

# Savanna School District

1330 SOUTH KNOTT AVENUE  
ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA 92804-4798  
PHONE: (714) 236-3800

August 22, 2023

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

Re: Savanna 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 Savanna School District (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 agrees with the finding.

## 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 as increased access to and focus on training of school staff may increase the identification of children experiencing homelessness.

The District partially disagrees that a lack of "mandatory" training necessarily contributes to a failure to identify children experiencing homelessness because parents self-report and identify themselves as McKinney - Vento so we don't believe failure to identify children experiencing homelessness is solely the lack of mandatory training for district staff.

### 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 partially disagrees with the finding; while the District recognizes that there may be a disparity with the application amongst the schools within Districts and to that extent agrees with the finding.

The District does not have first-hand 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 partially disagrees with this finding for the following reason: The District can't speak about other school districts but we are following the same application of the McKinney-Vento regulations.

### 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 agrees with this finding.

### Finding 5

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

The District wholly disagrees with the finding. As it relates to the Savanna School District the current McKinney-Vento Liaison has been in this position for over 9 years so there has not been much turnover in the position in our District.

The District does not have first-hand information regarding the experience and turnover rate for McKinney-Vento Liaisons throughout the county.

### Finding 6

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

The District partially disagrees with the finding; although this statement is not the case in Savanna School District, as our current liaison has been in this position for 9 years, we would agree that it is accurate for many school districts in Orange County. As our McKinney-Vento Coordinator regularly attends the HOPES Collaborative meetings at Orange County Department of Education, he has witnessed first-hand how liaisons come and go for other districts, and few are in place for more than two or three years.

The District does not have first-hand information regarding whether or not districts across Orange County mandate McKinney-Vento training and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding.

**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 agrees with this finding.

**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 agrees with this finding.

**Finding 9**

**School districts that do not apply for grants which fund programs benefitting 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 agrees with this finding.

**Finding 11**

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

The District agrees with this finding.

**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.

**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; the District's McKinney-Vento Liaisons attend the HOPE Collaborative and there are many opportunities to collaborate with and learn from other districts. The District is also able to collaborate and consult with OCDE and other neighboring districts as needed.

#### 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.

#### 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.**

The District has not yet implemented this recommendation but will implement this recommendation by December 31, 2023, and annually thereafter. The training will be incorporated into our annual trainings through Keenan and Associates.

#### 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.**

The recommendation has been implemented. The District's McKinney-Vento Liaison gets trained annually through the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) McKinney-Vento Act training programs.

#### 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.**

The recommendation has been implemented by increased hours for Community Liaisons in the District and the addition of one more Spanish-speaking Community Liaison for this school year.

#### **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.**

The recommendation has been implemented. Savanna School District has this in place as part of the annual Data Confirmation and registration process for school.

#### **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.**

The recommendation has been implemented. District Administration is aware of District staff members who are available and willing to submit grant applications to assist in educating children experiencing homelessness.

#### **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.**

The recommendation has been implemented through the establishment of a joint task force that will be meeting throughout the school year that will address absenteeism, low test scores and low graduation rates of children experiencing homelessness under the coordination of the Orange County Department of Education.

#### **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.**

The recommendation has been implemented. The Savanna School District has developed a plan to address absenteeism for all students, including homeless students, beginning in the 2023-24 school year.

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**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.**

The recommendation has been implemented. The Savanna School District has developed a plan to improve academic performance in English Language Arts and Math for all students, including homeless students, beginning in the 2023-24 school year.

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.

Sincerely,



Dr. Sue Johnson  
Superintendent  
Secretary of the Board of Trustees

BOARD APPROVED: 8/21/23



Mrs. Chris Brown  
President, Board of Trustees

EXCERPT FROM THE OFFICIAL MINUTES  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
SAVANNA SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA 92804

August 21, 2023

Motion by Mr. Shook, seconded by Mrs. Karanick, to approve the response of Savanna School District to the 2022-23 Orange County Grand Jury Report *The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County*. The motion was carried 4-0.

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CERTIFICATION

I, Sue Johnson, DO HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE FOREGOING IS  
A TRUE AND EXACT COPY OF THAT PORTION OF THE MINUTES SPECIFIED.

SIGNED

  
Secretary of the Board of Trustees