



Lowell Joint School District
11019 Valley Home Avenue
Whittier, CA 90603
Attn: Rhonda Overby

July 31, 2023

The Honorable Maria Hernandez
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Lowell Joint School District's Response to the 2022-23 Orange County Grand Jury Report: "The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County"

Dear Judge Hernandez:

In accordance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Orange County Grand Jury has requested that the Lowell Joint School District respond to findings and recommendations in the 2022-2023 Orange County Grand Jury report entitled "The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County" published on May 25, 2023. Below are the responses of the Lowell Joint School District, as approved by the Board of Education on August 7, 2023.

F #	Finding	Agree/ Disagree	Response And Explanation (if Required)
F1	Many children experiencing homelessness are not identified as such, and therefore do not receive the support and benefits authorized by the McKinney-Vento Act.	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	LJSD provides opportunities throughout the year to be identified as McKinney Vento. We use our Data Confirmation process to complete the housing questionnaire. School sites and our District Office also have a paper form for families that come into the office or do not have online access. When families are identified, the school site, teacher, and district liaison are given the information. Families are notified about their rights and supports.
F2	The lack of mandatory McKinney-Vento Act training of school site office staff, counselors, and teachers contributes to a failure to	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	The LJSD Homeless liaison connects with each school principal and office staff to provide annual information. Principals partner with the

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	identify children experiencing homelessness.		McKinney-Vento Liaison to present information to the staff
F3	There is disparity in the application of McKinney-Vento regulations across Orange County public school districts which results in unequal access to educational benefits for children experiencing homelessness.	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	LJSD participates in OCDE and CDE training on the McKinney Vento rights, regulations, and benefits to support students experiencing homelessness. LJSD ensures that all families complete the McKinney-Vento Declaration Form as a mandatory component of our data confirmation process. All Mc Kinney-Vento identified students are given the same access to educational programs and benefits.
F4	The majority of McKinney-Vento Liaisons are in full-time positions, but because their work includes multiple non-McKinney-Vento responsibilities, most do not have sufficient time to do the work required by the McKinney-Vento Act.	Respondent agrees with the finding	
F5	Many McKinney-Vento Liaisons lack needed experience due to a high turnover rate in those positions.	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	The Lowell Joint School District's McKinney-Vento Liaison has been in her position for 5 years. She is well-trained due to her participation in a variety of opportunities, including Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) Homeless Outreach Promoting Educational Success (HOPES) meetings, CA Homeless Education Technical Assistance Center (HETAC) webinars, and CA Department of Education conferences. The District Homeless Liaison collaborates with the OCDE and CDE Homeless Liaisons for questions and support when needed.
F6	McKinney-Vento Act training is not mandatory for the majority of McKinney-Vento Liaisons.	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	The Federal Program Monitoring Program Instrument for Homeless Education states that the LEA Liaison duties (3.0) include: (h) School personnel, including principals and other school leaders, attendance officers, teachers, enrollment personnel, and specialized instructional support personnel, that provide services to homeless

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			<p>children, youths, and their families receive professional development and other support. (42 U.S.C. Sections 11432[g][1][D], 11432[g][6][A][ix]; EC Section 48852.5[c]) To effectively conduct this professional development and support, the McKinney-Vento Liaison must also attend training. The Consolidated Application and Reporting System (CARS) also asks if the Homeless Liaison has attended or participated in training within the past two years, which implies that this is required. The District Homeless Liaison attends National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), Homeless Education Technical Assistance Center (HETAC), the annual National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAECHY) conference, and the OCDE Network meetings all provide opportunities to receive ongoing training.</p>
<p>F7</p>	<p>Students experiencing homelessness who are enrolled in an elementary district often do not continue to receive McKinney-Vento benefits when they move to a high school district because the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prevents the sharing of this information between districts.</p>	<p>Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.</p>	<p>While LJSD does not have a high school in our district, we partner with our local high school district to ensure articulation and continuity of services. Participation is not based on the previous school district's records. It is based on the current living situation and a new questionnaire is filled out each year regardless of continuing in the same school/district or moving/promoting.</p>
<p>F8</p>	<p>McKinney-Vento funds depend on school districts submitting grant proposals, but not all districts have employees trained in writing grant applications, resulting in missed funding opportunities.</p>	<p>Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.</p>	<p>LJSD receives Title I, Part A funding and must reserve a portion to provide services to homeless children and youth. Training in grant writing is not necessary to complete the CARS report to receive Title I funding. The CARS report is simple and requires a district to mark "yes" to receiving Title I, Part A. Homeless program reports include yes and no questions about training, expenditure data, and homeless services provided. LJSD does not depend on grants for funding but will be using a newly hired grant writer to submit</p>

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			proposals in the upcoming year.
F9	School districts that do not apply for grants which fund programs benefiting children experiencing homelessness miss potential revenue opportunities.	Respondent agrees with the finding	
F10	McKinney-Vento is an unfunded federally mandated program; however, school districts that qualify and apply for Title I, Part A funds may obtain revenues that can be used for children experiencing homelessness. These funds are insufficient to meet the needs of the school districts supporting children experiencing homelessness.	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	If the funds are insufficient, LJSD can opt to increase the amount of Title I funding set aside for homeless services. We have not had to do this in the past, but given economic uncertainty and one-time funding expiration, the district will reexamine as needed.
F11	A lack of reliable transportation for children experiencing homelessness often results in chronic tardiness and absenteeism.	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	Transportation is a barrier for some McKinney-Vento families. The District connects with local resources for getting McKinney-Vento students on public bus routes, deploying OCTA bus passes, and providing parent mileage reimbursement.
F12	Chronic Absenteeism Rates of Homeless Students are disproportionately high in comparison with the Chronic Absenteeism Rates of All Students and Socio-Disadvantaged Students.	Respondent agrees with the finding	LJSD chronically absent rates: Homeless students is 33% Socio-Economically Disadvantaged students is 20% All Students is 17%
F13	Children experiencing homelessness in Orange County perform at a lower level on standardized tests and have a lower graduation rate than All Students and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students.	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	As an elementary school district, LJSD does not graduate students. Lowell Joint's Academic Performance rates: Homeless students: ELA = Low Band Homeless student Math = Low Band Socio-Economically Disadvantaged students ELA = Low Band Socio-Economically Disadvantaged students

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			<p>Math = Low Band</p> <p>All Students is ELA = Medium Band All Students is Math = Low Band</p> <p>ELA has a discrepancy in performance, but there is not a significant difference in MATH.</p>
F14	The percentage of Homeless Students graduating who failed to meet state standards on English Language Arts and Math tests is significantly higher than it is for All Students and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students.	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	LJSD is a TK-8 district and does not graduate students.
F15	There is a tendency by school districts to operate in isolation, which prevents productive collaboration on addressing the issue of children experiencing homelessness and the challenges of their education.	Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.	Lowell Joint School Districts collaborates with community-based agencies to serve homeless students. The McKinney-Vento Liaison makes referrals to Friends and Family for resources including food, clothing, supplies, and counseling services, respectively. The District Homeless Liaison attends the OCDE Homeless Liaison meetings and networks with other district Homeless Liaisons. The District Homeless Liaison communicates and collaborates with other district Homeless Liaisons to serve McKinney-Vento students when needed.
F16	A significant lack of affordable permanent housing contributes to many families being caught in the cycle of homelessness.	Respondent agrees with the finding	

Please see below for the responses to each required Recommendation as requested in the Orange County Grand Jury report and attached cover letter dated May 19, 2023.

R #	Recommendation	Implementation	Response And Explanation (if Required)
R1	All Orange County school districts should develop a "Back to School" plan that includes mandatory McKinney-	Recommendation has not yet been implemented but	The LJSD McKinney-Vento liaison will continue to meet with each school staff to provide training

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	Vento Act training for all district and school administrators, teachers, office staff, and counselors by December 31, 2023, and annually thereafter.	will be with a time frame for implementation.	and resources. By December 31, 2023, the liaison will expand her training to include recommended other staff.
R2	Participation in Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) McKinney-Vento Act training programs for all Local Education Agencies (LEA) McKinney-Vento Liaisons should be mandated by October 1, 2023, and annually thereafter.	Recommendation has been implemented.	McKinney-Vento liaison participates in OCDE and CDE training programs
R3	Given that most LEA McKinney-Vento Liaisons are responsible for a number of other duties, and do not have sufficient time to do their McKinney-Vento required work, school districts should identify ways to increase support and/or staff to address the numerous tasks of the Liaisons by October 1, 2023.	Recommendation has been implemented.	The LJSD McKinney-Vento Liaison partners with its nursing staff, psychologists, and counseling interns to provide support for families and students experiencing homelessness through weekly check in phone calls, home visits, identification, and training for all school staff.
R4	By January 1, 2024, for children experiencing homelessness to receive uninterrupted McKinney-Vento benefits, Orange County school districts should add a section to their mandatory enrollment school form enabling parents/guardians to give permission for their school to share information regarding their child's McKinney-Vento status with other districts that their child may be attending.	Recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable.	LJSD will continue with its existing forms. Participation is not based on the previous school district's records. It is based on the current living situation and a new questionnaire is filled out each year regardless of continuing in the same school/district or moving/promoting. Information also becomes part of the student record so it is available for future schools or districts.
R5	By October 1, 2023, each Orange County school district should develop and maintain a centralized list of district employees with grant application writing capability so that they are prepared to apply for available grants to assist in educating children experiencing homelessness.	Recommendation has been implemented.	LJSD has applied for and received small grants in the past. We have hired a grant writer for the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year who will continue with this.
R6	By October 1, 2023, a joint task force should be formed by the OCDE comprised of a district-level	Recommendation has been implemented.	LJSD will participate in the OCDE-sponsored joint task force (AKA: "Steering Committee") beginning in September 2023.

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	administrator from each Orange County school district and leadership from non-profit organizations who serve homeless families, to address absenteeism, low test scores, and low graduation rates of children experiencing homelessness.		
R8	By May 1, 2024, each Orange County school district administration should develop, and present to the District Board of Education, a plan to lower the Absenteeism Rates of homeless students.	Recommendation has been implemented.	Actions related to Chronic Absenteeism are already included in the 2023-2024 LCAP. Additional actions will be developed based on the annual reviews of current data. Actions and plans will be revised and Board approved if necessary for the 2024-2025 school year.
R9	By May 1, 2024, each Orange County school district administration should develop, and present to the District Board of Education, a plan to improve the performance of homeless students in English Language Arts and Math.	Recommendation has been implemented.	Actions related to Academic Performance in ELA and Math are already included in the 2023-2024 LCAP. Additional actions will be developed based on the annual reviews of current data. Actions and plans will be revised and Board approved if necessary for the 2024-2025 school year.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Overby
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Lowell Joint School District
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