



# HUNTINGTON BEACH UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

5832 Bolsa Avenue • Huntington Beach, California 92649  
(714) 903-7000 FAX (714) 372-8105

**Board of Trustees:**  
Diana Carey  
Bonnie Castrey  
Duane Dishno  
Susan Henry  
Michael Simons

**Clint Harwick, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools**

August 20, 2023

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez  
Presiding Judge  
Orange County Superior Court  
700 Civic Center Drive West  
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Huntington Beach Union High School District's Response to the 2022-23 Orange County Grand Jury Report on *The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County*

To the Honorable Maria D. Hernandez:

The Huntington Beach Union High School District commends the Grand Jury for its time and attention devoted to studying this very important issue and publishing the Grand Jury Report dated May 25, 2023, entitled: *The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County* (Report). The District is committed to serving all students, and recognizes that there are unique challenges facing children and families experiencing homelessness and challenges for our District and our school personnel devoted to identifying and serving these students and families.

The District has thoroughly reviewed and considered the Findings and Recommendations in the Report. In accordance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury has requested that the District respond to Findings and Recommendations made in the Report. The District responds to the Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations with the following:

## **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.**

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District cannot verify that "many" children experiencing homelessness in the Huntington Beach Union High School District (HBUHSD) are not identified as such and therefore do not receive McKinney-Vento services. As it relates to children experiencing homelessness in our District, the District partially disagrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*The District recognizes that not all children eligible for McKinney-Vento services are identified and receive such services. The District has processes and procedures to identify and serve*



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*McKinney-Vento students annually during registration and throughout the year as students may qualify at different times of the year.*

The District partially agrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*It is important to note that many families do not identify themselves as homeless out of embarrassment, fear of legal status, etc. The District, however, recognizes that it can always improve its process to identify and serve more McKinney-Vento students.*

### 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.**

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District partially disagrees that a lack of “mandatory” training necessarily contributes to a failure to identify children experiencing homelessness for the following reasons:

*The District does provide training to school staff and implements a process to identify those who are willing to be identified as homeless. It is impossible to verify if a lack of training contributes to not identifying all students who are homeless.*

The District partially agrees with the finding for the following reasons:

*Increased access to and focus on training of school staff will likely increase the identification of children experiencing homelessness.*

### 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.**

The District wholly disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding whether there is a disparity across all districts in Orange County leading to unequal access to educational benefits and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree to that portion of the finding. As it relates to the District, the District wholly disagrees with this finding for the following reasons:



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*Based on my observations, the application of McKinney-Vento regulations is consistent across Orange County public school districts. The disparity is in the number of children experiencing homelessness in each district. Districts with higher numbers of children experiencing homelessness typically have access to more community support and resources. All McKinney-Vento students in HBUHSD have access to the same educational benefits and they also receive support through our partnerships with outside agencies.*

### **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.**

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding the workload of McKinney-Vento Liaisons throughout the county and, therefore, cannot wholly agree or disagree with this finding. As it relates to the District, the District disagrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*The HBUHSD has two employees who oversee and work with our McKinney-Vento students. The full-time employee is the Director of Student Services. This person does have other responsibilities in the district, but HBUHSD also has a part time staff member who works 29 hours a week and this person's only responsibility is to work with our district's McKinney-Vento students and families. Every school site in the district also has one person who works directly with all McKinney-Vento families on their campuses.*

### **Finding 5**

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

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding the experience and turnover rate for McKinney-Vento Liaisons throughout the county and, therefore, cannot wholly agree or disagree with this finding. As it relates to the District, the District disagrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*The Director of Student Services position in the HBUHSD does not have a high turnover rate. The McKinney-Vento Liaison has been in the position for approximately 14 years. The school*



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*site representatives who work with our McKinney-Vento students are the Student Support Psychologists and most of them have been in their current position for several years.*

### Finding 6

#### **McKinney-Vento Act training is not mandatory for the majority of McKinney-Vento Liaisons.**

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding whether or not districts across Orange County mandate McKinney-Vento training and, therefore, cannot wholly agree or disagree with this finding. As it relates to the District, the District disagrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*The Director of Student Services and McKinney-Vento Liaison participate in the training offered by OCDE and CDE.*

### 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.**

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand knowledge regarding this finding across all districts in Orange County and, therefore, cannot wholly agree or disagree with this finding. However, as it relates to our District, a high school district, the District disagrees partially with this finding for the following reasons:

*When students matriculate from the feeder middle school districts to HBUHSD, there is a question on their data system that allows these districts to share information with our district. The District also has all families fill out the McKinney-Vento questionnaire during registration each year, so we partially disagree with the finding.*

The District partially agrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*There are some families who opt out of allowing our feeder districts to share student data when they matriculate to our district, therefore, we partially agree as we may not capture all students who were identified as McKinney-Vento the year before coming to our district.*



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### 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.**

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding this finding for all districts in Orange County and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding. As it relates to our District, the District disagrees for the following reasons:

*The Huntington Beach Union High School District receives Title I funding. We must reserve a portion to provide services to homeless 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. We do not depend on grants to meet the needs of our students who are experiencing homelessness. We also utilize the American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children & Youth (ARP-HCY).*

### Finding 9

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

The District agrees with this finding.

### 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.**

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District partially disagrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*The HBUHSD receives federal Title I, Part A. This funding requires the district to use a portion to provide services to children experiencing homelessness. We also receive state funding through the local control funding formula that is dependent on the number of students experiencing homelessness enrolled in the District. There are strict limitations on how the funds may be used,*



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*which can make it challenging to utilize the funds in a way that directly addresses the individual and unique needs of families and students experiencing homelessness.*

The District partially agrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*The HBUHSD could always benefit from more funding for our students who are experiencing homelessness.*

### Finding 11

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

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District partially disagrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*HBUHSD has partnered with OCTA youth Ride Free Pass Program for the public buses. We order the passes throughout the year and get them out to each of our school sites. The District has partnered with Project Hope Alliance, Robyne's Nest, and Stand UP for Kids. All three non-profits provide transportation to school for our McKinney-Vento students.*

The District partially agrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*Lack of consistent transportation for McKinney-Vento students is a barrier for these students and families. Some families prefer not to use public transportation to get their students to school or they do not utilize the services provided by outside agencies the district partners with.*

### 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.**

The District agrees with this finding.



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## 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.**

The District agrees with this finding.

## 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.**

The District agrees with this finding.

## 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.**

The District wholly disagrees with the finding.

As it relates to our interaction with other school districts, the District wholly disagrees with this finding for the following reasons:

*The Orange County Department of Education's (OCDE) Homeless Outreach Promoting Educational Success (HOPES) Collaborative coordinates training and quarterly networking meetings for Orange County district homeless education liaisons. HBUHSD has also developed partnerships and regularly collaborates with community agencies who serve the needs of individuals who are homeless. Some examples of these agencies include Project Hope Alliance, Stand Up For Kids, and Robyne's Nest.*

## Finding 16

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

The District agrees with this finding.



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## 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)**

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

The District has not yet implemented this recommendation but will implement this recommendation by December 31, 2023 with the following action plan:

*In addition to providing information to staff, training will be provided to school administrators, teachers, office staff, and counselors using a training video created by the OCDE. This will be implemented for the 2023-24 school year by December 31, 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)**

The recommendation has been implemented.

The District has implemented this recommendation as follows:

*HBUHSD's McKinney-Vento liaison participates in available training opportunities through OCDE and the California Department of Education (CDE).*

## 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)**

The recommendation has been implemented.

The District has implemented this recommendation as follows:





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*The HBUHSD has a McKinney-Vento liaison whose sole responsibility is to provide support to our students who are experiencing homelessness.*

### 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)**

The recommendation has been implemented.

The District has implemented this recommendation as follows:

*The HBUHSD has worked with feeder districts to implement a process in their Aeries database that allows the districts to share information with us as students matriculate to high school. The District also has its own form for families to fill out each year during registration and throughout the year to ensure families do not lose benefits or support.*

### 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)**

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.

The District will not implement this recommendation because the recommendation is neither warranted or reasonable for the following reasons:

*Any employee in the HBUHSD has the ability to write a grant, therefore a list is not warranted. The Director of Student Services is working with outside agencies to assist in the grant writing process, as well.*

### 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**



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### **absenteeism, low test scores and low graduation rates of children experiencing homelessness. (F.11, F.12, F13, F14, F15)**

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

The District has not yet implemented this recommendation but will implement this recommendation starting in the beginning of the 2023/2024 school year with the following action plan:

*HBHUSD will participate in the OCDE-sponsored joint task force beginning in September 2023. The District does and will continue to participate in the Homeless Outreach Promoting Educational Success (HOPES) Collaborative Network Meetings organized by OCDE.*

### **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)**

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

The District has not yet implemented this recommendation but will implement this recommendation by May 1, 2024 with the following action plan:

*HBUHSD District Staff will work to develop this plan and to present it to the HBUHSD Board of Education by May 1, 2024.*

### **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)**

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

The District has not yet implemented this recommendation but will implement this recommendation by May 1, 2024 with the following action plan:

*HBUHSD District Staff will work to develop this plan and to present it to the HBUHSD Board of Education by May 1, 2024.*



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Please accept the information provided herein as the 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CSpelber", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Courtney Spelber, Ed.D.  
Director of Student Services  
Huntington Beach Union High School District