

News

US School Districts Weigh Duty to Youth Migrant Shelters

By Sally Ho  
Associated Press

When San Benito, Texas, school leaders learned of an influx of children to a migrant shelter in their small town near the U.S.-Mexico border, they felt obliged to help. The superintendent reached out and agreed to send 19 bilingual teachers, mobile classrooms and hundreds of computers to make the learning environment resemble one of his schools. While a government contractor bears responsibility for educating children at the highly guarded center, local of-

ficials say they stepped up partly because of a law that calls on school systems to educate any child, anywhere within their district. "This is not a political issue. This is not a racial issue. This is a moral obligation, and actually our legal obligation," said Michael Vargas, who leads the board of the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District. San Benito is one of a small number of U.S. school systems that are preparing for the first day of school on both their public campuses and in new classrooms set up at nearby federal youth migrant shelters. In neighboring Brownsville, Texas, the super-

intendent is working on an agreement to deploy teachers and services to help educate 800 children housed in federal facilities in her district. The school systems pitched in amid an outcry over the separation of children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border under the Trump administration's zero-tolerance policy for illegal immigration. Several hundred children remain separated from their parents, but most of the thousands of young people held in federal shelters across the U.S. are unaccompanied minors who arrived in the country without their families. The Associated Press



In this June 18, 2018, file photo, dignitaries take a tour of Southwest Key Programs Casa Padre, a U.S. immigration facility in Brownsville, Texas, where children are detained. When school leaders in San Benito, Texas, learned of an influx of children to a migrant shelter in town, they felt obliged to help. The superintendent reached out and agreed to send 19 bilingual teachers and hundreds of computers to make the learning environment as similar as possible to one of his schools.

Black Teenager Assaulted in Linn County  
After Criticizing Confederate Flag  
Police seek information about assault, which may qualify as a hate crime

The Associated Press

BROWNSVILLE, Ore. — Linn County authorities say a Black teenager was assaulted at a country music festival after he criticized a Confederate flag three men were waving. Sheriff Jim Yon said Monday that the men were driving through the camping area of the Willamette Country Music Festival in Brownsville waving the flag from a newer-model black Ford truck when the 18-year-old victim spoke out.

One of the men got out and hit the victim several times before fleeing. He has not been found. The victim was treated for non-life threatening injuries. Linn County Lt. Michelle Duncan says authorities are investigating whether the incident qualifies as a hate crime. The suspect had dark hair and was wearing jeans, a black muscle shirt with the sides cut, brown boots and a black cowboy hat. Those with information are urged to call Sergeant Mike Harmon at (541) 967-3950.

inquired with public school districts in 61 cities nationwide where shelters are known to exist within their boundaries. Among the 50 that responded, most said they had no contact with the shelter or federal program authorities. Some outside the border states, including Camden, New Jersey, said they only recently discovered the existence of migrant shelters in their community. Many noted they would educate all children regardless of immigration status, as required by law, if their families or legal guardians sought enrollment on their campuses. "Until this becomes a real-time issue for us, we have no official position," said Superintendent Dennis Blauser of the Oracle, Arizona, school district. In Texas, some districts already had longstanding agreements to run classrooms with public school teachers at mi-

grant shelters. By law, the federal contractors that operate the shelters are required to have a "care provider" give children six hours a day of structured learning time. Southwest Key, the largest contractor operating such facilities, has agreements with two school districts, including San Benito. It is also working to create partnerships with the Brownsville Independent School District and with a charter school network run separately by Southwest Key's parent organization. Salvador Cavazos, Southwest Key's vice president of educational services, said the non-profit shelter operator has for years offered great basic services but is now welcoming more help from outside school systems as an enhancement as the number of children in its care grows. He said Southwest Key

gets appreciative feedback from families after the average 30- to 45-day stay for each child, and most students leave with some level of academic gain. He said the children do "a lot of good work" studying through a project-based curriculum that is aligned with state standards. "They do history projects. They do class presentations. They do read-alouds with the books and novels that they're reading," said Cavazos, a former school teacher and administrator. The districts' role is largely limited to their regular school year, though the shelters also provide supplemental curriculum during summer months. Brownsville Superintendent Esperanza Zendejas said she felt obligated to honor a 1982 Supreme Court ruling on children's right to education.

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