



# ORANGE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of Student & Community Services

1401 North Handy Street • Orange, CA 92867-4334

714-628-5424 • 714-628-4061 (Fax)

[www.orangeusd.org](http://www.orangeusd.org)

August 23, 2023

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

Re: Orange 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:

The Orange Unified 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* (Report). The District is committed to serving all students and recognizes that there are unique challenges facing children and families experiencing homelessness and challenges for our District and our 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 the 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. As it relates to children experiencing homelessness in our District, the District partially disagrees with this finding because those who are identified do receive the support and benefits authorized by the McKinney-Vento Act.

The District partially agrees with the finding because the 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 McKinney-Vento students but recognizes that the District can always improve its process to identify and serve more McKinney-Vento students.



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## 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 partially disagrees with the finding.

The District partially disagrees that a lack of “mandatory” training necessarily contributes to a failure to identify children experiencing homelessness in Orange County.

Orange Unified School District has processes and procedures in place to identify and serve McKinney-Vento students but recognizes that the District can always improve its process to identify and serve more McKinney-Vento students.

## 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 partially disagrees with the 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 and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with that portion of the finding. As it relates to our District, the District partially disagrees with this finding because those who are identified in Orange Unified School District do receive equal access to educational benefits.

The District partially agrees with this finding because the District recognizes that not all children eligible for McKinney-Vento services are identified, therefore, may not receive such benefits.

## 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 partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding the workload of McKinney-Vento Liaisons throughout the county and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with that portion of the finding in general.

As it relates to Orange Unified School District, the District’s McKinney-Vento Liaison has multiple non-McKinney-Vento responsibilities.

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## Finding 5

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

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding the experience and turnover rate for McKinney-Vento Liaisons throughout the county and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding.

As it relates to Orange Unified School District, the District disagrees with this finding because our McKinney-Vento Liaison has held this position for 10 years.

## Finding 6

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

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information on whether McKinney-Vento Act training is not mandatory for the majority of McKinney-Vento Liaisons throughout the county and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding.

Orange Unified School District disagrees with this finding because our McKinney-Vento Liaison is fully trained and attends ongoing training provided by the Orange County Department of Education and California Department of 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 partially disagrees with this finding.

Because the Orange Unified School District is a unified school district serving grades TK-12, the District does not have firsthand information regarding this finding with districts that are not unified and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding.



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## 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 partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding this finding for all districts in Orange County and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding.

The District partially agrees with the finding because we do not have trained personnel for writing grant applications. However, the District uses other funding sources.

## Finding 9

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

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding this finding for all districts in Orange County and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding. As it relates to Orange Unified School District, the District partially disagrees because we use other funding sources.

The District partially agrees with the finding because we do not have trained personnel for writing grant applications.

## 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 the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding this finding for all districts in Orange County and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding.

As it relates to Orange Unified School District, the District uses Title I funds to support our students experiencing homelessness.



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## Finding 11

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

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information about whether the lack of reliable transportation for children experiencing homelessness in Orange County often results in chronic tardiness and absenteeism.

As it relates to Orange Unified School District, the Transportation Department has a protocol and procedures to support homeless students arriving to and departing from school each day.

## 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 partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information on whether chronic absenteeism rates of homeless students are disproportionately high in comparison with the chronic absenteeism rates of all students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Orange Unified School District partially agrees with the finding because chronic absenteeism rates of homeless students are disproportionately high in comparison with the chronic absenteeism rates of all students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students in our District.

## 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 disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information on whether students 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.



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Orange Unified School District partially agrees with the finding because children experiencing homelessness in our District perform at a lower level on standardized tests and have a lower graduation rate than all students and socioeconomically disadvantaged 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.**

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information on whether the percentage of homeless students in Orange County 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.

Orange Unified School District partially agrees with the finding because children experiencing homelessness in our District perform at a lower level on standardized tests and have a lower graduation rate than all students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

## 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 partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding this finding for all districts in Orange County and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding.

As it relates to Orange Unified School District, our McKinney-Vento Liaison collaborates with other neighboring districts and community-based agencies.

## Finding 16

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

The District partially disagrees with the finding.

The District does not have firsthand information regarding this finding for all districts in Orange County and, therefore, cannot agree or disagree with this finding.

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As it relates to Orange Unified School District, we have families who are homeless due to the lack of affordable permanent housing.

## 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)**

The recommendation has not yet been implemented but mandatory McKinney-Vento Act training for all district and school administrators, teachers, office staff, and counselors is planned to be completed by December 31, 2023.

In addition, our District’s Human Resources Department has communicated with all staff in the “2023-2024 Required Employee Training” memo that all school site employees and other personnel providing services to youth experiencing homelessness will receive the mandatory McKinney-Vento training.

## 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 has been implemented.

The Orange Unified School District has implemented this recommendation. Our McKinney-Vento Liaison has participated in OCDE’s Homeless Outreach Promoting Educational Success (HOPES) Collaborative on a quarterly basis over the past ten years.

## 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)**

The recommendation has not yet been implemented but the District plans to implement this recommendation by October 1, 2023.

Orange Unified School District has hired Community Leads through the Community Schools Grant to assist with identifying McKinney-Vento students throughout the school year. At the beginning of the school year,



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extensive training on the McKinney-Vento Act was provided by our McKinney-Vento District Liaison to our Community Leads and School-Site Designees and will continue throughout the school year.

## 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)**

The recommendation requires further analysis in order for Orange Unified School District to seek further guidance from the Orange County Department of Education.

Currently, a student's McKinney-Vento status is maintained as part of their student record. The District will explore ways to enable 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 attend.

## 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)**

The recommendation requires further analysis in order to consult with the District's Superintendent.

The District will consider developing and maintaining 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 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 Orange Unified School District has not yet implemented this recommendation but plans to participate in the joint task force once it is formed by the Orange County Department of Education.





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## 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)**

The recommendation has not yet been implemented but the District plans to implement this recommendation by May 1, 2024.

Orange Unified School District plans to participate in the joint task force once the Orange County Department of Education forms it. Through its participation, Orange Unified School District will develop a plan to lower the absenteeism rates of homeless students. Once completed, this plan will be presented to the Orange Unified School District Board of Education.

## 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)**

The recommendation has not yet been implemented but the District plans to implement this recommendation by May 1, 2024.

Orange Unified School District plans to participate in the joint task force once the Orange County Department of Education forms it. Through its participation, Orange Unified School District will develop a plan to lower the absenteeism rates of homeless students. Once completed, this plan will be presented to the Orange Unified School District Board of Education.

Please accept the information provided herein as the District's responses 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 particularly important issue.

Sincerely,

Heriberto Angel  
Executive Director  
Office of Student & Community Services  
Orange Unified School District