

SB 252 (Leno)

As Introduced February 18, 2015

Co-authors: Senators Allen, Beall, McCarty & Wieckowski; Assemblymembers Baker, Chiu, Dababneh, Garcia, Lackey, Maienschein & Santiago

Access to Education for Homeless Youth

FACT SHEET

SUMMARY

SB 252 (Leno) will ensure that homeless youth have access to the California high school equivalency and proficiency exams. It will do so by prohibiting a scoring contractor or testing center from charging a fee to an examinee who can verify his or her status as a homeless child or youth.

BACKGROUND

Existing law authorizes the Superintendent of Public Instruction to issue a high school equivalency certificate to a person who has not completed high school and who has taken a general education development test approved by the state board and administered by a testing center approved by the California Department of Education (CDE).

These testing centers and scoring contractors may charge a fee to youth taking the exam. Currently, three testing centers offer the high school equivalency exam in California; the exam fee ranges from \$150-\$200. This cost acts as an impossible barrier for many homeless youth hoping to take the exam.

Existing law also authorizes the Superintendent to issue a high school proficiency certificate to a person between the ages of 16-18 who has not completed

high school and who has passed the California high school proficiency exam. Students who pass this exam may then apply to a California community college to continue their education. The Sacramento County Office of Education oversees the contracting and scoring of this exam on behalf of CDE.

Homeless Youth

During the 2012-2013 school year, nearly 270,000 California students experienced homelessness. Twenty-seven percent of these students were enrolled in grades 9-12. Child and youth homelessness is increasing in California, with a 39% increase since the 2009-2010 school year. Initial school district data indicate approximately 0.8 percent of homeless students take the general education development test, or 2,160 students statewide.

Educational Struggles

The challenges of homelessness and mobility lead to disproportionately low rates of high school graduation among homeless students. California studies have found that as many as 75% of older homeless youths drop out of school.

The costs of low graduation rates are very high, for students and for the state. People who do not graduate from high school have

access only to low-income jobs. These low wages harm their health and stability, and drastically limit their tax contributions to local and state coffers. One study estimated the loss in lifetime earnings resulting from homeless students dropping out of school is \$5 billion dollars, and the loss of contributions to California is \$3.2 billion. In addition, high school dropouts are eight times more likely to be in jail or prison than high school graduates. According to recent research, California spends over \$1 billion annually just in juvenile crime costs related to youth who have left school.

As homelessness can make graduating from high school challenging, or even impossible, other paths to completing high school and accessing higher education are extremely important to homeless youths. The high school proficiency and equivalency examinations are two paths to post-secondary education and opportunities that can greatly enhance homeless youths' future earning power and ultimate stability.

FEDERAL ACTION

The federal McKinney-Vento Act requires state and local educational agencies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youths in school. The McKinney-Vento Act requires every local educational agency to designate a liaison, who must ensure homeless students are identified and receive the services to which they are entitled.

SOLUTION

SB 252 will help homeless youth to obtain high school proficiency and equivalency certificates, thus allowing them to continue into post-secondary education and access

higher-wage, stable employment. This will increase their health and well-being, as well as generate significant income for the state.

SB 252 exempts homeless youths from the fee typically charged to an applicant for the high school proficiency examination application. It also exempts homeless youths from fees charged by scoring contractors or testing centers that administer the equivalency exam. The bill requires homeless youths seeking these exemptions to obtain a verification of their housing status from a homeless services provider. Homeless services providers include publicly funded agencies providing services to homeless youth, attorneys, local educational agency McKinney-Vento liaisons, school social workers, certain law enforcement officers, and other entities determined by the Department of Education.

STATUS

Introduced

SUPPORT

- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (co-sponsor)
- California Coalition for Youth (co-sponsor)
- Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP)

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