



Magnolia School District

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August 18, 2023

To: Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
Superior Court of Orange County
Central Justice Center
700 Civic Center Drive West, Department C01
Santa Ana, CA 92701

From: Board of Trustees
Magnolia School District

Subject: Response to Grand Jury Report: *The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County*

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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The Orange County Grand Jury (OCGJ) published a report on May 25, 2023 based on its investigation titled, *The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County*. Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05 requires the Magnolia School District to provide a written response to the Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court. The Magnolia School District's written responses to the findings and recommendations are detailed on the following pages.

Findings

Finding 1: 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: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

The Magnolia School District collects data from families regarding their McKinney-Vento status via a user-friendly one page document at the beginning of each school year. Staff also engages in community outreach and attends events and food pantries to gather information and assist families with completing the document throughout the school year. Families are provided with support and resources based on this data.

Finding 2: 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: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

The McKinney Vento Liaison provides yearly training for staff to assist with the identification of children experiencing homelessness. The Magnolia School District's 2023 "Back to School" plan requires all district employees to complete Keenan Safe Schools Online Training titled "Students Experiencing Homelessness: Awareness and Understanding (Full Course)" mandatory training by December 21, 2023 and annually thereafter. The homeless liaison will also continue to provide ongoing in-person staff training throughout the school year.

Finding 3: 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: Respondent agrees with the finding.

All students in the Magnolia School District are provided equal access to educational benefits. Additional resources are provided to students experiencing homelessness and their families. There may be unequal access across Orange County public schools due to various factors.

Finding 4: 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: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

The Magnolia School District hired and assigned one full time Social Worker who has been trained in the McKinney-Vento Act to every elementary school site. This has reduced the workload for the liaison and increased accessibility for students and their families. The addition of these Social Workers allows the liaison sufficient time to complete the work required by the McKinney-Vento Act.

Finding 5: Many McKinney-Vento Liaisons lack needed experience due to a high turnover rate in those positions.

Response: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

The Magnolia School District has not experienced a high turnover rate in this position. The current liaison has been in the position since 2014.

Finding 6: McKinney-Vento Act training is not mandatory for the majority of McKinney-Vento Liaisons.

Response: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

The Magnolia School District's McKinney-Vento Liaison attends and participates in the Orange County Department of Education's McKinney-Vento Act training programs and will continue to do so annually. The current job description requires that the employee have knowledge of McKinney-Vento policies, procedures, goals and objectives.

Finding 7: 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: Respondent agrees with the finding.

The Magnolia School District will be adding a section to mandatory enrollment school forms 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 by January 1, 2024.

Finding 8: 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.

Response: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

The Magnolia School District has several district employees that have grant application writing capabilities. The Magnolia School District has been a recipient of grant funding for their McKinney-Vento Program - Project H.E.R.O. (Homeless Education Renewing Opportunities) since it was established in the fall of 2009.

Finding 9: School districts that do not apply for grants which fund programs benefiting children experiencing homelessness miss potential revenue opportunities.

Response: Respondent agrees with the finding.

The Magnolia School District applies for grants to ensure sufficient funds are available to support children experiencing homelessness. If other school districts are not applying for these grants there may be missed opportunities.

Finding 10: 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: Respondent agrees with the finding.

The Magnolia School District applies for grants to ensure sufficient funds are available to support children experiencing homelessness.

Finding 11: A lack of reliable transportation for children experiencing homelessness often results in chronic tardiness and absenteeism.

Response: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

The Magnolia School District provides transportation for children who are homeless that struggle with chronic tardiness and absenteeism.

Finding 12: Chronic Absenteeism Rates of Homeless Students are disproportionately high in comparison with the Chronic Absenteeism Rates of All Students and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students.

Response: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

According to the 2022 California School Dashboard, Chronic Absenteeism Rates of Homeless Students were very high as were Chronic Absenteeism Rates of All Students and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students in the Magnolia School District.

Finding 13: 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.

Response: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

According to the 2022 California School Dashboard, children experiencing homelessness performed low in both Math and English Language Arts on the standardized assessment as did All Students and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students in the Magnolia School District.

Finding 14: The percent 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.

Response: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

According to 2022 student performance on the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment and/or the California Alternate Assessment, Magnolia School District students experiencing homelessness performed low in English Language Arts and Math in regards to meeting grade level standards as did All Students and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students.

Finding 15: 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: Respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding.

The Magnolia School District participates in local, county and state trainings and meetings throughout the school year to collaborate and address issues and challenges for students experiencing homelessness.

Finding 16: A significant lack of affordable permanent housing contributes to many families being caught in the cycle of homelessness.

Response: Respondent agrees with the finding.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: 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)

Action: The recommendation has been implemented.

The Magnolia School District's 2023 "Back to School" plan requires all district employees to complete a Keenan Safe Schools course titled, *Students Experiencing Homelessness: Awareness and Understanding (Full Course)* by December 21, 2023 and annually thereafter.

Recommendation 2: 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)

Action: The recommendation has been implemented.

The Magnolia School District's McKinney-Vento Liaison attends and participates in the Orange County Department of Education's McKinney-Vento Act training programs and will continue to do so annually.

Recommendation 3: 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)

Action: The recommendation has been implemented.

The Magnolia School District hired and assigned one full time Social Worker who has been trained in the McKinney-Vento Act to every elementary school site. This has reduced the workload for the liaison and increased accessibility for students and their families. The addition of these Social Workers allows the liaison sufficient time to complete the work required by the McKinney-Vento Act.

Recommendation 4: 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)

Action: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The Magnolia School District will add a section to mandatory enrollment school forms as appropriate to enable 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 by January 1, 2024.

Recommendation 5: 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)

Action: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The Magnolia School District will develop and maintain a centralized list of district employees with grant application writing capability by October 1, 2023.

Recommendation 6: 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, F13, F14, F15)

Action: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

By October 1, 2023 the Magnolia School District will send a district-level administrator to participate in the OCDE joint task force to address absenteeism, low test scores and low graduation rates of children experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 8: 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)

Action: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

By May 1, 2024, Magnolia School District administration will develop and present to the District Board of Education, a plan to lower the Absenteeism Rates of homeless students.

Recommendation 9: 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. (F13, F14)

Action: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

By May 1, 2024, Magnolia School District administration will develop and present to the District Board of Education, a plan to improve the performance of homeless students in English Language Arts and Math.

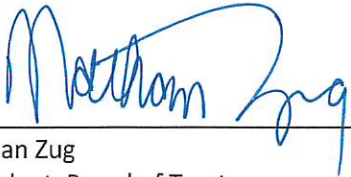
Please accept the information provided herein as the Magnolia School District's responses to the Orange County Grand Jury's Factual Findings and Recommendation in the Report. Once again, we appreciate the time and attention that the Grand Jury devoted to this very important issue.

Sincerely,



District Superintendent

BOARD APPROVED:



Nathan Zug
President, Board of Trustees

8-17-23

Date



Frank Donavan, Ed.D., Secretary
Governing Board of Trustees

8-17-23

Date