801/AB 806	Financial Aid
Benefits	Priority registration and CCPG	Independent status for calculation of financial aid eligibility.
Homeless Definition	Meets McKinney-Vento definition currently or at any point within 24 months prior to college application.	<p>At any time after July 1 of the application year, the student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meets the McKinney-Vento definition and is unaccompanied OR • Is self-supporting and at risk of being homeless <p>A student living in one of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent may be considered homeless even if the parent would provide support and a place to live.</p>
Expiration of Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six years from date of admission to post-secondary institution or upon reaching age 25, whichever occurs first. • Once homeless youth status is verified, it remains in place over breaks in enrollment. • Status is not transferable to another district. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once status is verified, it remains in place for subsequent years at the same institution. • If a student changes institutions, an FAA may rely on prior determination made by an FAA at another institution. • Once a student turns 24, they are automatically considered independent.

	ABH 801/AB 806	Financial Aid
Authorized to verify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A McKinney-Vento homeless liaison • A homeless service provider • A social services provider funded by the state to provide health or behavioral health services, public assistance, or employment services • An attorney or a law enforcement liaison • Federal TRIO or GEAR program • FAA • College Homeless and Foster Student Liaison Full definition at HSC 103577(e)(3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless K-12 education liaison • Program or shelter that serves individuals experiencing homelessness • Director or designee of a director of a TRIO or GEAR UP program • Financial aid administrator at current institution or another institution who previously made a determination If determination is made by an FAA, they may rely on third party verification or a documented interview with the student.
References	California Education Code 66025.9 CCCCO Guidance Memo - SS 17-07	20 USC 1087vv 20 USC 1087uu-2

Homeless Definition Crosswalk created by John Burton Advocates for Youth

Other Resources Available to Homeless Youth

Housing Resources

Colleges should leverage community resources to support students experiencing homelessness, recognizing that services vary by county. Below is information about housing resources; campuses are encouraged to confirm availability with local agencies and maintain their own updated list of community supports.

Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC)

The homeless CoC is the local or regional network that coordinates efforts to prevent and end homelessness. Each CoC is responsible for maintaining a Coordinated Entry System (CES) for homeless services, and in some cases, CoCs offer separate CES for youth. These systems act as a centralized entry point for housing support and services, while also prioritizing applicants according to the urgency and severity of their needs. Creating a relationship with your local CoC Care can help facilitate referrals to broader community services for homeless individuals and families.

HUD maintains a [list of CoCs](#) and John Burton Advocates for Youth [maintains a list](#) that features website links and whether there are specific youth access points.

In **Connecting the Dots: How Colleges Can Collaborate with Homelessness Response Systems to Address Student Needs**, JBAY spotlights several California community colleges that have partnered with their local CoCs. Strategies identified in the report include:

- **Attending and representing the college at CoC board and relevant committee meetings.** Doing so can help build relationships, educate college staff about how these systems function, elevate the issue of college student homelessness with the larger strategy to address community homelessness, and influence funding allocation.
- **Leveraging CoC participation to connect with local housing providers.** Partnerships between college campuses and nonprofit providers have proven effective at many campuses, resulting in expanded resources for homeless students.
- **Consider becoming a CES or co-locate CES providers on campus.** Designating the college as a CES access point can increase students' access to housing services and help staff build a deeper understanding of student homelessness. Bringing CES to campus does not require the college to operate its own access point. Instead, existing CES providers can visit the campus on scheduled days to conduct intakes for students in need of housing support.

California Community College Homeless and Housing Insecure Pilot Program

This program, available at 27 colleges across the state, supports rapid rehousing efforts for homeless and housing-insecure students. Participating colleges have established partnerships with community organizations that are equipped to support homeless students in securing housing.

Colleges offering the Homeless and Housing Insecure Pilot Program include:

American River College	Los Angeles Southwest College
Antelope Valley College	Los Angeles Trade-Tech College
Barstow College	Modesto Junior College
Butte College	Oxnard College
Cerritos College	Riverside City College
College of Marin	San Bernardino Valley College
College of the Redwoods	San Diego City College
Compton College	San Joaquin Delta
Cuyamaca College	Santa Barbra City College
Fresno City College	Santa Rosa Junior College
Gavilan College	Shasta College
Imperial Valley College	Southwestern College
Long Beach City College	Victor Valley College
Los Angeles Harbor College	West Hills Lemoore College

2-1-1 California

2-1-1 California is a statewide network consisting of county databases of resources and information regarding service providers or community agencies, such as emergency housing, public benefits, transportation, or health care. This is a 24/7 service. Simply dial 211 from your telephone to be connected or go online to the 2-1-1 webpage to find resources in your county.

This service is not currently available in all counties; please check the website for availability. www.211california.org

Population Based Programs

California operates various housing programs targeted to specific populations, such as youth exiting foster care and families enrolled in CalWORKs.

Transitional Housing Placement Programs (THP-Plus, THP-NMD)

THP-NMD provides supportive housing to youth ages 18 to 21 who are in extended foster

care (non-minor dependents). THP-Plus provides up to 36 months of supportive housing to former foster youth ages 18 to 24. John Burton Advocates for Youth maintains rosters that contain contact information for both [THP-NMD](#) and [THP-Plus](#) providers. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) also maintains a roster of [county contacts](#) for THP and Extended Foster Care (EFC). Your local county contact can provide a list of housing providers in your area.

Independent Living Program (ILP)

ILP offers training and services to assist current and former foster youth to achieve self-sufficiency and independence. ILP providers can assist by connecting foster youth with resources such as housing or education.

CDSS maintains a roster of county contacts for ILP, available at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/foster-care/county-contacts-for-efc-thp-and-ilp>. Your local county contact can provide information about the ILP provider in your area, and these programs are also typically accessible through an Internet search.

CalWORKs Housing Support Program and Homeless Assistance (HA) Program

The CalWORKs Housing Support Program (HSP) and Homeless Assistance (HA) Program offer housing support to families enrolled in or eligible for CalWORKs. A list of county contacts is available at

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/housing-programs/calworks-housing-support-program>.

Bringing Families Home (BFH)

BFH targets families involved with the child welfare system who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, homelessness. More information is available at

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/housing-programs/bringing-families-home-program>.

Veteran's Programs

Various programs are available specifically to student veterans through CalVets. Additional information is available at <https://www.calvet.ca.gov/veteran-services-benefits/housing>.

Domestic Violence Programs

Many communities offer housing resources for individuals and families fleeing domestic violence. These resources can be found through 2-1-1 or at

<https://www.cpedv.org/domestic-violence-organizations-california>.

Food Resources

Utilizing a community food bank is a practical way for homeless youth students to access food and nutrition. Basic needs centers on campus also typically offer food resources. Contact the center on your campus to explore what resources are available and how these resources can be accessed. Utilizing CalFresh benefits (formerly known as food stamps) is another practical and sustainable way for students to access food and nutrition.

California Association of Food Banks

This tool can connect you to food banks and other types of food assistance programs and resources in your county: <http://www.cafoodbanks.org/find-food-bank>.

CalFresh

Many students, particularly homeless students, may be eligible to receive SNAP benefits, known as CalFresh in California. The Homeless Youth Liaison can assist students with the application process for CalFresh or refer the student to the basic needs center for additional support. CalFresh benefits can be used to purchase unprepared food at grocery stores and fruits and vegetables at most farmers' markets. In some counties, students who are verified as homeless can also redeem CalFresh benefits at on-campus cafeterias and other qualifying restaurants (see the [EBT locator page](#) for additional information).

To qualify for benefits, students must meet income eligibility requirements, which consider both gross and net income and vary by household size. For example, in September 2025 a non-disabled household of one person would need a gross income of less than \$2,510 to qualify and a net income (after allowable deductions) of \$1,255. The limits increase for larger households and can be viewed through the [CalFresh Eligibility Criteria website](#). If students are unsure about whether they qualify, they should be encouraged to apply so that an eligibility worker can determine their eligibility.

While CalFresh requires college students to work at least 20 hours per week or 80 hours per month to qualify, some students can qualify for an exemption to this rule. Exemptions are available for a range of situations, including those who are:

- Enrolled less than half time or taking only non-credit courses
- Approved for a TANF-funded Cal Grant A or B or work-study
- Participating in a CalFresh Employment and Training program
- Parenting young children
- Receiving CalWORKs
- Enrolled in a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program or Local Program that Increases Employability (LPIE)
- Disabled

Detailed information about these exemptions, including a list of all approved LPIEs, is available at <https://calfreshoutreach.org/student-exemptions/>.

Information about eligibility for non-citizens is available at <https://www.getcalfresh.org/immigrants-faq>.

The Center for Healthy Communities also maintains resources related to CalFresh access for college students at <https://calfreshoutreach.org/resource-hub/>.

Application Process

Applying for CalFresh can be complicated, and the Homeless Youth Liaison can assist students with finding a CalFresh outreach partner, on campus or in the community, who can help with gathering and submitting the correct documentation to apply.

[BenefitsCal.com](https://www.benefitscal.com) is California's online portal for managing essential food, health care, and cash assistance programs, including CalFresh, Medi-Cal, and CalWORKs. BenefitsCal aims to make managing your benefits easier and more accessible. Through this portal, you can:

- Apply for and renew benefits
- Access and update case information
- View important county notices
- Check EBT balances
- Track appointments and receive reminders
- Securely upload documents
- Request EBT card replacements
- Contact county workers

Students can apply online or by phone.

Documentation requirements: Students will need the following to complete the interview process: proof of identity (driver's license, California identification card, etc.), social security number, paycheck stubs (if employed) for the past 30 days, bank statements for all accounts, proof of shelter costs (rent or mortgage payment, utility bills, etc.).

TIP: If a homeless student does not have an address, the student can use the campus address (make sure the student knows where to pick up mail) or qualify for free general delivery at any post office. See the additional resources below for more details.

TIP: Homeless persons can receive a new or replacement California photo identification card from the Department of Motor Vehicles free of charge. If born in California, homeless persons also qualify for a free certified birth certificate from the county of their birth. See the additional resources below for more details on how to access these documents.

Interview: An eligibility worker will conduct an interview over the phone, unless the applicant requests an in-person interview. Many times, the eligibility worker will call from a blocked number. It is important to inform students of this detail so they don't miss the call.

TIP: Students can reschedule the phone interview if the initial interview has been scheduled at an inconvenient time.

TIP: Homeless students will likely qualify to have their CalFresh application expedited and be eligible to receive benefits within three days. Encourage students to disclose income amounts and share as many other relevant details as possible with the intake worker to expedite the process.

Other Resources

Homeless youth students may also qualify for other resources in the community. It is recommended that Homeless Youth Liaisons research available resources that are specific to their local communities.

Public Benefits Finder: California Competes features a tool that allows individuals to identify resources, including access to food, housing, and childcare. The tool is available at

<https://californiacompetes.org/resources/public-benefit-finder-for-california-students/>.

Birth Certificate: A homeless individual can receive a free certified copy of his or her birth certificate (in the California county in which the person was born).

<https://housingca.org/resources/community/individuals/get-ca-birthcert/>

California ID: The California Department of Motor Vehicles can give homeless individuals a California identification card for free.

<https://housingca.org/resources/community/individuals/get-my-ca-photo-id/>

Free General Delivery P.O. Box: Students experiencing homelessness—including “couch surfing” or otherwise lacking a fixed/permanent place of living—can request a no-cost P.O. Box at their local Post Office so that they can receive mail. They will need to have identification, be known to the window clerk or Postmaster, or provide a verifiable point of contact (e.g., shelter, social services office, place of employment). Students must complete [PS Form 1093](#) and submit it to their post office. Learn more at the [USPS website](#).

If students' application for a no-cost P.O. Box is denied, they can receive mail by having it sent to **“General Delivery.”** The post office will hold their mail for a maximum of 30 days, and they will need to bring valid identification to pick up their held mail. Learn more at the [USPS website](#).

Related Toolkits

The CCCCO and other partners have created a range of toolkits to assist Homeless Liaisons.

California Community Colleges Basic Needs Center Toolkit: This toolkit provides guidance regarding legal obligations and best practices related to the operations of basic needs centers on California Community College campuses.

Equitable Access to Care Toolkit: This resource offers real examples, outreach materials, and step-by-step implementation tools used by colleges in the Inland Empire to connect students to Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and other critical services.

Emergency Assistance Toolkit for California Community Colleges: Colleges can explore practical strategies to strengthen and sustain campus-based emergency assistance programs that help students navigate unexpected financial challenges.

Promising Partnerships: Supporting College Student Success Through Collaboration Between Basic Needs and Financial Aid Offices: This report from John Burton Advocates for Youth highlights opportunities for enhanced collaboration and coordination across financial aid and basic needs offices to better support college students in accessing the resources they need to succeed.

Connecting the Dots: How Colleges Can Collaborate with Homelessness Response Systems: This resource from John Burton Advocates for Youth showcases innovative strategies for collaboration between college campuses and homelessness response systems that can help address college students' homelessness.

Helping Homeless Youth Succeed in College: Strategies for Identifying Homeless College Students: This publication from SchoolHouse Connection discusses examples of strategies that colleges and university systems have implemented to identify and provide outreach to students experiencing homelessness.

Success Stories

Below are examples of campuses that have built strong systems to support homeless students. Although each takes a unique approach, all are finding effective ways to connect students with services and public benefits that set them up for success.

Cerritos College, Los Angeles County, CA

Cerritos College built a housing development named [The Village](#) exclusively for homeless students between the ages of 18 and 25. The Village partners with Jovenes, Inc.—a Los Angeles-based nonprofit organization serving homeless and housing-insecure youth—to provide safe and secure housing services to Cerritos students who are facing homelessness.

The Village is located within walking distance of Cerritos College and includes seven townhomes that can house up to 28 students. Townhomes feature both free and affordable housing options.

Imperial Valley College, Imperial, CA

Imperial Valley College's student housing communities include a [tiny home community](#) and 12 RV housing units that serve to eliminate homelessness and housing insecurities as barriers. The college leveraged state funding in partnership with the City of El Centro to create this community.

These single-occupancy homes contain a kitchen, desk, patio, and mini-washer and dryer. They are conveniently located less than five miles away from campus, making it easy for residents to ride their bikes or take public transit to school. Each month, students pay about \$200 in rent and participate in 10 hours of community service on the property.

Skyline College, San Bruno, CA

The [SparkPoint center at Skyline College](#) integrates the benefits application process into an established process of accessing student services. By incorporating this process, many students that otherwise may not have fully utilized the benefits available to them are able to enroll for benefits while simultaneously accessing other student services, such as academic advisement or a food pantry.

SparkPoint at Skyline College also provides financial education and coaching, employment and career services, a food pantry, scholarships, and other services that assist with financial self-sufficiency and educational attainment.

Homeless Youth Liaison FAQ

1. What is required of the Homeless Youth Liaison under AB 801 guidelines?

The Homeless Liaison is required to inform current and prospective homeless youth about financial aid opportunities (FAFSA, etc.) and other assistance available to unhoused students. The liaison is also responsible for ensuring that eligible homeless students receive priority enrollment and for notifying homeless students that they are eligible for the CCPG. The liaison is also required to assist these students with applying for and receiving federal and state financial aid and other available services.

2. Is it required that the Homeless Youth Liaison and the Foster Youth Liaison be the same individual?

No, the Homeless Youth Liaison and the Foster Youth Liaison do not have to be the same individual. Colleges can implement the structure that works best in their local context.

3. How do I know if a student is considered homeless for purposes of FAFSA or AB 801?

Both the FAFSA and AB 801 use the McKinney-Vento Definition of homelessness shown on [page 8](#). Additional information is also available in the “Higher Education and Homeless Youth” section of this document.

4. What if a homeless student is 25 years of age or older?

These students may still be eligible for assistance, financial aid, and other programs, but they are not guaranteed the benefits provided for by AB 801. For financial aid purposes, students are automatically considered independent once they turn 24 years old and their homeless status is no longer relevant when completing the FAFSA form. Note that students may still qualify for the CCPG based on other eligibility criteria such as income.

5. What happens when a previously verified homeless student turns 25?

They are no longer eligible for the benefits provided by AB 801 such as automatic CCPG qualification or priority enrollment. These student may still qualify for the CCPG based on other eligibility criteria, such as income, and may be eligible for other campus programs that provide priority enrollment.

6. How do students applying for the CCPG access eligibility through their status as a homeless youth?

These students should answer “Yes” to the question on the CCPG application that asks, “Has the Financial Aid Office or the college homeless student liaison verified that you have been without a fixed, regular, and adequate residence in the last 24 month (homeless)? If you have been homeless but not verified, check “Yes” and contact the college Financial Aid Office.” If students do not qualify as homeless, they may still apply for the California College Promise Grant based on other eligibility criteria such as income.

7. What if a student was verified as homeless at another campus, but now attends my campus?

If the student remains within the same college district, no additional verification is required for AB 801. A student must be re-verified upon changing districts. However, this can be as simple as verifying with the previous Homeless Youth Liaison via a documented telephone call.

8. Does a homeless youth student have to report their parental income on the FAFSA?

This depends on whether the student is considered “independent” as an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. See the “Financial Aid and Homeless Youth Status” of this toolkit for additional details.

9. Are the definitions of homelessness the same for priority registration and independent status on the FAFSA form?

While the definitions both rely on the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness, there are some key differences.

- The AB 801 definition requires a student to be homeless at some point during the 24 months prior to college application submission or at any point after college application submission, whereas FAFSA/CADAA independent status is defined as having been homeless on or after July 1 of the FAFSA application year.²²
- To qualify for independent status, a student must be “unaccompanied.” This is not a requirement under AB 801.²³
- Once verified under AB 801, homelessness status remains in effect for six years or until the age of 25, whichever occurs first. FAFSA independent status remains in effect until the student turns 24, at which point the student is automatically considered independent.

10. Who is a “homeless services provider” for the purposes of verification of AB 801 homeless status (as defined in paragraph (3) of subdivision (d) of Section 103577 of the Health and Safety Code)?

- A governmental or nonprofit agency receiving federal, state, or county or municipal funding to provide services to a homeless person or homeless child or youth, or that is otherwise sanctioned to provide those services by a local homeless CoC organization.
- An attorney licensed to practice law in California.
- A local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youth, pursuant to Section 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii) of Title 42 of the United States Code, or a school social worker.
- A human services provider or public social services provider funded by the State of California to provide homeless children or youth services, health services, mental or behavioral health services, substance use disorder services, or public assistance or employment services.
- A law enforcement officer designated as a liaison to the homeless population by a local police department or sheriff’s department within California.

11. Who can I contact with questions regarding homeless students and AB 801 implementation?

Inquiries may be directed to Colleen Ganley at the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office.

- Telephone: 916.323.3865
- Email: cganley@cccco.edu

Sample Homeless Youth Liaison Job Description

The Homeless Youth Liaison position is designed to provide support to current and prospective students experiencing homelessness. The Homeless Youth Liaison's overall purpose is to improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness.

Specific Responsibilities:

1. Serve as the campus expert on homeless youth education, issues, practices, and state and federal legislation that impacts homeless students.
2. Have comprehensive understanding of how to identify, outreach to, and support students experiencing homelessness.
3. Be responsible for assisting students with both state and federal financial aid applications; be informed about distinctions with the FAFSA application process for students experiencing homelessness, including eligibility for independent student status.
4. Act as a liaison between various campus support systems and departments on campus.
5. Act as a liaison between campuses, shelters, and the community on behalf of homeless students.
6. Participate in training sessions and professional development opportunities that enhance the support services to homeless students.
7. Understand and execute the requirements outlined in Assembly Bill 801.
8. Understand how to verify homeless youth according to Assembly Bill 801; understand how to provide and/or receive verification to and/or from other campuses or entities for Assembly Bill 801 and/or FAFSA processes.
9. Assist AB 801 eligible students with the processes for accessing:
 - Priority registration
 - CCPG

Appendix A: Using Dataquest

California's DataQuest system can be used to identify how many students in your local K–12 systems have been identified as homeless. To find this data, follow the steps below:

1. Go to <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.
2. Select the level for which you want to view data. You can view data for the whole state or a specific county, district, or school.
3. Under "Select Subject" scroll down to "Homeless student data" under "Enrollment data" and select "Submit."
4. Select the year for the data you would like to review (the most recently available data will automatically populate).
5. Select the county, district, or school.
6. For county data, select the county from the drop-down menu. If you select district- or school-level data, you will be asked to type a part of the district or school name and will then be provided with a list to select from.
7. You will be provided with a list of cumulative total enrollment, homeless student enrollment, and a breakdown of what percentage of homeless students reside in different dwelling types (e.g., doubled up, staying in shelters, unsheltered, motel/hotel). If you are viewing by county, you will have the option to view a breakdown by district. If you are viewing by district, you will have the option to view a breakdown by school.

Endnotes

1. The RP Group & CEO Affordability, Food & Housing Access Taskforce, and Community College League of California. *Real College California: Basic Needs Among California Community College Students* (Sacramento: Community College League of California, 2023). https://www.ccleague.org/wp-content/uploads/basic_needs_among_california_community_college_students-final-2023.pdf.
2. California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. *California Community Colleges Basic Needs Center Evaluation*. June 2025.
3. U.S. Department of Education. *Preliminary Guidance for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, Title VII, Subtitle B*. June 1995, 22–23.
4. The Hope Center. *College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National #RealCollege Survey Report*. 2019. https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HOPE_realcollege_National_report_digital.pdf.
5. Covenant House International. "Income Inequality and Poverty Lead to Increased Youth Homelessness." Accessed August 2025. <https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-issues/poverty-and-income-inequality>.
6. Gaetz, Stephen. "Towards the Prevention of Youth Homelessness." *Infectious Diseases* 4, no. 4 (2024): 108, <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-995X/4/4/108>.
7. Covenant House and National Network for Youth. "Youth Homelessness." Accessed August 2025. <https://nn4youth.org/learn/youth-homelessness/>.
8. The RP Group. *Real College California*.
9. Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. *Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Prevention Study*. 2022. <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/rda/reports/research-11-254.pdf>.
10. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *The 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1: Point in Time Estimates of Homelessness*. December 2024. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2024-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.
11. Morton, M.H., Ann E. Dworsky, and G. M. Samuels *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National estimates*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2017.

12. National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE). *Homelessness Reported for Federal Student Aid Applicants: Unaccompanied Homeless Youth FAFSA Applicants, 2021–22 through 2023–24*. Published April 2025. https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/UHY-FAFSA-Applicants_2021-22-through-2023-24.pdf.
13. Cole, Susan F., Ann Eisner, Michelle Gregory, and Jeanne Ristuccia *Creating and advocating for trauma-sensitive schools*. Boston: Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2013. Craig, Sandra E. *Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Learning Communities Transforming Children’s Lives, K–5*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2016.
14. [Cal Educ. Code § 76010](#).
15. [Cal. Educ. Code § 76011](#).
16. [Cal Educ. Code § 66025.9\(b\)\(2\)](#).
17. See Cal. Educ. Code § 66025.9(b)(2) for the definition of priority registration; 20 U.S.C. § 1087vv(d)(8) for the FAFSA definition; and U.S. Department of Education, *2025–2026 Federal Student Aid Handbook, Application and Verification Guide*, Chapter 5, “Special Cases.” <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/handbook/2025-2026Application-and-Verification-Guide>.
18. U.S. Department of Education. *2025–2026 Federal Student Aid Handbook, Application and Verification Guide, Chapter 5, “Special Cases: Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determinations.”* <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/handbook/2025-2026Application-and-Verification-Guide>.
19. 20 U.S.C. § 1087uu–2(a); U.S. Department of Education, *2025–2026 Federal Student Aid Handbook, Application and Verification Guide*, Chapter 2, “Filling Out the FAFSA Form: Student Personal (5), Homelessness (6), or Unusual (7) Circumstances.” <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/handbook/2025-2026Application-and-Verification-Guide>.
20. U.S. Department of Education. *2025–2026 Federal Student Aid Handbook, Application and Verification Guide*, Chapter 5, “Special Cases: Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determinations.” <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/handbook/2025-2026Application-and-Verification-Guide>.
21. U.S. Department of Education. *2025–2026 Federal Student Aid Handbook, Application and Verification Guide*, Chapter 5, “Special Cases: Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determinations.” <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/handbook/2025-2026Application-and-Verification-Guide>.
22. [Cal Educ. Code 66025.9\(b\)\(2\)](#).
23. [20 U.S.C. § 1087vv\(d\)\(8\)](#).