



August 21, 2023

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

Re: Huntington Beach City 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 Orange County Grand Jury:

The Huntington Beach City 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*. The District is committed to serving all students and recognizes that there are unique challenges facing children and families experiencing homelessness as well as challenges for district and 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 this finding. The District cannot verify that "many" children experiencing homelessness in Orange County are not identified as such and therefore do not receive McKinney-Vento services. The Huntington Beach City School 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 students experiencing homelessness but recognizes that the District can always improve these practices. Currently, the District uses several methods to identify children experiencing homelessness and believes that the majority of children are appropriately identified. Upon new enrollment to the District, all parents/guardians complete online enrollment in which a housing questionnaire is included in the required documents to be completed. A paper copy of the housing questionnaire as well as assistance with completing online enrollment are provided for parents/guardians if needed. For returning students, parents/guardians are required to annually complete data confirmation, which also includes the housing questionnaire. Based on the housing questionnaire responses, the school's Office Manager and/or a district Community Liaison reaches out to the parents/guardians to determine whether the student is eligible for the McKinney-Vento program and offers resources and support. There is also information regarding homeless education and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act posted on the district website as well as at school sites where parents/guardians frequently visit to raise awareness about rights and protections afforded to children experiencing homelessness as well as district and community resources available to students who qualify.

## 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 wholly disagrees with this finding. The District's Executive Director of Student Services and Community Liaisons provide information regarding McKinney-Vento to school site office staff, counselors, teachers, and administrators annually to raise awareness and improve accurate 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 this 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, therefore, the District cannot wholly agree or disagree with this finding as it relates to all districts. The Huntington Beach City School District is committed to ensuring all students are provided equal access to educational opportunities offered by the District and complies with all required regulations.



All students eligible for the McKinney-Vento program are provided with additional resources and supports to meet the unique needs of each family and student in an effort to provide equitable access.

#### **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 disagrees partially with this 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 that portion of the finding. The Huntington Beach City School District's Homeless Education Liaison is the Executive Director of Student Services, which is a full-time position with many responsibilities and duties. However, due to the relatively small size of the District and number of children experiencing homelessness that the District serves (less than 25 students annually), McKinney-Vento Act responsibilities are fulfilled adequately. HBCSD also hired two Community Liaisons who started at the beginning of the 2021-22 school year who provide additional partnership, resources, and support to students and families experiencing homelessness.

#### **Finding 5**

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

The District wholly disagrees with this 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 all districts. As it relates to the Huntington Beach City School District, the District disagrees with this finding for the following reasons: The District's Homeless Education Liaison position has evolved over time due to district restructuring. The restructuring of leadership positions and addition of Community Liaison positions have provided more allocated resources dedicated to serving children experiencing homelessness. The District has not experienced a high turnover rate in these positions and has been able to adhere to regulations and provide services and supports to families experiencing homelessness.

### Finding 6

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

The District wholly disagrees with this 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 all districts. As it relates to the Huntington Beach City School District, the District disagrees wholly with this finding for the following reasons: The District's Homeless Education Liaison and Community Liaisons are required as part of their job responsibilities to regularly attending McKinney-Vento Act trainings and to stay current with state and federal regulations regarding homeless education.

### 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 wholly disagrees with this 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 as it relates to all districts. However, as it relates to the Huntington Beach City School District, an elementary school district, the District disagrees with this finding for the following reasons: The majority of Huntington Beach City School District students matriculate to the Huntington Beach Union High School District. Both districts utilize the Aeries Student Information System (SIS), which is a digital platform for storing confidential student records. When students transfer or matriculate to a different district that also uses Aeries, their student records, which include McKinney-Vento eligibility, are transferred to the new district. Additionally, students' cumulative student files are transferred to other districts upon enrollment, which also notify the new district of a student's McKinney-Vento status.

### 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 wholly disagrees with this finding. The District does not have firsthand information regarding this finding for all districts in Orange County and, therefore, cannot wholly agree or disagree with this finding as it relates to all districts. As it relates to the Huntington Beach City School District, the District disagrees with the finding for the following reasons: Districts that receive Title I, Part A funding must reserve a portion to provide services to children experiencing homelessness. Training in grant writing is not necessary to complete the Consolidated Application and Reporting System (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 funds. Homeless program reports include yes and no questions about training, expenditure data, and homeless services provided. The Huntington Beach City School District does not depend on grants to adequately meet the educationally related needs of children and families experiencing homelessness.

### **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 this finding. Districts that receive federal Title I, Part A funding must reserve a portion to provide services to children experiencing homelessness. Districts also receive state funding through the local control funding formula (LCFF) 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, 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.

### **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 partially agrees with this finding. The Huntington Beach City School District is an elementary school district and does not have data related to graduation rates; therefore, the District cannot agree or disagree with that portion of the finding. The District agrees that children experiencing homelessness in the District are performing at lower levels on standardized tests than their peers.

#### **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 partially agrees with this finding. The Huntington Beach City School District is an elementary school district and does not have data related to graduation rates; therefore, the District cannot agree or disagree with that portion of the finding. The District agrees that children experiencing homelessness in the District are performing at lower levels on standardized tests than their peers.

### **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 this finding as it relates to the Huntington Beach City School District's interactions with other districts in the County. The Orange County Department of Education's (OCDE) Homeless Outreach Promoting Educational Success (HOPES) Collaborative coordinates trainings and quarterly networking meetings for Orange County district Homeless Education Liaisons, which the District's Homeless Education Liaison regularly attends. The Huntington Beach City School District has also developed partnerships and collaborates with community agencies who serve the needs of individuals who are homeless.

### **Finding 16**

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

The District generally agrees with this finding. The District does not have firsthand information regarding this finding and, therefore, cannot wholly agree or disagree. However, the District generally agrees with the finding based on information shared by families in the District who are experiencing homelessness or who struggle with housing instability.

### **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)**

This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented for the 2023-24 school year and annually thereafter. 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 Orange County Department of Education.



### **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)**

This recommendation has been implemented. The District's Homeless Education Liaison participates in available training opportunities through the Orange County Department of Education, the California Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Education.

### **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)**

This recommendation has been implemented. The District hired two Community Liaisons at the beginning of the 2021-22 school year to provide additional partnership, resources, and support to students and families 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)**

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable. Qualifying for McKinney-Vento benefits is a determination that is made by the new school district of enrollment based on the families current living situation and information the family provides to the new district upon enrollment through the housing questionnaire. Students' cumulative student files are transferred to other districts upon enrollment, which also notify the new district of a student's McKinney-Vento status in the prior district.



### **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)**

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable. The Huntington Beach City School District does not currently have staff who are responsible for grant application writing nor does the District depend on grants to adequately comply with regulations or meet the educationally related needs of children and families 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. (F.11, F.12, F13, F14, F15)**

This recommendation has not yet been implemented as it is directed to the Orange County Department of Education and has an October 1, 2023 date for implementation. The Huntington Beach City School District would participate in a "joint task force" if invited.

### **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)**

This recommendation has been implemented. The Huntington Beach City School District administration presented to the District's Board of Trustees regarding student achievement data, which included achievement data and absenteeism rates of students experiencing homelessness, at a Board Study Session meeting on February 21, 2023. The Board of Trustees approved the 2023-24 Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) on June 20, 2023, which describes the goals, actions, services, and expenditures that meet state and local priorities in serving students.

### Recommendation 9

**The Orange County Superintendent of Schools should provide information from the School Accountability Report (SARC) to the Board of Supervisors identifying the number and describing the performance of children experiencing homelessness in Orange County public schools. This data should include the aggregate of students in each district who are experiencing homelessness, their chronic absenteeism rates, and the high school graduation rate, and the percent who meet or exceed state standards in English and Math, starting October 31, 2023, and yearly thereafter.**

This recommendation has not yet been implemented as it is directed to the Orange County Superintendent of Schools and has an October 31, 2023 date for implementation.

Please accept the information provided herein as the District's response 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,



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