



National Center for
Homeless Education

<https://nche.ed.gov>



A Closer Look at File Specifications: FS 118

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) developed a series of briefs focused on ensuring data submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) meet quality standards and conform to program requirements. As the second in the series, this brief provides information about the data collection and submission process for File Specification (FS) 118: Homeless Students Enrolled.

Data Collected by FS 118

FS 118 includes data group 655. As the largest file specification to focus only on homeless education data, it provides information on how to report the number of homeless children and youth (HCY) who are enrolled in public schools:

- in each grade;
- by the primary nighttime residence used by the students at the time they are identified as homeless, including the residence of unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY);
- by race/ethnicity;
- for each subgroup of homeless students, including children with disabilities,¹ English learners,² UHY, and migratory learners;³ and
- as the education unit total.

When submitting data to ED, the state educational agency (SEA) should provide a count of students for each local educational agency (LEA) and a separate count for the SEA. Students should be reported for each LEA they enrolled in, but they should only be included once for the SEA data.

Important Dates

FS 118 is due by December 15, 2021 for School Year 2020-21. Once the data have been submitted to ED, the information will undergo a data quality review. States will then have the opportunity to submit data again as needed; the due date for data resubmission is typically in late March.

Data Quality Checks

During the data quality review, information submitted by states will be compared to the Business Rules Single Inventory (BRSI). The full BRSI, which contains rules for all data submitted through *EDFacts*, is available at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/business-rules-guide.html>.

¹ As defined by 20 U.S.C. § 1401(3).

² As defined by 20 U.S.C. § 7801(20).

³ As defined by 20 U.S.C. § 6399(3).

The questions below are based on rules pertaining to FS 118 contained in the BRSI. State coordinators, ED*Facts* coordinators, and others reviewing data included in FS 118 can use them to validate their data. If any question results in a response of no, state coordinators should investigate the reason and work with liaisons or the data staff submitting information to make corrections prior to submitting information to ED. If upon further investigation, the data are determined to be correct, state coordinators should work with ED*Facts* coordinators to submit explanatory comments with the data.

Completeness

- Did all LEAs in the state that enrolled students report data, including charter schools and LEAs that did not receive a subgrant?
- Do all LEAs and does the state data set include all the required data elements, including the number of students in each grade, the primary nighttime residence for all homeless students, the number of students for each race/ethnicity, the primary nighttime residence for UHY, all of the subgroups of HCY, and the education unit total?

Current Year Accuracy

- Calculate the total number of HCY by grade for each LEA. Does it match the education unit total for each LEA?
- Calculate the total number of HCY by grade for the SEA. Does it match the education unit total?
- Calculate the total number of HCY by primary nighttime residence for each LEA. Does it match the education unit total for each LEA? Do the same calculation using primary nighttime residence data for UHY. Does it match the total number of UHY for each LEA?
- Calculate the total number of HCY by primary nighttime residence for the SEA. Does it match the education unit total? Do the same calculation using primary nighttime residence data for UHY. Does it match the total number of UHY?
- Using LEA data, calculate the total number of HCY by race/ethnicity. Does it match the education unit total for each LEA?
- Using SEA data, calculate the total number of HCY by race/ethnicity. Does it match the education unit total for the SEA?
- Is the sum of all LEA education unit totals larger than the SEA education unit total for the number of HCY? HCY who enroll in more than one LEA during the school year should be counted once for each LEA in which they enroll but should only be counted once for the SEA data set.

Accuracy Across Years

- Is the total of HCY reported by all LEAs comparable to the previous reporting year total? Based on historical data, a significant change for states with 1,500 or fewer students is 25% or more. For states with more than 1,500 students but less than 10,000 students, a significant change is 15% or more. For states with 10,000 or more students, a significant change is 10% or more.
- Is the education unit total of HCY for the SEA comparable to the previous reporting year total? For states with 1,500 or fewer students, a significant change is 25% or more. For states with more than 1,500 students but less than 10,000 students, a significant change is 15% or more. For states with 10,000 or more students, a significant change is 10% or more.
- Using LEA data, sum the total number of students in each subgroup and a statewide total of HCY for both reporting years. Calculate the percentage of HCY who are reported for each subgroup. Is the percentage of HCY in each subgroup for the current reporting year within two percentage points of the percentages of HCY in each subgroup for the previous reporting year?
- Using SEA data, calculate the percentage of HCY who are reported for each subgroup for both reporting years. Is the percentage of HCY in each subgroup for the current reporting year within two percentage points of the percentages of HCY in each subgroup for the previous reporting year?

- ❑ Using LEA data, sum the total number of students reported for each type of primary nighttime residence and calculate the percentage of HCY who are reported for each type of primary nighttime residence for both reporting years. Is the percentage of HCY in each type of nighttime residence for the current reporting year within two percentage points of the percentage of HCY in each type of nighttime residence for the previous reporting year? Do the same calculations using UHY data and UHY primary nighttime residence data. Are the percentages of UHY in each type of primary nighttime residence from one reporting year to the next within two percentage points?
- ❑ Using SEA data, calculate the percentage of HCY who are reported for each type of primary nighttime residence for both reporting years. Is the percentage of HCY in each type of nighttime residence for the current reporting year within two percentage points of the percentage of HCY in each type of nighttime residence for the previous reporting year? Do the same calculations using UHY data and UHY primary nighttime residence data. Are the percentages of UHY in each type of primary nighttime residence from one reporting year to the next within two percentage points?

General Data Quality Notes

Subgroups of students are not exclusive; that is, a homeless student could be a part of some, all, or none of the subgroup categories.

Occasionally, families or UHY decline educational services available to them based on their homeless status. In this instance, the student should still be included as a part of the count of enrolled HCY; receipt of education services is not required and does not impact the student's enrollment status.

All HCY counts included for FS 118 must be cumulative. Counts that only reflect the status of students at the beginning or end of the school year are considered erroneous.

Sometimes a homeless student is enrolled by one LEA but placed by the enrolling LEA in another LEA for the purpose of receiving educational services not otherwise available (e.g., an intermediate service agency or district). When this happens, the student should be assigned for data reporting purposes to the LEA that is responsible for ensuring the student receives a public education, i.e., the LEA in which the student enrolled. For example, a homeless student is identified as in need of special education services not available in the LEA. As a result, the LEA assigns the student to attend school in a neighboring district with which the LEA has a shared services agreement for the purposes of providing special education services. The student should be reported by the LEA assigning the student to the school because that is where the student is enrolled, even though the student attends another LEA.

Nighttime residence data should reflect the type of residence the student was using at the time the student was identified as meeting the definition of homeless. There is no need to update the data to reflect changes to the student's nighttime residence over the course of the year for federal reporting unless the student is also an UHY. If the student is an UHY, only submit the type of housing the student used when first identified as an UHY, even if the student didn't become unaccompanied until after they had been identified as homeless with their parents or guardians.

HCY living in substandard housing should be included under the category of unsheltered.

Changes made to the McKinney-Vento Act by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 removed children and youth awaiting foster care placement from the homeless definition.

Providing Notes About Quality

SEAs are required to respond to the feedback sent to them by ED during the data quality review. Additionally, SEAs are allowed to submit comments with their data to explain why the data may be outside expected ranges. The comments should be concise, explain a problem or large change contained within the data, explain why data have

not been submitted, or explain steps the SEA is taking to correct the data. The three most common mistakes SEAs make with regard to including comments with their data are:

1. using the same comment that was used for the previous collection window, even though it is out of date and no longer relevant;
2. including comments for a data point that do not apply to that data; and
3. including comments that are unclear or confusing.

The following are examples of comments that help clarify data included under FS 118, and therefore are likely to reduce the number of corrections the SEA will be asked to make:

- We encountered an error in the system and were unable to complete the upload. Partner Support has been contacted for assistance (Ticket No. XXXX).
- Our state was unable to provide data for this question due to a security breach that erased the data from our system.
- Previously, we did not include charter school LEAs in our data collection. This has been corrected; the current counts reflect that correction.
- Our state does not have a migrant program.
- Our state experienced a wildfire this year that required several communities to evacuate and experience significant losses; our number of students increased as a result.
- Our state has undertaken a new outreach initiative, working with higher education and youth health centers. As a result, our numbers of UHY have increased significantly.
- A large district in our state lost funding that provided social workers in each building within the LEA. As a result, the LEA was unable to maintain its previous level of staffing. This significantly impacted the LEA's ability to identify students; as a result, our number of students has dropped significantly.
- Two communities in our state lost a significant number of jobs when two large manufacturers were forced to lay off employees. This impacted our student counts.
- SEA data include duplicate counts of students. (This information must be provided if a state is unable to provide an unduplicated count for the SEA.)

The following are examples of comments that are vague, do not indicate what steps were taken to address the concern noted by ED during the data review, or indicate that the SEA violated a rule included in the file specs, and are therefore likely to result in a data flag:

- In response to an error message: Data are correct.
- In response to an error message: This is the same methodology we used last year.
- Homeless counts are based on students who were homeless on (date).
- Some LEAs report unknown for housing residency.

Public Availability of Data

While data are aggregated and do not include personally identifiable information, they are made available to the public in order to increase transparency, identify technical assistance and programmatic needs, and provide information to policymakers. The following list is not all inclusive as LEAs, SEAs, and other non-governmental organizations may also release information on the education of students experiencing homelessness, but it provides several examples of how data submitted to ED are released to the public.

- ED Data Express is a website hosted by ED to improve public access to data at the district and state levels. Homeless student enrollment data and related notes on data quality can be accessed by visiting <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/> and selecting the green Download button and then the green Reset Filters button. Choose options for state, level (LEA or SEA), school year, file specification, and homeless subgroup to create a downloadable file.
- Federal Data Summaries published by NCHE have historically included homeless student enrollment, including information on primary nighttime residence, and demographic subgroup. These reports are available at <https://nche.ed.gov/data-and-stats/> and <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/education-for-homeless-children-and-youths-grants-for-state-and-local-activities/performance/>.
- State Profiles published by NCHE provide unduplicated homeless student enrollment data. These state-level reports can be accessed by visiting <https://nche.ed.gov/data/> and clicking on the state.



This brief was developed by:

National Center for Homeless Education

Helpline: 800-308-2145 and homeless@serve.org

<https://nche.ed.gov>

May 2021

The National Center for Homeless Education operates the U.S. Department of Education’s technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program. The contents of this brief were developed under a grant from the Department; however, these contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department.