



**Lisette Estrella-Henderson, Superintendent of Schools**  
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September 6, 2017

The Honorable Robert C. Fracchia  
Presiding Judge of the Solano County Superior Court  
Hall of Justice  
600 Union Avenue  
Fairfield, CA 94533

**RE: 2016-2017 GRAND JURY REPORT TITLED EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS OF SOLANO COUNTY HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Dear Judge Fracchia:

The Solano County Office of Education (SCOE) was named as an affected party in the 2016-2017 Grand Jury Report titled *Educational Rights of Solano County Homeless Children and Youth* and, therefore, is required to respond under California Penal Code §933.05. We would like to point out that, although SCOE has fiscal oversight of Solano County's school districts, the recommendations cited in this report are outside of SCOE's oversight authority and would need to be independently addressed by each school district's governing board and superintendent.

Below are SCOE's responses to the findings and recommendations contained in the Grand Jury Report:

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

Response to Finding 1: SCOE partially disagrees with the findings. Each school district provides SCOE with the count of homeless students. SCOE accurately compiles countywide statistics based on district input. Accurate data collection may be affected by transience among homeless families and by a method of identification relying heavily on self-reporting.

**Recommendation 1a** – All data contained in reporting documents be accurate and verifiable.

Response to Recommendation 1a: SCOE agrees with the recommendation, and it has been implemented as it pertains to the students in SCOE's programs. Accurate data collection is essential to providing appropriate services, and SCOE will continue to work with our local school districts in support of effective data collection methods and practices.

**Recommendation 1b** – Reporting entities find more effective ways of identifying homeless children/youth.

Response to Recommendation 1b: SCOE agrees with the recommendation, and it has been implemented. A large part of SCOE's efforts every day are concentrated on serving our community's most vulnerable children and youth including those with disabilities, in the juvenile justice system, unaccompanied minors, and those who are in foster care or homeless. We continuously search for more effective ways to identify children and youth in SCOE's programs who are homeless.

Board of Education

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SCOE collaborates with various community partners through our participation in the Solano Children's Alliance, which is the longest operating multi-disciplinary children's service interagency council in our State. Alliance members, with expertise in healthcare, law enforcement, social services, education, local government, child care, community-based organizations, and as parents, join together to address issues specific to children and families including the identification of children and youth who are homeless.

SCOE also participates in a statewide network of homeless children and youth liaisons that provides training and technical assistance about how to identify children and youth who are homeless. In addition to training our own staff, SCOE trains school district personnel and shares improved identification methods as well as promotes better data collection practices.

**Finding 2** – Teacher training in identifying and reporting homeless students is a low priority.

Response to Finding 2: SCOE partially disagrees with the finding. In addition to training its own teachers, SCOE has trained school district administrative teams and school site administrators and clerical staff, when requested.

**Recommendation 2** – Districts establish a high priority for teachers to receive intensive training in identifying and reporting homeless students.

Response to Finding 2: SCOE agrees with this recommendation, and it has been implemented for teachers in SCOE's programs. We remain committed to providing staff in our local school districts with trainings on effective procedures to identify homeless students, and SCOE will continue to be available to train teachers in the districts upon request. Furthermore, SCOE is the recipient of a grant from the California Department of Education that will fund training for school staff in Solano County. The training is focused on increasing awareness among school staff and ensuring consistent and effective practices throughout Solano County regarding the identification of homeless students and meeting their needs through referrals to available resources.

**Finding 3** – Providing transportation is problematic in serving homeless students.

Response to Finding 3: SCOE agrees with the finding. A lack of transportation can significantly affect the ability of students to attend school regularly.

**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.

Response to Recommendation 3a: SCOE agrees with this recommendation, and it has been implemented. SCOE will continue to facilitate collaboration among the districts through the Countywide Homeless and Foster Youth District Education Liaisons' meeting, which includes all stakeholders and where best practices are shared and challenges are discussed.

**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.

Response to Recommendation 3b: SCOE agrees with the recommendation, and it has been implemented. In collaboration with local transportation agencies, SCOE will continue to provide bus passes to students upon request from the families of SCOE's students and from the districts.

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

Response to Finding 4: SCOE agrees with the finding. Addressing the needs of homeless students is a complex and challenging task, especially considering that funding is limited.

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

Response to Recommendation 4: SCOE disagrees with the recommendation, and it will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. SCOE utilizes a multi-departmental approach to grant writing in a constant effort to increase countywide services for students and school districts. Most of SCOE's support services for districts are funded by grants. SCOE applied for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Grant Program during the last grant cycle in 2015 and was not selected, perhaps as a result of the shift toward decentralized funding directly to school districts. However, SCOE recently received a grant from the California Department of Education in support of homeless students which will provide training for the school districts in Solano County.

To support effective grant writing strategies, SCOE is also collaborating with a grant development agency to identify opportunities and maximize funding for countywide initiatives. Additionally, within the existing SCOE-approved staffing, there is no capacity for a designated position solely assigned to grant writing.

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

Response to Finding 5: SCOE agrees that limited emergency housing is a barrier that contributes to homelessness; however, we are not aware of the extent to which it affects pregnant teens.

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

Response to Recommendation 5: SCOE disagrees with the recommendation, and it will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. Providing emergency housing for unaccompanied homeless teenage students is not within the scope of local educational agencies. However, SCOE is committed to continuing our work with the districts, city, and county administrators, along with nonprofit agencies to identify additional resources to address the problem. In addition, SCOE will continue to provide referrals to support services for homeless children and youth and unaccompanied homeless students.

Thank you for the opportunity to convey how very important it is to my organization to identify children and youth who are homeless in order to help them obtain the resources necessary to alleviate this barrier to learning and support their academic success.

Sincerely,



Lisette Estrella-Henderson  
County Superintendent of Schools