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August 23, 2023

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

Re: Orange County Department of Education's Response to the 2022-23 Orange County Grand Jury Report on *The ABC's of Educating Children Experiencing Homelessness in Orange County*

The Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) 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). OCDE is committed to serving all students, and recognizes that there are unique challenges facing children and families experiencing homelessness and challenges for our County and our personnel devoted to identifying and serving these students and families.

OCDE 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 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.

OCDE agrees with this finding.

Finding 6

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

OCDE 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.

OCDE 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.

OCDE agrees with this finding.

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)

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

Due to existing governance structures and systems, OCDE is not able to mandate McKinney-Vento training for LEAs. The role of OCDE is that of technical assistance and support for districts as they opt in to provided supports and services. OCDE HOPES Collaborative provides technical assistance and support to assist all 28 Districts. HOPES Collaborative encourages collaboration with community partners to leverage limited resources. Through an MTSS framework HOPES collaborative offers universal supplemental, and intensified support services such as: e-trainings, 1:1 consultations, network meetings, professional development for liaisons, schools, community partners, families and students, plus tools and resources that are housed on the OCDE website.

Additionally, OCDE will provide an e-training for all district McKinney-Vento Liaisons. This e-training will be available to disseminate to all district staff. OCDE will then provide a certificate of completion to all McKinney Vento Liaisons who complete the e-training each year.

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)

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

OCDE will lead a Steering Committee (referred to in R6 as “joint task force”) through the Homeless Outreach Promoting Educational Success (HOPES) Collaborative Network Meetings. This Steering Committee is embedded within the existing HOPES Collaborative, allowing information to be disseminated with minimal barriers or delay. OCDE HOPES Collaborative supports county-wide efforts to address issues specific to youth experiencing homelessness. In addition, OCDE has developed three (3) subcommittees comprised of OCDE staff, district personnel, and community partners addressing chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, and low test scores. These subcommittees will meet 1x per month beginning September 2023 through April 2024.

Each subcommittee will review current practices, evidence supporting those practices, and then share practices and findings with the Steering Committee (AKA joint task force) in April 2024. The Steering Committee is composed of district liaisons who will then disseminate within their specific LEAs.

Sincerely,



Ramon Miramontes, Ed.D.
Deputy Superintendent
Orange County Department of Education