

Buena Park School District
6885 Orangethorpe Avenue
Buena Park, CA 90620
Attn: Yvette Cantu

August 14, 2023

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

Dear Judge Hernandez,

I am writing on behalf of the Buena Park School District in response to the Orange County Grand Jury report on educating children experiencing homelessness.

The Buena Park School District is committed to ensuring the academic success of all students, especially those with unique needs, such as those experiencing homelessness. The district takes great pride in our efforts to identify and address their needs. Our dedicated administrators and staff have implemented identification protocols and increased the resources and services necessary for students to succeed academically. We are dedicated to providing equitable access to a rigorous instructional program to all students regardless of their housing situation. We are grateful for the Orange County Grand Jury's efforts and their valuable insights into the factors and effective practices that can strengthen programs and improve services for our homeless students. The work will help us achieve our ultimate goal of ensuring high academic achievement for all our homeless students.

At the August 14, 2023, Board of Education meeting for Buena Park School District, the Board approved the Grand Jury Responses as requested by the Orange County Grand Jury dated May 25, 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.	Disagree. ... ▾	Partially Disagree: The Buena Park School District (BPSD) annually provides opportunities for families to be identified for McKinney Vento. Identification is done through the data confirmation enrollment process by way of enabling parents to complete the BPSD Residential Questionnaire. School sites and the district office also maintain a paper form for families upon enrollment, in which families are initially identified if

			families do not have access to online enrollment or cannot access the online form. As parents complete this form, they are also provided a one-page, user-friendly document that provides parents a copy of their rights, access to resources, and a McKinney Vento contact person for the district. Once forms are reviewed and confirmed, the district immediately provides a copy of their educational rights, access to each school's basic needs such as uniforms, school supplies, and, if needed, referrals to local organizations for food, eyeglasses, health care, and more.
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.	Disagree. ... ▾	Wholly Disagree: The McKinney Vento Coordination and Homeless liaison provide each principal with the annual PowerPoint presentation to each school. Principals determine if they will present the annual training to staff (including counselors and classified staff) or if they would like the district McKinney Vento team to present. All sites have the training and information for staff and resources for families. In addition, principals are updated regularly at monthly principal meetings about new resources for students and families experiencing homelessness.
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.	Disagree. ... ▾	Wholly Disagree: All students in BPSD are given the same access to educational resources for all schools.
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.	Disagree. ... ▾	Wholly Disagree: BPSD has dedicated staff specifically assigned to work with the homeless program supported by a state grant that allows additional staff to focus solely on McKinney Vento services and programs.
F5	Many McKinney-Vento Liaisons lack needed experience due to a high turnover rate in those positions.	Disagree. ... ▾	Wholly Disagree: BPSD has stable staff that OCDE regularly trains to support needy families. We do not have a high turnover rate of employees.
F6	McKinney-Vento Act training is not mandatory for the majority of McKinney-Vento Liaisons.	Disagree. ... ▾	Wholly Disagree: BPSD employees attend the CDE training as a part of our grant assurances. In addition, staff attends regular OCDE meetings that

			provide training, information, and resources. Additionally, BPSD staff frequently access the CDE website and use their PowerPoint presentations for counselors, teachers, and staff to incorporate into our annual training for schools.
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.	Disagree. ... ▾	Wholly Disagree: BPSD has a strong relationship with our sister high school district. As our students complete 8th grade, with parent permission, we offer a soft handoff to families as needed to contact the high school district homeless liaison if support or services are still needed for families who continue to experience homelessness.
F8	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.	Disagree. ... ▾	Wholly Disagree: BPSD does not solely rely on funding grants. The district utilizes other funding sources like Title I and Supplemental funds, general funds, and donations from community agencies. BPSD has self-trained staff in seeking grants. In addition, the district liaison works with the cabinet to seek out any new grants or opportunities that may be afforded to families experiencing homelessness.
F9	School districts that do not apply for grants which fund programs benefiting children experiencing homelessness miss potential revenue opportunities.	Agree. T... ▾	Agree: The extra grant funding assists our district in providing more resources.
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.	Agree. T... ▾	Agree: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our district uses all appropriate funding, including Title I. Based on our parent survey, we see that there are increased needs than what we typically see. Therefore we are looking for more funding and ways to continue to support our families.
F11	A lack of reliable transportation for children experiencing homelessness often results in chronic tardiness and absenteeism.	Agree. T... ▾	Agree: BPSD is working to find alternatives for families who struggle with reliable transportation and have difficulty accessing the bus transportation provided by the district.
F12	Chronic Absenteeism Rates of Homeless Students are disproportionately high in comparison with the Chronic Absenteeism Rates of All Students and Socio-Disadvantaged Students.	Agree. T... ▾	Agree: BPSD is working to find alternatives for families who struggle with reliable transportation and have difficulty accessing the bus transportation provided by the district due to a lack of housing in

			busing areas.
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.	Agree. T... ▾	Graduation rates do not apply to BPSD.
F14	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.	Agree. T... ▾	Agree: BPSD is providing more tutoring and interventions for students. We recognize that more can be done to ensure all students meet state standards.
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.	Disagree. ... ▾	Wholly Disagree: BPSD has a myriad of community partners that support and assist our department and district in meeting the needs of students. Based on our annual parent survey, these partnerships expand to food pantries, child care, counseling, and other needs based on our annual parent survey.
F16	A significant lack of affordable permanent housing contributes to many families being caught in the cycle of homelessness.	Agree. T... ▾	Agree: BPSD continues to work with local agencies to find other means of housing support and referrals.

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 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.	Recommen... ▾	The Buena Park School District (BPSD) has conducted mandatory McKinney-Vento Act training for all district and school administrators, teachers, office staff, and counselors. We will continue to complete the training by December of each school year.
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.	Recommen... ▾	The BPSD's Homeless Liaison attends and actively participates in all training programs related to the McKinney-Vento Act organized by the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) throughout the year. Attending these trainings is mandatory to perform their job responsibilities, and annual participation is required.

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.	Recommen... ▾	Liaison has additional district-level and site staff to assist in the responsibility of supporting homeless students in our district by ensuring that identified students and families receive the necessary support and resources to succeed academically and personally. Additionally, staff members at designated school sites assist identified McKinney Vento families and offer case management services to these families.
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.	Recommen... ▾	By December of 2023, the BPSD will include a section to the mandatory enrollment 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.
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.	Recommen... ▾	By September 2023, the BPSD will 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.
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.	Recommen... ▾	The BPSD will participate in OCDE's joint task force.
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.	Recommen... ▾	By May 1, 2024, the BPSD will present its annual reports to the Board regarding chronic absenteeism rates within the homeless education subgroup and outline plans to lower them. As new data emerge, the District will update and adjust these plans to better address the needs of students experiencing homelessness to ensure their educational stability and success. The staff overseeing the McKinney-Vento student services and program will continue and maintain a plan to decrease the chronic absenteeism rate for students experiencing homelessness.

<p>R9</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Recomme... ▾</p>	<p>The BPSD presents annual reports to the Board regarding English Language Arts (ELA) and Math performance rates within the homeless education subgroup and outlines plans to increase these rates. As new data emerge, BPSD updates and adjusts these plans to better address the needs of students experiencing homelessness and ensure their educational success. The staff overseeing the McKinney-Vento student services and programs will continue and maintain a plan to increase English Language Arts (ELA) and Math performance rates.</p>
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Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Yvette Cantu, Chief Academic Officer
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