

Report on the Status of Separate Schools for Homeless Children and Youths in Counties Exempted from the Prohibition of Separate Schools

Prepared for the President of the United States, the U.S Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, and the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor

August 2020

Introduction

Section 722(e)(3)(F)(i) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (“McKinney-Vento Act” or “Act”) requires the Secretary of Education (“Secretary”) to prepare a report about separate schools and local educational agencies serving homeless children and youth. The report must include information regarding:

- (1) compliance with all requirements for separate schools, as described in section 722(e)(3)(B)-(F) of the Act;
- (2) barriers to school access in the school districts served by the local educational agencies (LEAs);
- (3) the progress that the separate schools are making in integrating homeless children and youth into the mainstream school environment, including the average length of student enrollment in such schools; and,
- (4) the progress the separate schools are making in helping all students meet challenging State academic standards.

Background

In section 721(1) of the McKinney Vento Act, Congress expressed its policy that “[e]ach State educational agency shall ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths.” Congress further noted its policy that “[h]omelessness is not [a] sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment.” Section 721(3) of the Act.

The one, limited exception to the general prohibition of segregating homeless students or otherwise separating them from the mainstream school environment, is for the purpose of certain authorized separate schools for homeless children and youth and qualifying LEAs in “covered count[ies]” (San Joaquin County, CA; Orange County, CA; San Diego County, CA; and Maricopa County, AZ). Section 722(e)(3)(B)-(E) and (G).

As of the 2019-2020 school year, only one separate school for homeless children and youth remains—the Monarch School of San Diego County, CA—which serves such children and youth

in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The school constitutes a public-private partnership between the San Diego County Office of Education (“SDCOE”) and the non-profit Monarch School Project and can enroll up to 350 students daily.

U.S. Department of Education’s Monitoring of the Monarch School

On April 26, 2019, a team from the Office of School Support and Accountability of the U.S. Department of Education (“Department”) conducted a targeted monitoring review of the Monarch School.

The review covered, for both the SDCOE and the Monarch School, applicable fiscal, administrative, and program requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act. The primary goal of the review was to ensure compliance with the Act.

Monitoring Summary. Findings from the review, and for purposes of the four reporting requirements of section 722(e)(3)(F)(i), are:

(1) Compliance with all requirements for separate schools in section 722(e)(3)(B)-(F) of the McKinney-Vento Act.

The Department found the Monarch School did not provide written notice “at least twice annually while the child or youth is enrolled in such school, to the parent or guardian of the child or youth.” Notices must include information about general rights provided under the McKinney-Vento Act, about the choice of schools homeless children and youth are eligible to attend, that no homeless child or youth is required to attend a separate school, that homeless children and youth shall be provided comparable services, including transportation services, educational services and meals through school meal programs, that homeless children and youth should not be stigmatized by school personnel, and such notice shall provide contact information for the local liaison for homeless children and youth and the State Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youth. Section 722(e)(3)(C)(i) of the Act. The California Department of Education (“CDE”) and SDCOE resolved the finding prior to the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

(2) Barriers to school access in the school districts served by the local educational agency.

In its monitoring review, the Department did not find any evidence of barriers to school access in the school districts served by the SDCOE. Specifically, the Department observed many instances of collaboration between the SDCOE homeless liaison and Monarch School staff resulting in increased access to educational and other support services. Examples included coordination of transportation of students to the school across district lines, coordination with family and juvenile courts, daily contact when students were absent without excuse, coordination with Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and special education services, the provision of free meals, and targeted support for those graduating from high school. Furthermore, information about

student rights under the McKinney-Vento Act is provided in English, Spanish, and Braille, and interpretation is provided for Arabic language speakers and those using American Sign Language.

(3) The progress the separate schools are making in integrating homeless children and youth into the mainstream school environment, including the average length of student enrollment in such schools.

The Monarch School reported that, on average, students attend the Monarch School for 11 months before enrolling in other schools in the San Diego area. Because the school is operated by SDCOE, which is also a McKinney-Vento subgrantee of the CDE, it provides many training opportunities on rights and services under the McKinney-Vento Act, including training designed to facilitate enrollment and coordination of services.

(4) The progress the separate schools are making in helping all students meet challenging State academic standards.

The Department found low levels of proficiency in reading/language arts and mathematics at the Monarch School, particularly for elementary school students and for students who are English learners. In addition, the Department found above-average levels of chronic absenteeism for all students compared to State and national averages for students experiencing homelessness. For a review of comparative data related to academic proficiency, chronic absenteeism, and graduation rates of homeless students, see Appendix A.

As a result, the Department recommended CDE and SCDOE provide targeted technical assistance to the school to improve grade-level reading/language arts and mathematics proficiency, particularly for its elementary school students.

Appendix A. Comparative Data on Homeless Students

Table 1. Percentage of Enrolled Homeless Students Who Scored at or Above Proficient on the State Tests

School Year	Monarch School Reading/language arts (R/LA)	California R/LA	Monarch School Mathematics	California Mathematics
SY 2015-16	16.0	28.8	6.0	18.7
SY 2016-17	16.1	28.6	4.1	19.2
SY 2017-18	19.6	30.6	3.7	20.8

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *EDFacts* files 175 and 178, Data Groups 583 and 584

Table 2. Percentage of Chronically Absent Students¹

School Year	Monarch School	California Homeless Students	California All Students
SY 2016-17	54.6	21.8	10.8
SY 2017-18	52.2	23.1	11.1
SY 2018-19	58.8	25.0	12.1

SOURCE: California State Department of Education, DataQuest School Climate Data; Retrieved from <https://www.ed-data.org/state/CA> June 17, 2020

Table 3. Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

School Year	Monarch School	California Homeless Students	California All Students
SY 2016-17	60.0	69.9	82.7
SY 2017-18	65.2	68.9	83.0

SOURCE: California State Department of Education, DataQuest Graduation and Dropout Data; Retrieved March 24, 2020

¹ Students are considered “chronically absent” if they are absent at least 10 percent of the instructional days that they were enrolled to attend in a school. See <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/chronabscal.asp>.