

SUPPORTING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Perspectives from California's Community Colleges



This report is a collaborative effort of the California Homeless Youth Project (CHYP) and the ACLU Foundations of California (ACLU). The ACLU's statewide Education Equity team draws from each of the ACLU's three affiliates in California: the ACLU Foundation of Northern California, the ACLU Foundation of Southern California, and the ACLU Foundation of San Diego & Imperial Counties.

CHYP and the ACLU together administered a survey of California's homeless liaisons in spring 2018 as part of both organizations' work learning about the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness and desire to advocate for greater resources and supports for them. CHYP and the ACLU wanted to hear from school liaisons, who work directly with students experiencing homelessness in schools, to better understand the needs of students experiencing homelessness and the capacity and resources of the schools that serve them.

CHYP and the ACLU administered the survey to K–12 homeless liaisons and to community college liaisons for students experiencing homelessness in California. This report details key findings and recommendations from the community college survey.

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Executive Summary

While investing in their futures, many college students across California struggle to find a place to call home. Lacking a “fixed, regular, and adequate” nighttime residence—which can include doubling up with other people, living in a vehicle, staying in a shelter, or sleeping outside—these students are often hidden in plain sight.

Youth experiencing homelessness are undercounted in local, state, and federal efforts to enumerate the homeless population, and the same is true among California’s public colleges. Until recently, the California Community Colleges had not systematically identified students experiencing homelessness, though available data now suggests roughly one in five students qualify as “homeless.”¹ As a result, many students’ unique needs are unmet, and community colleges may miss opportunities to ensure students’ lifelong success.

Public colleges in California, including every community college, are required to have a homeless liaison to support students experiencing homelessness. To better understand the needs of students experiencing homelessness and the ways California’s colleges can more effectively support them, the California Homeless Youth Project (CHYP) and the ACLU Foundations of California (ACLU) surveyed California’s college homeless liaisons. Staff from as many as 61% of California’s community colleges responded to the survey. This report details the responses of people working most closely with this student community and offers recommendations to improve practice.

Legal Framework

In 1987, the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act reaffirmed the rights of K–12 students experiencing homelessness and established a network of school district liaisons responsible for providing additional support to these youth. Following suit, college students experiencing homelessness in California recently received the promise of additional supports with the passage of Assembly Bill 801 in 2016, the Success for Homeless Youth in Higher Education Act (AB 801). Among other supports, AB 801 requires the California State University (CSU) and California Community Colleges (CCCs),

and requests the University of California (UC), designate at least one liaison on each campus to serve students experiencing homelessness. College homeless liaisons play a critical role in helping students experiencing homelessness navigate the higher education system, including financial aid, and access much needed resources.

Findings

- 1. Homeless liaison positions are not adequately funded.** A relatively new position under state law, the college-level homeless liaison often has many other primary responsibilities pulling them away from supporting students experiencing homelessness. Only 5% of respondents reported spending 20 hours or more supporting students experiencing homelessness. As one liaison wrote, *“We do not have adequate staffing or resources to assist with referrals or to fully assist the at-risk of homelessness population.”*
- 2. The 5 greatest needs of students experiencing homelessness are connections to housing, FAFSA completion, mental health services, supportive services beyond the school setting, and CalFresh assistance.** This list emphasizes the importance of engaging in a comprehensive conversation about students’ greatest needs and the corresponding resources that can support students experiencing homelessness. As one homeless liaison and financial aid advisor wrote, we need *“policies that can join many members of a community to help the homeless population in a few ways ... [financially], academically, and humanely, carrying out help where it is needed.”*
- 3. Housing is the most difficult need to meet for students experiencing homelessness.** An overwhelming majority of respondents (82%) said that housing is the support that they are least able to provide. As one liaison wrote, *“There needs to be more low-income housing, transitional housing, and 18-24 year shelters with an emphasis on academic support and degree completion. A student who cannot be full-time and receive low-income housing is not supported in their goals.”*
- 4. The majority of respondents are aware of recent legislation affecting students experiencing homelessness, though implementation is incomplete.** For example, 86% of respondents were familiar with the right to priority enrollment for students experiencing homelessness under AB 801. However, only 81% of respondents reported this requirement being implemented on their campus.
- 5. California Community Colleges are not methodically identifying students experiencing homelessness across the system or at individual campuses.** Thanks to a recent report by the Hope Center, we now have system-wide rates of student homelessness across CCC campuses. Nearly 1 in 5 students (19%) experienced homelessness at some point during the past year.² This definition includes students who are couch-surfing or are sleeping outside, in cars, abandoned buildings, hotels, and emergency shelters. However, at the school level, most college liaisons are not systematically or comprehensively identifying students, as only five respondents said that their campus assesses every student at the beginning of the year to identify students at-risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. As one liaison wrote, *“We need a better way to identify homeless students.”*

Recommendations

- 1. The state of California should fully fund homeless liaison positions.** Although the legislature requires all CCCs and CSUs to identify a homeless liaison on each campus, funding is not allocated by the state to conduct this work. Especially in light of available data suggesting high rates of student homelessness at the community college level, community colleges should designate at least one employee whose primary responsibility is to support students experiencing homelessness at each campus. The state of California should recognize the funding required to conduct this work. As one homeless liaison and financial aid advisor wrote, the homeless liaison role “*should be its own position.*”
- 2. Community colleges should pursue more housing resources specifically for college students experiencing homelessness.** Possible housing resources include advocating for affordable student housing on or near each campus, developing emergency short-term housing for students experiencing homelessness, creating student housing by leasing existing housing stock near each college, and implementing host homes for college students. The State of California should incentivize and help fund these efforts.
- 3. Community colleges should implement systematic and effective ways to identify students experiencing homelessness.** The CCCs must develop a process to determine how many of their students are experiencing homelessness. It is difficult to develop and implement informed solutions for students at-risk of or currently experiencing homelessness without understanding the scope of the problem. The CSU and UC systems both use census-type surveys to better understand student homelessness system-wide, which CCCs could employ. In addition, individual community colleges should identify all students experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness for liaisons to fulfill their responsibility to assist them. For example, community colleges should include standardized questions on their general application for all students, and conduct surveys periodically to identify students whose circumstances change mid-year.

Background and Legal Framework

While investing in their futures, many college students across California struggle to find a place to call home. Homelessness—lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence—can take many forms, including doubling up with other people, living in a vehicle, staying in a shelter, or sleeping outside.³ According to recent studies, 11% of California State University (CSU) students and 5% of University of California (UC) students reported experiencing homelessness at least once in the past year.⁴ A system-wide study of student homelessness at California Community colleges (CCCs) was recently conducted by The Hope Center and the CCC Chancellor’s office, which found that 19% of CCC students experienced homelessness in the past year⁵, compared to 14% of students in community colleges nationwide.⁶ This research is consistent with the Los Angeles Community College District finding that 19% of their students experienced homelessness in the 2016–2017 school year. Students at Peralta Community College District in Alameda County had even higher rates of homelessness, at 30%.⁷ Thus, available data shows students at CCCs face particularly acute challenges with housing.

In 1987, the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act reaffirmed the rights of homeless K–12 students and established a network of school district liaisons responsible for providing additional support to these youth.⁸ In 2016, college students experiencing homelessness in California received the promise of additional supports with the passage of AB 801, which supports homeless and former foster youth in several ways.⁹ First, it gives them priority enrollment for classes at CCCs and CSUs and requests that UCs do the same. Second, it makes students experiencing homelessness automatically eligible for a California College Promise Grant fee waiver at the CCCs, waiving their college tuition. Third, it requires CSUs, CCCs, and requests UCs designate at least one liaison on each campus to serve students experiencing homelessness and former foster youth. (Though the law speaks of “a staff member” to serve both student groups, schools may designate multiple liaisons, such as one for students experiencing homelessness and another for former foster youth). The liaisons are

tasked with identifying resources available to these student groups, informing students about such resources, and helping them with financial aid and other application processes.¹⁰

Higher education homeless liaisons can play a critical role in helping students experiencing homelessness navigate the higher education system and access much needed resources. When the California Homeless Youth Project

(CHYP) convened a focus group of students experiencing homelessness and asked what they needed to be successful in college, they reported needing stability, positive relationships with supportive adults, help navigating financial aid, and knowledge of existing campus resources. Based on liaisons' job responsibilities outlined in AB 801, these are precisely the kinds of services that the role of higher education homeless liaisons aim to provide.

Homeless Liaisons' Duties

Under AB 801, California Community Colleges and California State Universities shall, and the University of California is requested to, do the following:

(1) Designate a staff member who is employed within the financial aid office, or another appropriate office or department, of the institution to serve as the Homeless and Foster Student Liaison. The Homeless and Foster Student Liaison shall be responsible for understanding the provisions of the federal Higher Education Act pertaining to financial aid eligibility of current and former foster youth and homeless youth, including unaccompanied homeless youth, and for identifying services available and appropriate for enrolled students who fall under one or more of these categories. The liaison shall assist these students in applying for and receiving federal and state financial aid and available services.

(2) Inform current and prospective students of the institution about student financial aid and other assistance available to homeless youth and current and former foster youth, including their eligibility as independent students under Section 1087vv of the federal Higher Education Act, as that section read on December 31, 2015.

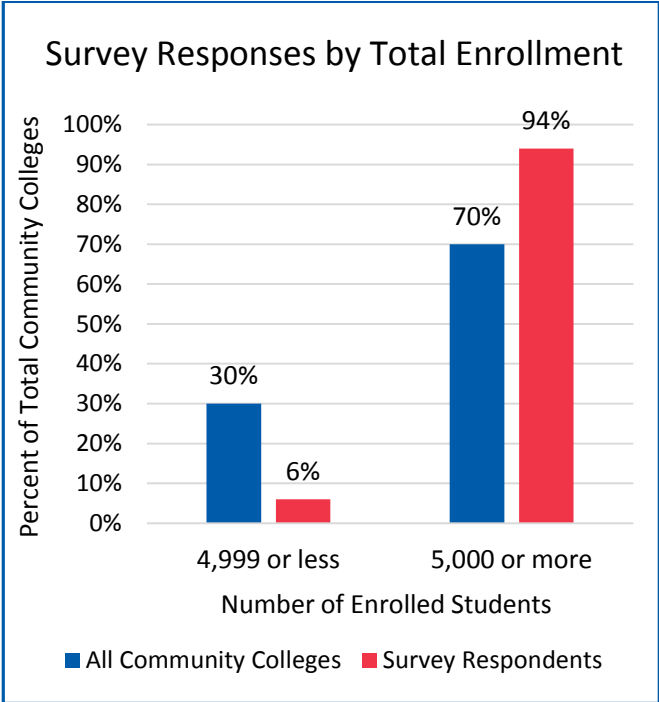
Cal. Educ. Code § 67003.5

Survey Responses

The survey achieved a substantial response rate among California’s community colleges. The survey received responses from 81 college-level staff, 69 of whom self-identified as employees at a CCC. Given that there are 114 CCCs in California, the survey received responses from as many as 61% of CCCs across the state. Moreover, 38 of the 69 responses were from individuals who self-identified as the official liaison for their particular community college, reflecting responses from at least 33% of all CCCs. For reasons discussed in Appendix A, the survey was not widely disseminated to representatives from CSUs or UCs.

Of the respondents who worked at CCCs, 94% worked on campuses with 5,000 or more students.ⁱ Based on 2016–2017 CCC enrollment data, 70% of CCCs have 5,000 or more full-time equivalent students.¹¹ Thus, staff working at smaller community colleges with fewer than 5,000 students are underrepresented in the survey results.

Approximately half of the respondents said that they were the primary person on their campus tasked with responding to the needs of students experiencing homelessness. The remainder of respondents provided assistance to youth experiencing homelessness, but did not consider themselves the primary point person. Counseling is the most common background of the respondents, and 41% of respondents said that they had a counseling certification, credential, or master’s degree.



ⁱ Because some respondents did not answer every question, percentages discussed throughout this report are reflective of the number of respondents to each question.



Findings

The survey achieved a response rate of as much as 61% of all CCCs. Based on the survey responses, which included a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions, CHYP and the ACLU developed the following findings and recommendations.

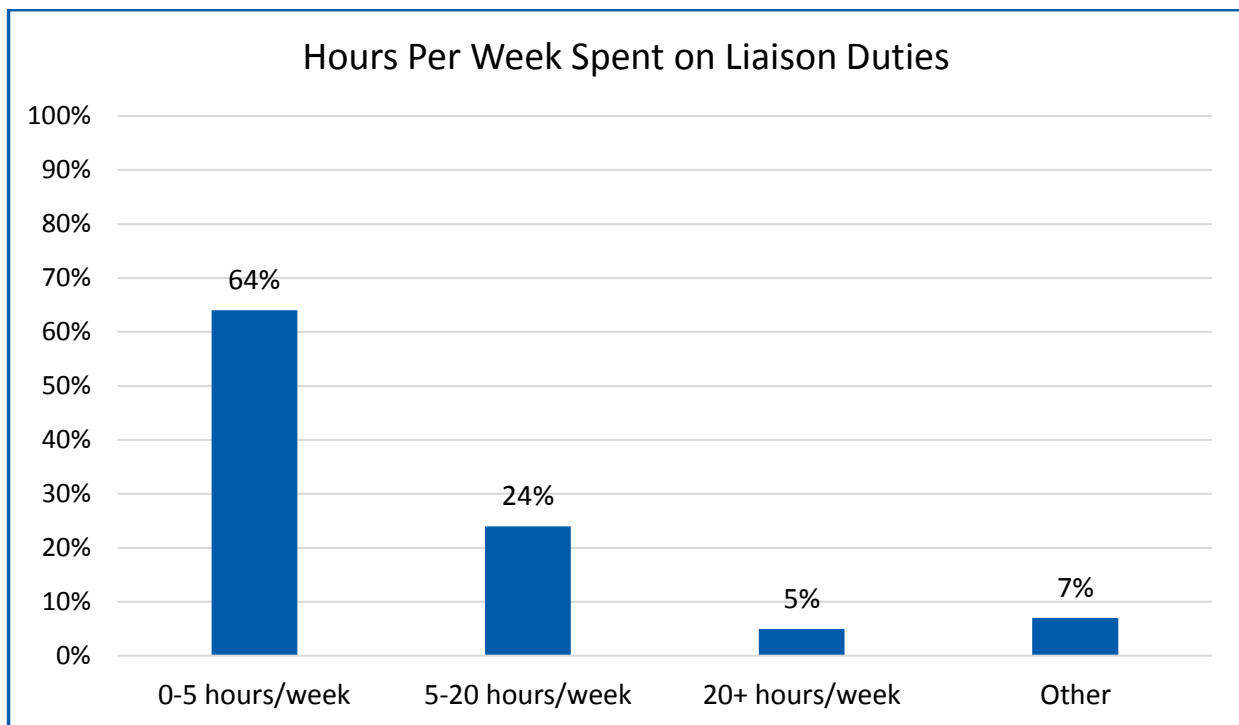
1. Homeless liaison positions are not yet adequately funded.

Community college homeless liaisons balance multiple roles and have difficulty fulfilling their duties to assist students experiencing homelessness. While nearly all of the respondents said that they directly serve students experiencing homelessness, over half said that being a homeless liaison was just one of their many job titles. Other common job titles include being a foster care liaison (51%); being in a staff or administrative role for Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Center for

Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE), or a Guardian Scholars program (33%); and being in a staff or administrative role in the Financial Aid Office (16%). Accordingly, 71% of the survey's respondents feel that their college has not yet adequately staffed and funded the homeless liaison position.

Reflecting their many roles and responsibilities, 64% of respondents who work full-time said that they spend 5 hours or fewer on their homeless liaison duties each week. Only 5% of respondents reported spending 20 hours or more supporting students experiencing homelessness. Most respondents (77%) did report having at least one staff member who supports them in assisting students experiencing homelessness, though the survey did not ask how much time other staff provide in support. Nonetheless, half of all respondents do not feel that they have sufficient time to carry out their homeless liaison duties.

Nearly two out of three respondents who work full-time said that they spend 5 hours or fewer on their homeless liaison duties each week.



“The homeless liaison position is very involved and I feel it should be its own position versus taking on two roles, a financial aid technician/officer and homeless liaison, at the same time. It would be ideal to have two staff members to assist with the homeless population on campus.”

– CCC Financial Aid Officer / Homeless Liaison

“There has been no funding directed for the position. This title was added in addition to my current job.”

– CCC Financial Coach / SparkPoint Coordinator / Homeless Liaison

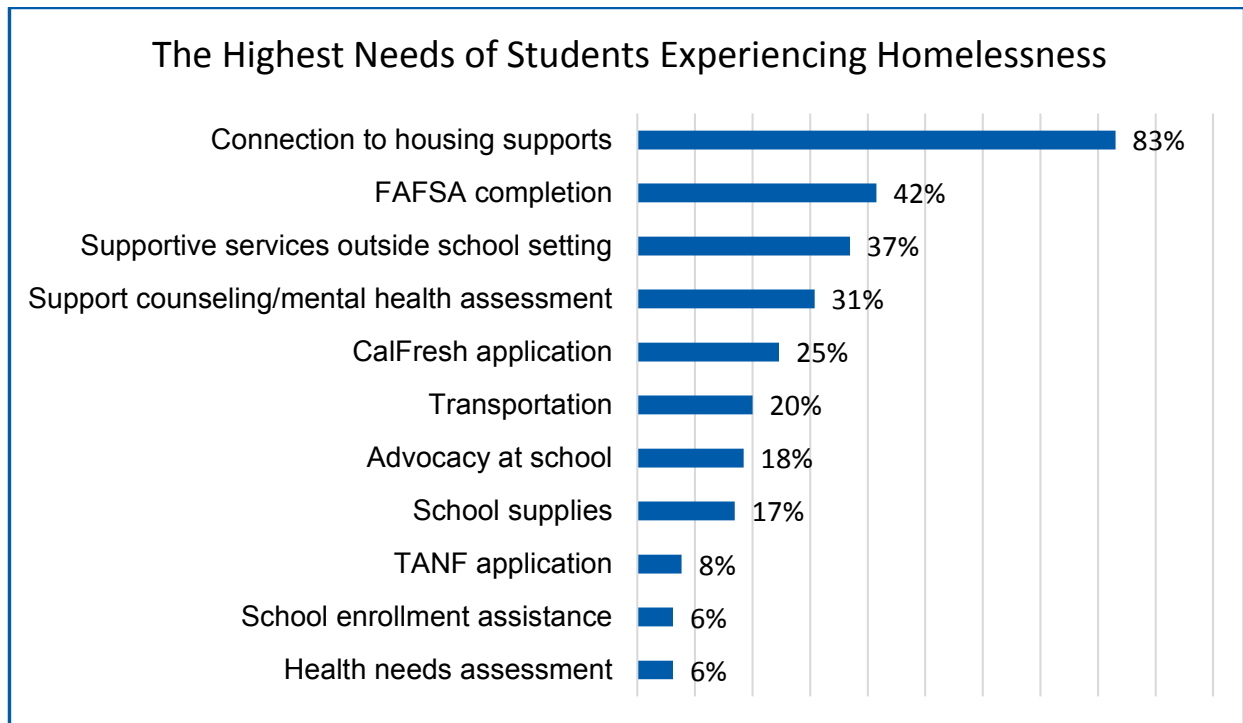
“Our role primarily has been to ascertain independent student status for the FAFSA, and now the BOG-FW/CCPG. We do not have adequate staffing or resources to assist with referrals or to fully assist the at-risk of homelessness population who may already be independent for financial aid.”

– CCC Homelessness Liaison / Financial Aid Technician / Director of Programs

Community college homeless liaisons provided some specific suggestions on where CCCs should invest additional resources. For example, when asked what policies need to be in place to support students experiencing homelessness, one CCC Homeless Liaison/Financial Aid Technician said, *“We just need more staffing, and a dedicated person in the Financial Aid Office to assist this population.”* Similarly, a CCC Homeless and Foster Youth Liaison said, *“Make it mandatory that the foster youth liaison and the homeless youth liaison must be two separate people ... because it is difficult to serve both well. I think one group suffers and it is usually the homeless youth because I have more foster youth that I serve.”* Thus, as liaisons reported, when colleges hire staff to specifically serve students experiencing homelessness, it allows homeless liaisons to more fully support their academic success and help them meet their basic needs.

2. The 5 greatest needs of students experiencing homelessness are connections to housing, FAFSA completion, counseling and mental health services, supportive services beyond the school setting, and CalFresh assistance.

Survey respondents were asked to pick the three greatest needs of the students experiencing homelessness that they serve. When presented with a list of twelve options, including an “other” option, respondents most frequently identified as the highest needs: connections to housing supports (83%), Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion (42%), counseling/mental health needs assessments (37%), supportive services beyond the campus setting (30%), and navigating the CalFresh application process (25%).



State and federal research around these issues provide insights into why liaisons reported these as students' greatest needs and propose frameworks for meeting such needs¹²:

- **Housing Supports:** Balancing work and academics, students attending California's public institutions have little financial leverage to compete in expensive, crowded rental markets. Housing supports such as emergency housing on campus, student emergency grants, low-income student housing or rental vouchers, and referrals to local housing agencies can help students experiencing homelessness establish stability in the immediate and long-term future.
- **FAFSA Completion:** Many students find the FAFSA to be lengthy, confusing, and difficult to complete.¹³ Unaccompanied homeless youth may experience additional challenges when completing the FAFSA because they need to have their homelessness verified for financial aid purposes by a school district homeless liaison or by certain homeless service providers.¹⁴ Verification of homelessness allows these students to be considered financially independent from their parents, which means they do not need their parents' financial information or signatures on the FAFSA.¹⁵
- **Enrollment in CalFresh:** College students experiencing homelessness may also experience higher rates of food insecurity due to financial hardship and a lack of places to store and prepare food. CalFresh provides monthly financial assistance to eligible low-income households. Eligible college students can use CalFresh benefits to purchase groceries off-campus as well as groceries and prepared foods on certain college campuses.¹⁶ However, a lack of awareness and confusing eligibility requirements prevent students from fully utilizing this resource.¹⁷
- **Mental Health Services:** Many of California's college students struggle with anxiety, stress, depression, and other mental health needs that impact their academic success and quality of life.¹⁸ Students experiencing homelessness while attending college may have even greater mental health needs than their peers, with higher rates of trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, self-injurious behaviors, and suicide.¹⁹ Campus mental health clinics, local community clinics, and health insurance coverage can and should help students receive needed mental health services.
- **Supportive Services Beyond the Campus:** Students need help understanding what resources are available to them within and beyond their campus and how to access these resources. With sufficient supports, higher education homeless liaisons can help students experiencing homelessness secure housing, navigate complex financial aid forms, and enroll in public benefits like CalFresh. Multi-sector partnerships can also help students get the supports they need to thrive in college and beyond.

The California Homeless Youth Project, in collaboration with SchoolHouse Connection, published a series of issue briefs titled [Supporting California's Homeless & Low-Income College Students: A Practical Guide](#) that provide an overview of the top five needs of students experiencing homelessness and the resources that can support them.

“[We need] policies that can join many members of a community to help the homeless population in a few ways ... [financially], academically, and humanely, carrying out help where it is needed.”

– CCC Homeless Liaison/Financial Aid Advisor

3. Housing is the most difficult need to meet for students experiencing homelessness.

Survey respondents identified housing as the greatest need of students they serve, yet 82% of respondents said that housing is the support that they are least able to provide. This may be due to limited student housing options at California’s community colleges, where almost all of the survey respondents work. Only 11 out of 114 CCCs offer student housing, thus housing only a small fraction of the total CCC student body.²⁰ In contrast, all of the CSUs and UCs offer student housing and house about 11% and 34% of their total student bodies, respectively.²¹

“There needs to be more low-income housing, transitional housing, and 18-24 year shelters with an emphasis on academic support and degree completion. A student who cannot be full-time and receive low-income housing is not supported in their goals.”

– CCC Homeless Liaison

In response to the need for more housing resources for students, several respondents recommended building short- and long-term campus housing. When asked what policies need to be in place to support students experiencing homelessness, campus staff suggested “modular housing on campus,” “affordable student housing,” and “rapid housing.” Respondents also offered approaches to building campus housing on unused college land such as creating public-private incentives for development and utilizing existing campus construction programs.

Beyond on-campus student housing, respondents highlighted the need for more low-income housing, transitional housing, and emergency shelters. They also highlighted the need for partnerships with

local agencies, nonprofits, and landlords to offer a comprehensive portfolio of housing resources to students experiencing homelessness. When asked what policies could be put in place, higher education staff and administrators said:

- *“Support to waive or pay for rent deposits. Create policies to compensate community members willing to rent rooms to our students.”*
- *“Provide funding for community colleges to build on-campus housing that would prioritize homeless youth.”*
- *“[Create] designated housing facilities that we can send the students to. Currently, we refer them out but are unsure if they find a place.”*
- *“Incentives to landlords to rent to students, especially students with children.”*

In sum, respondents reported being unable to refer students to housing not only because of a dearth of housing options for students, but also because of limited connections and financial supports to connect students with existing systems.

4. The majority of respondents are aware of recent legislation affecting students experiencing homelessness, though implementation is incomplete.

California law only recently created many of the key supports available to college students experiencing homelessness. Encouragingly, respondents reported being broadly familiar with these recent changes in law. However, respondents also reported that implementation of these recent changes in law lags behind respondents’ familiarity with them.

Most notably, when provided a description of AB 801, The Success for Homeless Youth in Higher Education Act, a substantial majority of respondents said they were familiar with the law’s requirements and that those requirements were implemented at their campus. Enacted in 2016, AB 801 requests UC campuses and requires



CSU campuses and all CCCs to designate at least one liaison on every campus to identify resources available to students experiencing homelessness, inform them about these resources, and help them with application processes. Nearly all respondents (88%) are familiar with these requirements and report they are being implemented on their campus. The law also affords homeless and foster youth priority class enrollment at the CCCs and CSUs, and requests that UCs do the same.²² Again, a substantial majority of respondents (86%) reported being familiar with the priority enrollment requirement, though slightly fewer respondents (81%) reported the requirement being implemented on their campus.

Similarly, most respondents were familiar with AB 214 (2017), which aims to increase college student enrollment in CalFresh, California's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).²³ A college student enrolled at least half-time must also work at least 20 hours per week or qualify for a work exemption to be eligible for CalFresh. AB 214 requires the Department of Social Services to create and maintain [a list of college programs](#) and allow students enrolled in these programs to be exempt from the CalFresh work requirement.²⁴ In addition, this law requires the California Student Aid Commission to notify Cal Grant recipients who meet eligibility requirements under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program about their potential eligibility for CalFresh.²⁵ A substantial majority of respondents (75%) reported being aware of these new opportunities for students facing food instability. However, a smaller number of respondents (44%) said AB 214 is being implemented on their campus, while just as many

(44%) reported not knowing whether or not the new law was being implemented.

In sum, though school personnel's familiarity with AB 801 and 214 is high, implementation of these relatively new laws may still be incomplete.

5. California Community Colleges are not methodically identifying students experiencing homelessness across the system or at individual campuses.

Based on the results of the survey, it appears the CCCs are not methodically collecting data about students experiencing homelessness across the CCC system. In other words, the CCCs lack a system for assessing, compiling, and reporting overall rates of student housing instability and homelessness across their 114 campuses. In contrast, California's public universities have conducted census surveys to estimate the system-wide rates of student homelessness system-wide. Available data from the CCCs suggests rates of student homelessness far above the national average,²⁶ and the recent Hope Study report confirms that nearly 1 in 5 students (19%) experience homelessness.

"We don't need better policies. We need a better way to identify homeless students."

– CCC Homeless Liaison

In addition, most college liaisons are not systematically and comprehensively identifying students experiencing homelessness at the school-level. Only five respondents said that their campus assesses every student at the beginning of the year to identify students at-risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. Many schools rely on enrollment packets and the FAFSA to identify students experiencing homelessness—about six out of ten respondents said they used these forms to identify students at the beginning of the school year (63%) and during the school year (58%). However, these methods are imperfect.

“We haven’t had a large of amount of students identify as homeless.”

– CCC Homeless & Foster Youth Liaison / CalWORKs / Advisor

Not all students experiencing homelessness are eligible for federal financial aid, complete the FAFSA, or know to self-identify as “homeless” on the federal application even if they do complete it. Respondents also rely heavily on passive systems of identification, such as referrals from other offices—for example, 93% of respondents rely on referrals from other offices to identify students during the school year. Accordingly, over one third of survey respondents (37%) said that they did not know how many students were experiencing homelessness on their campuses – and one

respondent guessed that their campus had none. Thus, the CCCs do not yet have in place systematic and affirmative practices for identifying students experiencing homelessness.

Difficulty identifying these students is reflective of a lack of formal training available to higher education staff and administrators. According to respondents, the three most common types of training that they received were webinars (73%), workshops or conferences (70%), and emails (60%). Meanwhile, less than half said that they received on-the job training or training with their supervisor, and only one in three said that they attended government-provided trainings. The lack of formal training by supervisors and/or campuses likely impacts staff and administrators’ ability to systematically identify students in need and to provide them with comprehensive services and referrals.



Recommendations

1. Community colleges should fully fund homeless liaison positions in conjunction with the State of California.

CCCs should designate at least one employee whose primary responsibility is to support students experiencing homelessness at each campus. Doing so would give homeless liaisons the capacity to build partnerships with nonprofit service providers and local county agencies; develop databases of local, state, and federal resources that students may qualify for; conduct student outreach; increase awareness of student homelessness in the campus community; and provide comprehensive case management. Similarly, California's community colleges should provide sufficient support staff and other resources to their homeless liaisons to help students meet their basic needs and reach their educational goals.

2. Community colleges should pursue more housing resources specifically for college students experiencing homelessness.

California's community colleges must leverage additional housing resources for students experiencing homelessness. Possible housing resources include advocating for affordable student housing on or near each campus, developing emergency short-term housing for students experiencing homelessness, and creating student housing by leasing existing housing stock near each college. The State of California should incentivize and help fund these efforts. Some campuses, such as San Diego State University and Sacramento State University, are taking action, creatively partnering with local housing authorities, religious organizations, and even college alumni to find shelter for students.

Spotlight: San Diego University's Economic Crisis Response Team

San Diego State University (SDSU) has an Economic Crisis Response Team that helps students facing immediate crises, including food insecurity, housing insecurity, and a lack of transportation. Students experiencing homelessness who have been in foster care may also qualify for the [Guardian Scholars Program](#). In 2015, SDSU collaborated with the San Diego Housing Commission and used federal funding as a [pilot program](#) to secure year-round housing for Guardian Scholars over the following three years.

Spotlight: Sacramento State University's Emergency Housing Program

In 2017, Sacramento State debuted their [Emergency Housing Program](#), providing short-term housing assistance and meal plans to students for up to 30 days in the residence halls. This time period allows students and the crisis manager to begin to plan and arrange for long-term housing. The campus's Host a Hornet Program matches interested alumni with a food-insecure student, whom they invite into their home for dinner twice a month. In addition, members of local churches close to the campus have opened up their homes to students in need.

3. Community colleges should implement systematic and effective ways to identify students experiencing homelessness.

California Community Colleges, to date, do not yet have an ongoing process to determine how many of their students are experiencing homelessness. Not understanding the scope of the problem across the community college system delays solution-oriented conversations and impedes informed actions that would benefit students at-risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.

In addition, the majority of CCCs lack information about the number of students experiencing homelessness at their individual campuses. Without a thorough identification processes, homeless liaisons at each campus are not able to fulfill their responsibility to assist students who are struggling to meet their basic needs.

Community colleges should implement systematic and effective ways of identifying students experiencing homelessness. A simple but effective way of identifying such students would be for CCCs to include and utilize standardized questions on their college applications concerning students' current or prior experiences with homelessness or risk of homelessness (in alignment with existing federal definitions of homelessness). Doing so would create annual system-wide data on this issue, which the CCCs Chancellor's Office could compile and share for decision makers at the state and local levels. In addition, this information would apprise individual campuses of their incoming students' needs and empower homeless liaisons to better serve their students. As another strategy, since a student's housing situation could change at any time, California's community colleges could also administer a survey to all of their students during the academic year to identify students who lose permanent housing during the semester.

Spotlight: California State University's Basic Needs Study

The California State University recently commissioned a study of food and housing security among CSU students. As part of the study, a comprehensive survey—which included a section on homelessness—was administered to over 27,000 students across 23 CSU campuses.²⁷ Recognizing the need for greater systemwide data collection, and the lack of recognized standardized measurement for food and housing security among college students, the study's authors have shared the survey instruments and methodology, which are available [online](#).



Conclusion

Students experiencing homelessness often report having no one to turn to when they need help the most. California's community college homeless liaisons can play a critical role ensuring these students get the help they need and deserve. As a result, community colleges and the state must provide additional and targeted resources to better equip liaisons to carry out their duties under the law. In addition, community colleges must take

deliberate action to identify students experiencing homelessness and connect them with housing, students' most urgent need. Only through purposeful and ambitious statewide action will we ensure students experiencing homelessness are adequately supported and no longer remain hidden in plain sight.

APPENDIX A - SURVEY DESIGN AND DISSEMINATION

Two years after AB 801 became law, the California Homeless Youth Project and the ACLU Foundations of California collaborated to evaluate whether California's homeless liaisons are equipped and empowered to support students experiencing homelessness. To explore this issue, the team conducted an anonymous survey of homeless liaisons in K–12 school districts and in the state's public higher education institutions.

To design their survey, CHYP and the ACLU looked to models like the Texas Network of Youth Services homeless liaison survey.²⁸ Survey questions were then adapted to California, including adding questions for liaisons at higher education institutions. CHYP and the ACLU also adopted a multiple-choice format to reduce the amount of time needed to complete the survey and increase the response rate. Before finalizing the survey, the authors piloted the survey with a small sample of higher education homeless liaisons. The final survey launched on May 1, 2018, and remained open until June 1, 2018.

The survey effectively reached California's community colleges. CCC homeless liaisons, whose updated contact information was readily available online, received a series of five emails from our team over the course of a month until the survey closed. In contrast, contact information for homeless liaisons within the CSU and the UC systems was not readily available online. Though attempts were made to connect with CSU and UC basic needs offices, in the absence of contact information, we were unable to directly invite homeless liaisons at California's public universities to participate in the study. Consequently, the survey results represent the experiences of homeless liaisons at California's community colleges.

ENDNOTES

¹ Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E. (2019, March). *California Community Colleges #RealCollege Survey*. Retrieved from <https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/RealCollege-CCCCO-Report.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ 42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2) (2012)

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