



**PLACENTIA-YORBA LINDA
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

1301 E. Orangethorpe Avenue
Placentia, CA 92870
www.pylusd.org

Alex Cherniss, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Board of Education
Marilyn Anderson
Leandra Blades
Carrie Buck
Todd Frazier
Shawn Youngblood

August 21, 2023

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

Re: Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified 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:

In accordance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Orange County Grand Jury has requested that the Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District respond to findings and recommendations in the 2022-2023 Orange County Grand Jury report entitled: "The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County," published on May 25, 2023. Below are the responses of the Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District.

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 to Finding 1:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District disagrees wholly or partially with this finding.

PYLUSD has done a thorough job of identifying our McKinney Vento population. We currently have identified 13.7% or 3,284 students who are MV. We support them through our Family Resource Center, assisting them by providing support and benefits authorized by the McKinney Vento Act.

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 to Finding 2:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District disagrees wholly or partially with this finding.

PYLUSD trains all staff throughout the year, which has resulted in the identification of students eligible for the McKinney Vento Program, as verified without consistent McKinney Vento count.

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 to Finding 3:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

This is an accurate statement based on what the PYLUSD McKinney liaison has gathered in fourteen years. Other local school districts do not have the same numbers as PYLUSD, even though they are in the same economic zone. It does not seem like every school district is counting their McKinney Vento equally and with the same earnestness.

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 to Finding 4:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

In PYLUSD, the McKinney Vento Liaison is 50% ELPAC and 50% McKinney Vento. The majority of the Liaison's time is taken up by McKinney Vento tasks/work. It would be helpful that the Liaison was 100% McKinney Vento in order to completely address the needs of our McKinney Vento population.

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

Response to Finding 5:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

Although this statement is not accurate for PYLUSD, as our current liaison has been in this position for 14 years, the district agrees that it is accurate for many school districts in Orange County. In attending the HOPES Collaborative meetings at OCDE, PYLUSD sees firsthand how liaisons come and go for other districts, and few are in place for more than two or three years.

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

Response to Finding 6:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

Here at PYLUSD, the McKinney Vento liaison is supported in many ways. Primarily, the opportunity to attend professional development at the county, state and national level pertaining to homeless education is always encouraged and even insisted upon.

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 to Finding 7:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District disagrees wholly or partially with this finding.

Because PYLUSD is a unified school district, they closely track the transition of their McKinney Vento students through all of the grade levels from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade. There is a seamless transition and the McKinney Vento Liaison has access to AERIES for all grade levels to maintain continuity of benefits.

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 to Finding 8:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

PYLUSD has a liaison trained in grant writing, who has successfully written five grant proposals which were all awarded. Moving forward, it will be imperative that new liaisons are trained to write the EHCY grant. PYLUSD has other trained professionals on hand to assist the liaison when writing the grants. It is apparent that other school districts may not have knowledgeable grant writers in this field as many do not apply for or receive the EHCY grant, or perhaps they are not interested in applying for it.

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

Response to Finding 9:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

All school districts should apply for these grant opportunities in order to better serve their McKinney Vento students.

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 to Finding 10:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

PYLUSD allocates nine percent of their Title 1, Part A funds for the McKinney Vento program. These funds have been consistently used for the McKinney Vento program throughout the years. PYLUSD feels that additional funding is necessary to meet the needs of our McKinney Vento students, especially after the American Rescue Plan funds are depleted.

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

Response to Finding 11:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

PYLUSD offers OCTA bus passes for McKinney Vento students who need them to get to and from school when they move out of our school boundaries. For younger students, PYLUSD offers bus passes to the parents so that they can accompany their children. Special education students, who are also McKinney Vento, are bussed by district transportation, or by private ride services. Chronic tardiness is often a problem for MV students who rely on their parents to transport them. Often times, their transportation is unreliable, and students are late or absent from school.

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 to Finding 12:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

PYLUSD's chronic absenteeism rate is 17.9%. The homeless student chronic absenteeism rate is 28.7%. The district agrees that this is disproportionately higher in homeless students.

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 to Finding 13:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District disagrees wholly or partially with this finding.

This statement is very broad and does not apply to all students.

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 to Finding 14:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

PYLUSD's homeless students are less likely to meet state standards for ELA and Math when compared to non-homeless 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.

Response to Finding 15:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District disagrees wholly or partially with this finding.

Orange County is lucky to have the HOPES Collaborative, offered by the Orange County Department of Education. There, all liaisons gather and share ideas and information to

improve their respective programs for McKinney Vento students and families. The more a liaison attends these meetings, the more liaisons they meet for further collaboration.

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

Response to Finding 16:

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District agrees with this finding.

PYLUSD agrees completely with fact that there is a significant lack of affordable housing in Orange County. It is the greatest barriers families face in finding stability in Orange County. Affordable housing is scarce in Orange County and increasingly hard to find for all families, not just McKinney Vento families.

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)

Response to Recommendation 1:

The recommendation has been implemented.

The PYLUSD "Back to School Plan" includes mandatory viewing of the OCDE McKinney Vento training video, as well as PYLUSD specific training, including a power point presentation regarding enrollment and identification, for all district staff members. Any new staff member who is in charge of enrolling students, will be provided an in-person training by the liaison or McKinney Vento counselor.

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)

Response to Recommendation 2:

The recommendation has been implemented.

PYLUSD's McKinney Vento liaison currently attends all HOPE Collaborative trainings lead by Jeanne Awrey.

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)

Response to Recommendation 3:

This recommendation requires further analysis.

While PYLUSD realizes the value of a full-time, dedicated McKinney-Vento liaison, the district's current liaison is funded through multiple sources. As such, he has multiple responsibilities. The District will continue to look for a dedicated funding resource for this position. PYLUSD has added a full-time McKinney-Vento counselor for additional support.

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)

Response to Recommendation 4:

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

The district will add this recommended language to the enrollment form on or before January 1, 2024 for implementation in the 2024-25 school year.

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)

Response to Recommendation 5:

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

The PYLUSD has written for and received grants to assist McKinney-Vento families five times. Each grant was awarded for a three-year cycle. An additional grant writer is not need at this time.

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)

Response to Recommendation 6:

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

The PYLUSD is in support of this recommendation and would participate if a task force is formed by the 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)

Response to Recommendation 8:

The recommendation has been implemented.

The PYLUSD Board of Education receives an update annually on attendance rates of all at-risk student groups through the Local Control Accountability Process.

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)

Response to Recommendation 9:

The recommendation has been implemented.

The PYLUSD Board of Education receives an update annually on attendance rates of all at-risk student groups through the Local Control Accountability Process..

Sincerely,



Richard McAlindin
Assistant Superintendent, Executive Services