

Assembly Bill 27

Connecting Homeless Students to Services & Local Assistance Centers

Assemblywoman Luz Rivas

SUMMARY

Identifying children who might be homeless is the first step to ensuring they have a fighting chance to succeed in school and life. By establishing and funding three County Offices of Education to develop Technical Assistance Centers (TACs), the state can assist local communities who are trying to tackle the growing homelessness crisis by implementing best practices used for identifying and connecting homeless students to services.

BACKGROUND

In 1987, the U.S. Congress passed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Act). To ensure access to public education, the Act required states to identify and provide services to homeless children and youth. The California Department of Education (CDE) administers the Act and oversees Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), which are required to work with schools to identify homeless students and provide them with support services. Once homeless students are identified, LEAs must provide those students services, such as free transportation, medical and counseling services, tutoring, and enrollment in school nutrition programs.

In 2019, Assemblywoman Rivas authored AB 16, which Governor Newsom vetoed because the administration believed CDE received enough funding to support homeless students. However, a subsequent State Audit requested by Assemblywoman Rivas, determined that “California LEAs are not doing enough to identify youth experiencing homelessness, even though identification is the critical first step to providing these youth with the necessary services and support.”¹ A 2020 UCLA report also notes that two out of three homeless students attend schools that do not receive dedicated federal dollars.²

PROBLEM

CDE reports that over 400 districts in California have not identified a single homeless student. And yet, CDE estimates that these numbers are closer to 250,000 homeless youth when taking into account those who may be couch surfing, doubling up in a single family home, or living in the garage of a house.

UCLA confirmed CDE’s estimates and found that over 269,000 students in the K-12 system experienced homelessness in 2019 – enough to fill Dodger Stadium almost five times over.

Latinx and Black students were disproportionately represented, and accounted for roughly 70% and 9% of all students who experienced homelessness. This is alarming as Latinx students account for 54% and Black students account for 5% of the total student population.

More children will become homeless due to COVID-19. A UCLA Luskin Institute Study predicts that in Los Angeles alone, “120,000 households, with 184,000 children, could experience homelessness because of the pandemic.”³ Furthermore, Columbia University anticipates a 20% increase in homelessness for the entire state because of the record high unemployment rates.

Recent reports have indicated that school registration rates have dropped by over 150,000 students. If we do not have a standardized process for identifying homeless students, they will also fall through the cracks.

SOLUTION

Our schools need support from the state to fight homelessness. There is currently no standardized process for identifying homeless children – this bill will fix that. By identifying homeless children, the state can ensure CDE and districts have the ability to deliver limited resources more effectively at a time when we need it most.

AB 27 will create three geographically located County Offices of Education throughout the state to develop Regional TACs to implement best practices used for identifying and connecting homeless students to services. This measure also incorporates additional recommendations from the State Auditor’s report and improves coordination between existing state and local homeless education programs.

We must show these children that we care, that they matter, and that we want them to succeed.

CONTACT

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¹ <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2019-104/summary.html>

² <http://transformschoools.ucla.edu/stateofcrisis/>

³ <https://challengeinequality.luskin.ucla.edu/2020/05/28/ud-day-report/>

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