



CENTRALIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

6625 La Palma Avenue
Buena Park CA, 90620
714.228.3100 phone/fax
www.cesd.us



August 18, 2023

Orange County Grand Jury
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

RE: Centralia Elementary School District's Response to the 2022-2023 Grand Jury Report on ***The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County***

Dear Orange County Grand Jury,

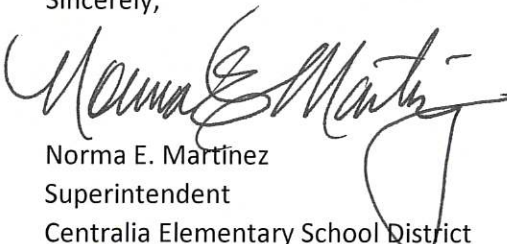
Centralia Elementary School District (CESD) commends the Orange County Grand Jury for its time and attention devoted to studying the very important issue of childhood homelessness and publishing the May 25, 2023, Grand Jury Report entitled; ***The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County***. CESD is committed to serving all students and recognizes that there are unique challenges facing children and families experiencing homelessness. Daily, CESD strives to identify and serve these students and families.

CESD has thoroughly reviewed and considered the Findings and Recommendations in the Grand Jury Report. Please find CESD's responses to the Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendation outlined in the report, ***The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County***.

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

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Norma E. Martínez
Superintendent
Centralia Elementary School District

Centralia Elementary School District

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Henry Charoen – Art Montez – Elizabeth A. Gonzalez – Lamiya A. Hoque – Luis Flores
Superintendent Norma E. Martinez

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
August 18, 2023
Page 2

Centralia Elementary School District
Response to Findings and Recommendations
2022-2023 Orange County Grand Jury Report
The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County

Findings:

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.

Response: CESD disagrees wholly with this finding. As part of the annual Data Confirmation process, each family is provided the state-approved district housing questionnaire to determine eligibility for McKinney-Vento. Families are connected with necessary resources through the District's Neighborhood Resource Center. In addition, families who need assistance filling out the questionnaire receive this assistance. While the McKinney-Vento Act explicitly outlines support for students, CESD has a long tradition of providing services, support, and assistance to all families as needed, regardless of identification.

F2: The lack of mandatory McKinney-Vento Act training of school site office staff, counselors, and teachers contributes to a failure to identify children experiencing homelessness.

Response: CESD disagrees wholly with this finding. McKinney-Vento training is required for all administrators, teachers, office staff, and social workers/counselors each year. CESD collects sign-ins and agendas to monitor the completion of the trainings.

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.

Response: CESD is consistent in its practices in applying the McKinney-Vento regulations across the district. We can only respond to practices in our district, not about other districts.

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.

Response: CESD disagrees wholly with this finding. The district has a McKinney-Vento liaison. The liaison oversees and supports all 8 schools in the district with the support of trained personnel that serve as an extension of the liaison, at all sites, thus maximizing supports to all students, including McKinney-Vento students. According to 2022-2023 enrollment at CESD, of the 4200 students in the district, 306 are

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
August 18, 2023
Page 3

identified as McKinney-Vento, a percentage total of 7.3% of the student population. Resources, support, and benefits are provided to students as needed.

F5: Many McKinney-Vento Liaisons lack needed experience due to high turnover rate in those positions.

Response: CESD disagrees wholly with this finding. Training and resources are available for the McKinney-Vento Liaison to learn, develop and implement plans to support students experiencing homelessness. From OCDE trainings to district level trainings, the McKinney-Vento Liaison is provided with resources, tools, and legislative updates. Training courses are done regionally and throughout the county and are held quarterly. In addition, district team meetings are held on a weekly basis.

F6: McKinney-Vento training is not mandatory for the majority of McKinney-Vento Liaisons.

Response: CESD disagrees wholly with this finding. The CESD McKinney-Vento Liaison is required by the District to attend the regional, county, and state trainings on McKinney-Vento/Homelessness.

F7: 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.

Response: CESD disagrees wholly with this finding. CESD coordinates with the secondary school district to provide resources for families. We have a strong partnership with the secondary school district to ensure that our families are provided with access to resources. In addition, annually, all districts are required to have parents complete the McKinney-Vento Housing Questionnaire to identify eligible students.

The McKinney-Vento Assistance Act Declaration Form is included in all registration packets for new and returning students. Participation is not based on the previous school district's records. It is based on the current living situation and can be re-submitted at any time during the year if the living situation changes.

F8: McKinney-Vento funds depend on the school districts submitting grant proposals, but not all districts have employees trained in writing grants applications, resulting in missed funding opportunities.

Response: CESD disagrees wholly with this finding. CESD's services for McKinney-Vento students are not dependent on grants. CESD receives federal and state funds to support our McKinney-Vento programs and services.

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
August 18, 2023
Page 4

Many CESD district staff write grants and have been awarded numerous grants that support the needs of CESD youth including McKinney-Vento students.

F9: School districts that do not apply for grants which fund programs benefiting children experiencing homelessness miss potential revenue opportunities.

Response: CESD disagrees partially with this finding. Title I federal funds are provided for McKinney-Vento students' programs and services without the need for an application. However, grant application opportunities are supported throughout the district.

F10: McKinney-Vento is an unfunded federally mandated program; however, school districts which 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.

Response: CESD disagrees partially with this finding. Title I federal funds are provided for McKinney-Vento students' programs and services without the need for an application. However, grant application opportunities are supported throughout the district.

F11: A lack of reliable transportation for children experiencing homelessness often results in chronic tardiness and absenteeism.

Response: CESD disagrees wholly with this finding. The district has its own transportation system that creates routes for McKinney-Vento families that need transportation support. The district can contract and customize services so transportation is not a barrier for McKinney-Vento students to attend school.

F12: Chronic Absenteeism Rates of Homeless Students are disproportionately high in comparison with Chronic Absenteeism Rates of All Students and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students.

Response: CESD agrees with this finding partially. Chronic absenteeism has been greatly exacerbated as a result of the pandemic. The data for 2021-2022 was impacted by guidelines from the State and Federal government concerning the pandemic regulations and guidelines. Chronic Absenteeism for McKinney-Vento students is 6 percentage points higher than that of Socio-economically Disadvantaged students and 11.4 percentage points higher than that of All Students.

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.

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
August 18, 2023
Page 5

Response: CESD agrees with this finding. In ELA, 38.05% of McKinney-Vento youth met or exceeded standards while 58.45% of All Students met or exceeded standards and 49.59% of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged students met or exceeded standards. In Math, 35.33% of McKinney-Vento youth met or exceeded standards while 52.94% of All Students met or exceeded standards and 43.35% of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged students met or exceeded standards.

F14: The percentage of Homeless Students graduating who failed to meet the state standards on English Language Arts and Math tests is significantly higher than it is for All Students and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students.

Response: CESD is an elementary school district. CESD does not report on rates of graduation.

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.

Response: CESD disagrees wholly with this finding. The McKinney-Vento Liaison in collaboration with neighboring districts and Orange County Department of Education work collaboratively to discuss McKinney-Vento student needs which address the issues faced with children experiencing homelessness and the challenges of their education.

F16: A significant lack of affordable permanent housing contributes to many families being caught in the cycle of homelessness.

Response: CESD has no position on this finding. We are an education institution; we are not a research institution focusing on affordable housing.

Recommendations:

R1: All Orange County school districts should develop a "Back to School" plan which includes mandatory McKinney-Vento Act training for all district and school administrators; teachers, office staff, and counselors by December 31, 2023, and annually thereafter. (F1, F2, F3)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. McKinney-Vento Trainings for administrators, teachers, office staff, and counselors is scheduled for the 2023-24 school year. The schedule should be implemented annually thereafter.

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
August 18, 2023
Page 6

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. (F1, F3, F5, F6)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The Centralia Elementary School District McKinney-Vento Liaison attends all Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) McKinney-Vento Act 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. (F4)

Response: The recommendation is not warranted because it is already in effect.

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. (F7)

Response: The recommendation is not warranted because annually all school districts are required to have parents/guardians complete the *McKinney-Vento Housing Questionnaire Forms* to identify students of eligibility.

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. (F8, F9, F10)

Response: The recommendation is not warranted because we have positions and personnel who engage in grant writing. We do not maintain a list.

R6: By October 1, 2023, a joint task force should be formed by the OCDE comprised of a district-level 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. (F.11, F.12, 13,F14,F15)

Response: This recommendation does not apply to our district as it is the responsibility of OCDE.

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
August 18, 2023
Page 7

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. (F11, F12)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. Lowering the absenteeism rate and attendance is part of the strategic plan and quarterly updates the CESD presents to the CESD Board of Education.

R9: By May 1, 2024, each Orange County school district administration should develop, and present the District Board of Education, a plan to improve the performance of Homeless students in English Language Arts and Math. (F13, F14)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. Annually, CESD provides a plan to improve outcomes for all CESD students, including McKinney-Vento students.