



Education for Homeless Children and Youth Policy

The Cottonwood School (“Charter School” or “TCS”) is committed to ensuring that homeless students are provided equal access to the same free, appropriate public education provided to other children and youth. Homeless students will be given access to the education and other services that such students need to ensure that they have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards to which all students are held. Homeless students will not be stigmatized or segregated in a separate school or program based on the student’s status as homeless.

Purpose: To ensure that homeless children and youth are provided with equal access to The Cottonwood School's educational program, have an opportunity to meet the same challenging state of California academic standards, are provided a free and appropriate public education, are not stigmatized or segregated on the basis of their status as homeless, and to establish safeguards that protect homeless students from discrimination on the basis of their homelessness.

Definitions:

The term "homeless children and youth" means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes children and youths :

1. 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 (not including mobile home parks), or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters, or are abandoned in hospitals;
2. Who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designated for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
3. Who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
4. Migratory children and unaccompanied youth (youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian) may be considered homeless if they meet the above definition of “homeless.”

Homeless status is determined in cooperation with the parent or guardian. In the case of an unaccompanied youth, status is determined by the Charter School Liaison.

“School of origin” means the school that the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled. (42 USC § 11432).

“Unaccompanied youth” means a youth, not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. (42 USC § 11434a)

Charter School Liaison

The Executive Director designates the following staff person as the Charter School Liaison for homeless students (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)):

Homeless Liaison:
Samantha Woodbeck
mvhy@cottonwoodk12.org
3921 Sandstone Drive, Suite A
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762
(530) 285-2003

The Charter School Liaison shall ensure that the following requirements are fulfilled by the Charter School (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)):

1. Homeless students are identified by school personnel and through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies, and through the annual housing questionnaire administered by the Charter School.
2. Homeless students enroll in and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed at The Cottonwood School.
3. Homeless students and families receive educational services for which they are eligible, including services through Head Start programs (including Early Head Start programs) under the Head Start Act; early intervention services under part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (“IDEA”); any other preschool programs administered by The Cottonwood School, if any; and referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, substance abuse services, housing services, and other appropriate services.
4. Parents/guardians are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children’s education.
5. Public notice of the educational rights of homeless children is disseminated at places frequented by parents or guardians of such youths and unaccompanied youths, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, and in a manner and form understandable to the parents and guardians of homeless youth and unaccompanied youth.
6. Enrollment/admissions disputes are mediated in accordance with the law, The Cottonwood School charter, and Board policy.
7. Parents/guardians and any unaccompanied youth are fully informed of all transportation services, as applicable.
8. Charter School personnel providing services receive professional development and other support.
9. The Charter School Liaison collaborates with State coordinators and community and school

personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to homeless children and youths.

10. Unaccompanied youth are enrolled in school; have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as the State establishes for other children and youth; and are informed of their status as independent students and that the youths may obtain assistance from the Charter School Liaison to receive verification of such status for the purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

The California Department of Education publishes a list of the contact information for the Homeless Education Liaisons in the state, which is available at: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/>

Enrollment:

The Cottonwood School shall immediately admit/enroll the student for which the Charter School is a School of Origin.

The Cottonwood School shall also immediately enroll a homeless youth who seeks to enroll in the Charter School if the youth would otherwise be eligible to attend and subject to the Charter School's capacity and according to the procedures stated in The Cottonwood School charter and Board policy. A homeless youth who is enrolled will have the right to attend classes and participate fully in school activities, including extracurricular activities.

The youth shall be immediately enrolled even if the student lacks records normally required for enrollment (such as previous academic records, records of immunizations, other required health records, proof of residency) or has missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness. Records will immediately be requested from the previous school. (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(C); Education Code § 48850(a)(3)(A).)

If the student needs to obtain immunizations or does not possess immunization or other medical records, the Executive Director or designee shall refer the parent/guardian to the Charter School Liaison. The Charter School Liaison shall assist the parent/guardian in obtaining the necessary immunizations or records for the student. (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(C).)

Homeless youth may remain in the student's school of origin for the entire period for which the youth is homeless. If a youth obtains permanent housing during an academic year, the youth will be permitted to remain in the school of origin through the end of the academic year.

Enrollment Disputes

1. Suppose a dispute arises over admissions/enrollment. In that case, the child/youth shall be immediately admitted (subject to Charter School's capacity and pursuant to the procedures stated in the Charter School charter and Board policy), pending final resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals.
2. The parent/guardian shall be provided with a written explanation of the admission/enrollment decision, including an explanation of parent/guardian's right to appeal the decision. The

parent/guardian shall also be referred to the Charter School Liaison. The Charter School Liaison shall carry out the dispute resolution and complaint process as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(E).)

3. The homeless liaison shall ensure that the dispute resolution process is also followed for unaccompanied youth.
4. A written explanation of the Charter School's decision regarding school selection or enrollment must be provided if a parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. This written explanation will also include the right to appeal the decision. (42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(3)(E)(ii)).
 - The written explanation shall be complete, as brief as possible, simply stated, and provided in a language that the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth can understand.
 - The explanation should include contact information for the Homeless Liaison, a description of the decision, a notice of the right to immediately enroll in the school of choice pending resolution of the dispute, notice that enrollment includes full participation in all school activities, a notice of right to present oral or written documentation, a notice of the right to appeal the decision to the county office of education and, if the dispute remains unresolved, to the California Department of Education, and contact information.

Housing Questionnaire

TCS shall administer a housing questionnaire for purposes of identifying homeless children and youth. TCS shall ensure that the housing questionnaire is based on the best practices developed by the CDE. TCS shall annually provide the housing questionnaire to all parents/guardians of students and to all unaccompanied youths at TCS. The housing questionnaire shall include an explanation of the rights and protections a student has as a homeless child or youth or as an unaccompanied youth. The housing questionnaire shall be available in paper form. The housing questionnaire shall be available in the primary language other than English spoken by fifteen (15) percent or more of the students enrolled at TCS and shall be translated into other languages upon request of a student's parent/guardian or an unaccompanied youth. TCS shall collect the completed housing questionnaires and annually report to the CDE the number of homeless children and youths and unaccompanied youths enrolled. (Education Code Section 48851.)

Comparable Services

Each homeless child or youth shall promptly be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in The Cottonwood School such as (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(4)):

- Transportation services
- Educational services for which the child or youth meets eligibility criteria, such as educational programs for students with disabilities and educational programs for students with limited English proficiency
- Programs in career technical education
- Charter School nutrition programs

Transportation

In the event that The Cottonwood School provides transportation services to all The Cottonwood School students, The Cottonwood School shall provide comparable transportation services to each homeless child or youth attending The Cottonwood School, as noted above. (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(4).)

If The Cottonwood School does not otherwise provide transportation services to all The Cottonwood School students, The Cottonwood School shall ensure that transportation is provided for homeless students to and from The Cottonwood School, at the request of the parent or guardian (or Charter School Liaison), if The Cottonwood School is the student's school of origin. (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J).) Transportation provided by The Cottonwood School will be adequate and appropriate for the Student's situation, but The Cottonwood School does not commit to any one method of transportation for all youth.

Professional Development

All administrators, teachers, and employees of The Cottonwood School, including the Charter School Liaison, will be provided professional development on the identification, services, and sensitivity necessary when dealing with homeless children and youth. All identified or suspected homeless children and youth will be referred to the Charter School Liaison. The Charter School Liaison will verify that the Charter School is providing the required training to school personnel providing services to youth experiencing homelessness at least annually through the CDE's verification system. (Education Code Section 48852.5(c)(2).)

The Charter School Liaison shall offer training to TCS certificated and classified employees providing services to students experiencing homelessness, including, but not limited to, teachers, support staff, and other school staff who work with pupils, at least annually relating to:

- (1) TCS's homeless education program policies; and
- (2) Recognition of signs that pupils are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing homelessness.

The Charter School Liaison shall inform such employees of the availability of training and the services the Charter School Liaison provides to aid in the identification and provision of services to students who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing, homelessness.

High School Graduation Requirements

Homeless students who transfer to the Cottonwood School any time after the completion of their second year of high school shall be exempt from any of the Charter School's graduation requirements that are in excess of the California minimum graduation requirements specified in Education Code section 51225.3 ("additional graduation requirements") unless The Cottonwood School makes a finding that the student is reasonably able to complete the Charter School's graduation requirements by the end of the student's fourth year of high school.

To determine whether a homeless student is in their third or fourth year of high school, either the number of credits the student has earned to the date of transfer, or the length of the student's school enrollment may be used, whichever will qualify the student for the exemption.

Within thirty (30) calendar days of the date that a student who may qualify for exemption under the above requirements transfers into the Charter School, the Charter School shall notify the student, the student's educational rights holder, and the Charter School Liaison of the availability of the exemption and whether the student qualifies for an exemption.

The Charter School shall notify students who are exempted from the Charter School's additional graduation requirements and the student's educational rights holder of how any of the requirements that are waived will affect the student's ability to gain admission to a postsecondary educational institution and provide information about transfer opportunities available through the California Community Colleges.

The Charter School shall not require any student who would otherwise be entitled to remain in attendance at the Charter School to accept the exemption from the Charter School's additional graduation requirements or deny the student enrollment in, or the ability to complete, courses for which the student is otherwise eligible. The Charter School shall not revoke an exemption and shall grant an eligible student's request for the exemption at any time if the student qualifies, regardless of whether the student previously declined the exemption. An eligible student's exemption from the Charter School's additional graduation requirements will continue to apply while the student is enrolled in the Charter School or if the student transfers to another school even after the student no longer meets the definition of a homeless child.

The Charter School shall not require or request that a student transfer schools in order to qualify the student for the exemption. Nor shall a student, a student's parent/guardian or educational rights holder, or a student's social worker or probation officer request a transfer solely to qualify for an exemption from the Charter School's additional graduation requirements.

If a student who is exempted from the Charter School's additional graduation requirements completes the California minimum coursework requirements specified in Education Code section 51225.3

before the end of the student's fourth year of high school and would otherwise be entitled to remain in attendance at the Charter School, the Charter School shall not require or request that the student graduate before the end of the student's fourth year of high school.

If the Charter School determines the student is reasonably able to complete the Charter School's graduation requirements by the end of the student's fifth year of high school, the Charter School shall do the following:

1. Inform the student of the student's option to remain at the Charter School for a fifth year to complete the Charter School's graduation requirements.
2. Inform the student and the educational rights holder for the student about how remaining in school for a fifth year to complete the Charter School's graduation requirements will affect the student's ability to gain admission to a postsecondary educational institution.
3. Provide information to the student about transfer opportunities available through the California Community Colleges.
4. Permit the student to stay at the Charter School for a fifth year to complete the Charter School's graduation requirements upon agreement with the student, if the student is 18 years of age or older, or, if the student is under 18 years of age, upon agreement with the educational rights holder for the student.

Acceptance of Course Work

The Charter School will accept any coursework satisfactorily completed at any public school, a juvenile court school, a school in a country other than the United States, and/or a nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency by a homeless student.

The Charter School will provide homeless students credit for the partial completion of courses taken while attending a public school, a juvenile court school, a school in a country other than the United States, and/or a nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency. If the student did not complete the entire course, the Charter School shall not require the student to retake the portion of the course the student completed unless the Charter School, in consultation with the holder of educational rights for the student, finds that the student is reasonably able to complete the requirements in time to graduate from high school. When partial credit is awarded in a particular course, the homeless student shall be enrolled in the same or equivalent course, if applicable, so that the student may continue and complete the entire course. These students shall not be prevented from taking or retaking a course to meet California State University or the University of California admission eligibility requirements.

Notice

For any homeless student who seeks enrollment at the Charter School, a written notice will be provided to the parent/guardian at the time of enrollment at least annually and while the student is enrolled at the Charter School.

Annual Policy Review

The Charter School shall annually review and revise any policies that may act as barriers to the identification of homeless children and youths or the enrollment of homeless children and youths at the Charter School. In reviewing and revising such policies, consideration shall be given to issues concerning transportation, immunization, residency, birth certificates, school records and other documentation, and guardianship. Special attention shall be given to ensuring the identification, enrollment, and attendance of homeless children and youths who are not currently attending school. TCS's review of its homeless education program policies shall use resources developed by the CDE and posted on the CDE's internet website and resources developed by homeless education technical assistance centers established using funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

School Website Posting

TCS shall ensure that the following information is posted, and updated as necessary, on its internet website:

- The name and contact information of the Charter School Liaison(s) for homeless children and youths.
- The contact information of any employee or contractor that assists the Charter School Liaison in completing the Liaison's duties.
- Specific information regarding the educational rights and resources available to persons experiencing homelessness.