

## Tustin Unified School District Response

Grand Jury Report: *The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County.*

August 21, 2023

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

In compliance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the Tustin Unified School District (TUSD) offers the following response to the Grand Jury findings and recommendations based on their investigation titled, *The ABC's of Educating the Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County* (Report). In the following document, please find the ***Grand Jury Finding/Recommendation listed in Bold Italics***, and the Tustin Unified School District response following each finding in plain text.

TUSD Example Response:

***Grand Jury Findings or Recommendations (Bold / Italicized):***

Tustin Unified Response (Plain Text):

***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.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

***F2. The lack of mandatory McKinney-Vento Act training of school office staff, counselors, and teachers contributes to a failure to identify children experiencing homelessness.***

Tustin Unified partially disagrees with this finding. TUSD has employed community liaisons and community specialists that combine efforts to identify and enroll students experiencing homelessness. It is likely that training additional staff on each campus would increase the volume of employees capable of identifying signs of homelessness, and in-turn potentially increase referrals to those trained to work directly with students experiencing homelessness. However, beyond training, more needs to be done to educate the general population of resources available, to inform them of whom to talk with and how anyone in the family can self-identify (without fear of repercussions) when they are experiencing financial strain, food insecurity, or 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.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

*Board of Education*

*Jonathan Ablove ♦ Allyson Damikolas ♦ Lynn Davis ♦ James H. Laird ♦ Jonathan Stone*

***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.***

Tustin Unified partially disagrees with this finding. While the statement may be true for other districts in Orange County, TUSD has a team of staff members that are hired to perform the work required by the McKinney-Vento act as one of their highest priorities. This team includes Community Liaisons, Child Welfare and Attendance Officers, Student Services Officers, Mental Health Professionals, Community Specialists, Nurses, as well as other administrative and support personnel. It is true however, that these individuals would perform other support roles at their sites after supporting students experiencing homelessness.

***F5. Many McKinney-Vento Liaisons lack needed experience due to high turnover rate in those positions.***

Tustin Unified partially disagrees with this finding. While this statement may be true for other districts in Orange County, TUSD is not experiencing a high turnover rate for McKinney-Vento Liaisons.

***F6. McKinney-Vento Act training is not mandatory for the majority of McKinney-Vento Liaisons.***

Tustin Unified partially disagrees with this finding. While training may not be mandatory in other districts across Orange County, TUSD provides training and expects our McKinney-Vento Liaisons to attend training each year. Additional follow-up or supplemental trainings may also be offered as needed. TUSD provides supplemental trainings in the event that a specific/timely topic applies to the liaison role and a uniform approach is desired across the District. TUSD trainings are typically provided by District staff that oversee the TUSD McKinney-Vento program and may be supplemented with support of outside resources.

***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.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding. TUSD is a K-12 District with a uniform student information system across all sites and levels. Therefore, student information is shared across our sites if a student transitions from a TUSD elementary site to a TUSD secondary site. Information could be lost however in the event a student coming from another school district or private school enrolls in TUSD and does not self-identify as experiencing homelessness.

***F8. McKinney-Vento funds depend on school districts submitting grant proposals, but not all districts have employees training in writing grant applications, resulting in missed funding opportunities.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

***F9. School districts that do not apply for grants which fund programs benefitting children experiencing homelessness miss potential revenue opportunities.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

***F10. McKinney-Vento is an unfunded federally mandated program; however, school districts which qualify and apply for Title 1, 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.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

***F11. A lack of reliable transportation for children experiencing homelessness often results in chronic tardiness and absenteeism.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

***F12. Chronic Absenteeism Rates of Homeless Students are disproportionately high in comparison with the Chronic Absenteeism Rates of All Students and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

***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.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

***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.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

***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.***

Tustin Unified School District partially disagree with this finding. TUSD meets with a group of similar districts and collaborates with a network of McKinney-Vento related staff in the area to ensure families moving from one district to another continue to receive the best supports possible. The group also shares best practices for supporting students and families who remain within their district but are experiencing homelessness. This work is in addition to the communication and networking on the topic that happens through OCDE.

***F16. A significant lack of affordable permanent housing contributes to many families being caught in the middle of homelessness.***

Tustin Unified agrees with this finding.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**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.**

Recommendation will be implemented prior to December 31, 2023. TUSD has already begun brainstorming ways to train District and school administrators, teachers, office staff, and counselors. OCDE has a program called the HOPES Collaborative that produces a series of videos that can be used to supplement trainings for all staff. TUSD is also considering adding a training component to our annual notices similar to those done for sexual harassment and mandatory reporting to make sure every employee is well versed on how to identify and support students experiencing homelessness.

**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.**

Recommendation has been implemented. TUSD plans to continue participating in required training programs provided by OCDE. Related staff will attend all required future McKinney-Vento trainings described in this recommendation.

**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.**

Recommendation has been implemented. TUSD has hired community specialists, community liaisons, and social workers that can support students experiencing homelessness. These staff members increase support for all members of the McKinney-Vento population as well as provide support and flexibility for the McKinney-Vento liaisons to perform a greater percentage of their role with fidelity.

**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.**

Recommendation will be in place prior to August 16, 2023. TUSD will add a section to mandatory student enrollment documents, giving parents the option to allow TUSD to share McKinney-Vento information with other school districts in the event a student changes districts after completing enrollment.

**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.**

Recommendation will be implemented prior to the October 1, 2023, deadline. TUSD will compile a list of employees with experience completing grant applications and add these staff members to listservs as they become available. These efforts will be undertaken prior to October 1, 2023, in order to maintain awareness of available supplemental resources for supporting the McKinney-Vento program.

**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.**

Recommendation has not been implemented however, TUSD is committed to having district-level representation as required on a joint task force between OCDE and non-profit organizations that serve the McKinney-Vento population. TUSD will have staff participate in any related task-force activities prior to the October 1, 2023, deadline.

**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.**

TUSD will develop a plan (in parallel to the Local Control Accountability Plan) to address chronic absenteeism in general (with a specific portion addressing the needs of the McKinney-Vento population) and present this plan at a public board meeting no later than May 1, 2024.

**R9. By May 1, 2024, each Orange County school district administration should develop, and present to the Board of Education, a plan to improve the performance of homeless students in English Language Arts and Math.**

TUSD will develop a plan (in parallel to the Local Control Accountability Plan) to address English and Math performance in general (with a specific portion addressing the needs of the McKinney-Vento population) and present this plan at a public board meeting no later than May 1, 2024.

Please accept the information provided herein as the District's responses to the Orange County Grant Jury's Findings and Recommendations in the Report. We appreciate the time and attention the Grand Jury has devoted to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Dr. Grant Litfin  
Assistant Superintendent, Administrative Services  
Tustin Unified School District