

Grand Jury Response
RE: Student Homelessness
August 28, 2017

The Vacaville Unified School District is committed to improving the academic, behavioral, and social emotional well being of all of our students.

Report Summary Findings

- The 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury found that the local education agencies did make efforts to provide services (even beyond educational needs) for the homeless children/youth. The report provided findings and recommendations that will help Solano Local Education Agencies better understand what resources and information is available and where staff training and data collection can be enhanced.
- The Grand Jury recognized the difficulty that LEAs have in collecting accurate homeless youth data. There is no established standard process for data collection or reporting set at the county, state or federal levels. The report pointed out that the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) acknowledges that youth homelessness is often underreported and extremely difficult to track; therefore, data on unaccompanied homeless children and youth is limited. Identifying children/youth who are not in school or whose homelessness has not been reported to the schools can also be challenging. Furthermore, there may be parents or guardians who do not want to report their status to the schools. In addition, some of the older children may not self-identify because they are afraid of law enforcement, child protective services, or their parents/guardians.
- Ensuring support and equal access to a high quality education and school services for homeless youth is paramount. Over the past year, Vacaville Unified School District has placed precedence on providing a systemic approach that includes staff development, for providing social, emotional and health supports for all students, so that they might be better able to learn. This proactive intervention system has enabled VUSD to better identify, track, serve and support our homeless youth. VUSD's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) for the 2017-2018 school year reflects a continued commitment to continue and grow student services, supports and interventions. Vacaville Unified School District will continue to find ways to further support the unique needs of homeless students.

Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1 – district documentation presented conflicting statistics in reporting the number of homeless children/youth.

Recommendation 1a- all data contained in reporting documents be accurate and verifiable.

Recommendation 1b - reporting entities find more effective ways of identifying homeless children/youth.

Finding 2 - teacher training in identifying and reporting a homeless student is a low priority.

Recommendation 2 - districts establish a high priority for teachers to receive intensive training in identifying and reporting homeless students.

Finding 3 - Providing transportation is problematic in serving homeless students.

Recommendation 3a - The Solano County Office of Education and School Districts within the county use established means of communication to share best practice ideas in providing transportation for the homeless students they serve.

Recommendation 3b - The Solano County Office of Education and the School Districts within the county form alliances with local transportation providers to meet the needs of homeless students.

Finding 4 -Funding for homeless students creates an on-going challenge within the county.

Recommendation 4 - The Solano County Office of Education and School Districts establish a grant writing position to acquire funding for homeless student services.

Finding 5 - Emergency housing for unaccompanied youth is limited to pregnant teens.

Recommendation 5 - The Solano County Office of Education and School Districts work with county, city administrators and local non-profits to provide emergency housing for all unaccompanied homeless teenage students.

Vacaville USD Responses to Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations

RESPONSE TO FINDING 1

The respondent agrees with this finding.

The Grand Jury recognized the difficulty that LEAs have in collecting accurate homeless youth data. Vacaville USD has established standard process for data collection and reporting. We continue to make ongoing improvements to the identification of homeless youth and the collection and reporting of associated data.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS 1A AND 1B

The recommendation has been implemented.

Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, a section has been added to the Vacaville USD *Student Emergency Card*. A parent or guardian (or student over 18 or unaccompanied student) is required to complete the document for each student at the start of each school year. The information added to the card is displayed below.

Student's Current Living Situation: A single family residence (i.e. house, apartment, condominium, or mobile home) Foster/Group Home Homeless due to financial hardship: Shared housing Motel/Hotel Emergency Shelter Unsheltered Unaccompanied Youth

VUSD has procedures in place for assuring that the information is accurate, verifiable.

Clerical staff at each school site reviews *Student Emergency Card* information provided by parent or guardian at the start of a new school year. If a parent or guardian (or student over 18 or unaccompanied student) indicates that one or more of the following student current living situations listed below is marked, he or she contacts the VUSD Homeless Liaison:

- Foster Home/Group
- Homeless due to financial hardship
 - Shared housing, or
 - Motel/Hotel, or
 - Emergency Shelter, or
 - Unsheltered, or
 - Unaccompanied Youth

The Liaison enters current student information into the Student Information System and makes contact with the parent or guardian (or student over 18 or unaccompanied student) to discuss and provide needed supports.

Clerical staff will be provided training on August 7, 2017 and site administrative staff and clerical teams will be provided additional training in October 2017. The training will include procedures for identifying homeless students and procedures for verifying accurate and supportable data.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 2

The respondent agrees with this finding.

Vacaville USD has provided training for staff in identifying and reporting homeless students. The focus of the training has been primarily for front office clerical staff, site administration, school counselors, and Response to Intervention Coordinators. We agree that students would benefit from additional teacher training.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 2

The recommendation has not yet been implemented but training will occur during the 2017-18 school year.

Clerical staff will be provided training on August 7, 2017 and site administrative staff and clerical teams will be provided additional training in October 2017. The training will include procedures for identifying homeless students and procedures for verifying accurate and supportable data.

Site administration will provide site-based training to teaching staff in identifying and reporting homeless students. A PowerPoint presentation will be provided to ensure consistency in the information that is shared. All school sites will confirm to the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services that this training is complete by December 7, 2017.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 3

The respondent disagrees partially with this finding.

Vacaville USD has a strong partnership with Vacaville City Coach. The Downtown Vacaville Transit Plaza is conveniently located near Vacaville High School, Country High School, and Thrower Opportunity Program. Bus routes are planned with students and school schedules in mind so students can easily access public transportation as an option to get to and from school. The partnership provides a unique opportunity for students in Vacaville USD to learn how to access public transportation.

Bus Passes are provided at no charge for Homeless and Foster youth as needed. The VUSD Homeless and Foster Youth Liaison works with the parent or guardian (or student over 18 or unaccompanied student) to provide information on passes, routes, schedules. The Liaison also works closely with the VUSD Transportation Department to coordinate use of district transportation services when public transportation is not a feasible option.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS 3A AND 3B

The recommendation has not yet been implemented but training will occur during the 2017-18 school year.

Vacaville USD will work with the Solano County Office of Education and other School Districts within the county to establish means of communication to share best practice ideas in providing transportation for the homeless students we serve.

Vacaville USD has established good working relationships with the Liaisons of surrounding school districts. We have worked together in the past, and will continue to grow these partnerships, to assist homeless students in need of cross-district transportation. The responsibility for transportation is shared by both district of attendance and district of residence, and Solano County school districts have partnered successfully to provide these services when needed.

VUSD will continue to communicate with Solano County Office of Education and other School Districts within the county to establish means of communication to share best practice ideas in providing even more transportation options for the homeless students we serve, including transportation to and from extra curricular activities including after school sporting events.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 4

The respondent disagrees partially with this finding.

Vacaville USD has been proactive in providing funding sources to serve Homeless and Foster Youth.

The Homeless and Foster Youth Liaison has developed partnerships with various companies, organizations and individuals in the Vacaville community to help serve and support our students and families without permanent housing. VUSD has received donations of cash, gift cards, and supplies from individual community members, local businesses such as Umpqua Bank and Under Armour, along with organizations such the Elks Lodge, Lions Club and Project 150. Donations have also been received from local churches and scout troops.

Internal fund raising occurs through the annual Vacaville USD Employee Celebration. The planning committee for the Employee Celebration has designated \$500.00 from the proceeds of this event to be donated annually to provide goods and services to families without permanent housing whom have students enrolled in VUSD.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 4

The recommendation requires further analysis and review by the Solano County Office of Education.

Recommendation 4 - The Solano County Office of Education and School Districts establish a grant writing position to acquire funding for homeless student services.

The VUSD Public Information Officer and Homeless and Foster Youth Liaison will work with the Solano County Office of Education and other School Districts to assist in writing grants to acquire funding for homeless student services. Within the existing District approved staffing, at this time there is no capacity for a position solely assigned for grant writing.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 5

The respondent disagrees wholly with this finding.

The City of Vacaville Homeless Roundtable has identified several possibilities for action to address the gaps in resources for working with the homeless population in Vacaville. Vacaville USD collaborates with the City of Vacaville on a regular basis through both the Vacaville Homeless Roundtable and the Youth Roundtable.

RESPONSE TO Recommendation 5

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

The Grand Jury's recommendation for the need to provide emergency housing for all unaccompanied homeless teenage students will be communicated to the City of Vacaville through both the Homeless Roundtable and the Youth Roundtable.

Summary:

The Vacaville Unified School District is committed to improving all outcomes for students. To this end, the district continues to improve information to staff about students homelessness as well as continuance support of homes students. Please contact us directly if you have any further questions.

Respectfully,

Kimberly Forrest

Kimberly Forrest
Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
Vacaville Unified School District