



Education Coordinating Council

January 19, 2005

9:30 a.m.

Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic
3787 South Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles, California

Present: Yolie Flores Aguilar
Gwen Bartholomew
Berisha Black
Carol Clem
Reuben De Leon, representing Evelyn Martinez
Steve Gocke
Paul Higa
José Huizar
Miriam Aroni Krinsky
Aubrey Manuel
Darline P. Robles
Maria Reza, representing Roy Romer
Bruce Saltzer
David Sanders
Beatriz Olvera Stotzer
Harriette Williams
Machelle Wolf

Guests: Wendy Aron, Third Supervisorial District
Jana Cooley, Fifth Supervisorial District
Aaron Nevarez, Fourth Supervisorial District
Jed Minoff, Casey Family Programs

Dr. Darline Robles brought the first meeting of the Education Coordinating Council (ECC) to order at 9:52 a.m., welcoming ECC members and the large audience. Robles apologized for the absence of Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who had planned to kick off today's meeting but had to attend a funeral instead. She thanked the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic and its executive director, Betsy Pfromm, for agreeing to host the meeting, and commented on the "remarkable feat" of getting so many people to come together and commit to action. Robles then introduced Robyn Lutsky, director of the on-grounds Burton Green school.

Lutsky welcomed participants and shared a few details about the Clinic's nonpublic school for emotionally disturbed and learning-disabled students, in which she sees "the palpable texture of the problems we face as educators today." As the ECC must do, Lutsky said, her school must address not just the academic struggles of its students, but their experiential deprivation as well.

Robles thanked Judge Michael Nash and the Children's Law Center, especially executive director Miriam Krinsky, for providing the leadership that resulted in the creation of the ECC. She also expressed appreciation to those involved with the 2003 and 2004 Education Summits, and particularly to members of the Board of Supervisors, who made the formation of the council a priority. "Our focus is a testament to their values and belief system," she said.

The board of the Los Angeles Unified School District—board president José Huizar is a member of the ECC—has adopted a resolution in support of the council, and the Los Angeles County Office of Education has also expressed its endorsement. Other supporters include the Los Angeles City Council, the city and the county commissions for children and families, the Los Angeles Community College District Board of Trustees, and the City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board Youth Council. In addition, Robles thanked the participants in the organizational planning meetings, held over the past year and a half, to help shape the council's purpose and design.

The council's public and private funders include the Department of Children and Family Services, the Probation Department, the county's Interagency Operations Group, and Casey Family Programs.

With that financial support, the ECC has been able to retain lead consultant Sharon Watson, former executive director of the Children's Planning Council, who introduced her team. Program director Carrie Watson, the former director of education for United Friends of the Children, is the only full-time staff member; she will help to develop the action plan due to the Board of Supervisors in December 2005. USC School of Social Work professor Jacquelyn McCroskey is helping the ECC around data and information-sharing issues, and human services consultant Cecilia Sandoval is working with community outreach, communications, and organizational issues. Watson is seeking someone with a sophisticated knowledge of school systems to round out the initial team.

Robles asked ECC members to introduce themselves and comment briefly on their affiliations and participation in the process. Sharon Watson outlined the four-fold purpose of this meeting: to launch the ECC, to elect leadership and put an initial structure in place for the next 12 months, to affirm priority areas for the council's work, and to agree on a meeting calendar.

Referring to statements made by members during their introductions, Robles commented that "clearly, we all know why the ECC is needed." Education is the most important factor for achieving adult success, and foster and probation youth are not getting the high-quality education that others get and that they deserve. With its stakeholder leadership, the ECC can do the broad strategizing, develop the needed policies, and take the kinds of actions that have not been possible before. The Board of Supervisors created the ECC and charged it with developing an Education Blueprint for foster and probation youth that spells out what's needed to raise their educational achievement and who is responsible for implementing those actions. Robles hopes that the council's collaborative focus on a specific population can be a model for other areas in Los Angeles County that serve all children.

Election of Leadership

As Watson conducted interviews during the summer of 2004 about what the ECC ought to accomplish, who should sit on it, and what its structure should be, certain names kept “popping up,” she said, regarding its leadership. All agreed that certain representation is key: persons with knowledge of the education, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems, and former foster youth who have actually experienced those systems.

There being no nominations from the floor, Yolie Flores Aguilar moved to accept the proposed slate of officers:

- **Chair: Honorable José Huizar, president of the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education**
- **Vice-Chair: Honorable Michael Nash, presiding judge, Juvenile Court**
- **Vice-Chair: Berisha Black, former foster youth and Emancipation Ombudsman for foster and probation youth**

Miriam Krinsky seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Launch the Work

Huizar stated that he is honored to serve as chair and is committed to the work of the ECC, particularly because LAUSD needs to be a critical player. The district is making a major effort to gather the data needed for program planning, starting with a data match between LAUSD and the Department of Children and Family Services to determine facts about foster youth within the district. Berisha Black encouraged ECC members to “be the change we want to see,” saying that “when we allow youth to leave the system without a high school education, we have failed them.” She wants to see no more failures in this county.

Judge Nash is at a national judicial conference and could not attend today’s meeting, but Miriam Krinsky spoke on his behalf about the tremendous challenges and disheartening outcomes now prevalent for foster and probation youth, as well as the pressures of fiscal constraints on the sys-

tem. “We’re here because we subscribe to the notion that this is beyond a school issue,” she said. “It is *all* of our responsibility to make a difference.”

Huizar invited audience members to introduce themselves.

Berisha Black moved that the agenda for today’s meeting be adopted. Beatriz Olvera Stotzer seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Beatriz Olvera Stotzer moved that the ECC’s mission statement be adopted:

“To raise the educational achievement of foster and probation youth to equal that of other youth.”

Bruce Saltzer seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

The ECC is designed to be both a planning and an implementation body, said Huizar. Even as it is developing an action plan during 2005, it will move to implement some ideas that can quickly address barriers or improve educational outcomes. The Education Blueprint due to the Board of Supervisors in December will:

- Explain what is wanted for youth educationally
- Identify both short-term, ‘doable’ actions and long-term ones needed to attain better educational outcomes
- Propose how these actions will be carried out and who is responsible
- Lay out indicators of progress

ECC membership is expected to evolve along with the work, since the blueprint will make clear what entities are needed around the table. Any changes to the council’s structure and membership will be proposed at the time the blueprint is submitted.

The ECC will meet quarterly at various locations, to enable as many stakeholders as possible to participate. A Planning Group will be responsible for the development of the Education Blueprint, as well as for organizing the council’s work in between meetings. A series of work groups will be established within the next few weeks to focus on key program areas and generate most

of the specific recommendations for the blueprint. “That’s where the real work will be done,” Watson said, with those recommendations being filtered through the Planning Group and then approved by the ECC as a whole.

A series of community forums and meetings is being arranged to ensure broad feedback to members on issues of importance. The interim consultant team that Watson introduced earlier will support the council’s work and carry out administrative and programmatic actions, including the development of an organization chart that will spell out the multi-tiered nature of how the ECC will accomplish its mission.

Miriam Krinsky moved to adopt the proposed first-year meeting schedule with the understanding that if a critical component of ECC members have conflicts with those dates, the calendar should be revisited at the April meeting. Aubrey Manuel seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

The Planning Group is now composed of about 25 people, and is growing and evolving, Watson said. Representation includes foster and biological parents, former foster youth, county departments and agencies, the judiciary, county and city commissions, school districts, multi-school programs, nonpublic schools, community councils, Head Start, and First 5 L.A. (The need to include mental health on the Planning Group and/or the ECC was expressed.)

Beatriz Olvera Stotzer moved that the Planning Group be designated as the operational group for the ECC between council meetings, and that the Planning Group:

- **Coordinate other work groups and projects as they evolve**
- **Oversee the development of the Education Blueprint**
- **Move ahead with action strategies approved by the ECC**

Yolie Flores Aguilar seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Reports

Following the creation of the ECC by the Board of Supervisors on November 3, 2004, a stakeholders' meeting was held on November 15 that discussed the blueprint and developed some initial program areas of focus. The Planning Group then met on December 16 to further define the blueprint and identify areas that cut across issues discussed at the Education Summits. "To ensure success," Watson said, "we decided that we would choose only a few and do them well."

The proposed areas of focus are:

- **Data and information-sharing**
- **Support for Foster Youth/Probation Education Liaisons**
- **Early childhood education and after-school care**
- **Front-line staff support**

In response to concerns about combining early childhood education with after-school care, Watson said that the ability to staff more work groups—with only one full-time program director—had been the deciding factor there. If members are willing to assist with staffing, those issues can be separated or the Planning Group can work on combining them in different ways. Kathy Malaske-Samu offered the Policy Roundtable for Children to facilitate and help with the early childhood education work group.

Beatriz Olvera Stotzer moved to approve the four priority program areas, charging the Planning Group with determining how the work groups are broken out. Darline Robles seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

The Planning Group also proposed a policy statement for the ECC:

"Council members and their organizations should give foster and probation youth highest priority for enrollment in their educational and school-related programs/services."

In the lengthy discussion that followed, two separate points were raised. First, some organizations represented on the ECC are direct-service agencies or departments, and it was agreed that the language be expanded to not simply enroll but facilitate enrollment as well as participation.

Second, several members noted that individuals who sit on the ECC representing other organizations may not be empowered to commit those bodies at a policy level. Should the ECC formally accept the policy statement today, or wait until the April meeting to hear from members about their organizations' stance? Some members advocated approval in the interest of keeping the ECC's momentum going, while others expressed discomfort with possibly running up against a conflicting regulation or policy within their organizations (complex rules for entering magnet schools, for instance). A passionate statement from a former foster youth in the audience urged approval of the policy statement without delay because of the high risks of homelessness and unemployment that foster and probation youth face when they do not graduate from high school. Because of problems foster parents and relative caregivers may have networking with services, youth may end up at the bottom of the list for services rather than at the top—a situation the ECC was formed to rectify.

Darline Robles moved to change the policy statement to a 'core value statement' to guide the ECC in its work. Maria Reza seconded the motion, and discussion went to the floor.

Miriam Krinsky suggested keeping the sentence as a policy statement, but made an amendment to change *highest priority* to *high priority*, to give organizations the latitude they may need bureaucratically. If some members need to abstain from voting on the policy statement subject to approval by their organizations, the statement could be subject to reconsideration.

The question was called, and members voted on the amended motion, to adopt the following **core value statement** for the ECC:

“Council members and their organizations should give foster and probation youth high priority for, and facilitate their enrollment and participation in, their educational and school-related programs/services.”

The motion passed with two ‘nay’ votes.

Miriam Krinsky moved to retain the language just adopted but to alter this ‘core value statement’ back to a ‘policy statement.’ Berisha Black seconded the motion, and discussion continued. Members expressed varying opinions—that calling it a core value waters down its impact, that it needs to be a policy statement even if the subject pushes the issue, that a ‘core value’ can be just as driving, that no organization should object to the spirit of the statement, whatever it’s called, and that the priority should be termed *high* if it is a policy statement and *highest* if it is a core value statement.

To move ahead yet remain respectful of members representing groups, Robles suggested that the core value statement rest as adopted, and that the issue be brought before the ECC again in April, after individuals have been able to discuss it with their organizations. Going from core value to policy is a logical progression, especially since the ECC will ultimately be evaluated on how it carries forward these ideas. As part of its broad-based outreach, the council needs to respect the different methods different organizations have of processing critical issues.

The Planning Group hoped the policy statement would both influence other bodies and empower ECC members to speak on behalf of the council at public meetings as other policies are being formed—guidelines for enrollment in universal preschool, for example—and the specific wording is not perhaps as important as the collective hopes of this group. The overall huge goal is for the blueprint to be ready in December, and to make foster and probation youth the priority within the educational system that they need to be.

Krinsky amended her own motion to table the issue until the April meeting, when members will consider whether to act on making the core value statement a policy statement; in the intervening months, members with ties to organizations are asked to inform them of the action and intent of the ECC and seek their blessing. Yolie Flores Aguilar seconded the amended motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Robles reported that the Los Angeles County Office of Education hosted a meeting on November 8 with the superintendents of six school districts serving large numbers of foster and probation

youth, as well as a meeting on January 6 with the Foster Youth Education Liaisons (mandated by AB 490) that yielded much input regarding barriers to service and suggestions for improvement.

Closing Comments

- ◆ With regard to the inclusion of mental health issues, it was suggested that the Planning Group be directed to consider adding the Department of Mental Health to the ECC or, at minimum, to the Planning Group itself. Gary Puckett, a DMH representative in the audience, stated that the department, from director Marv Southard on down, has every intention of actively supporting the ECC process, whether it is formally named on those bodies or not.
- ◆ Beatriz Olvera Stotzer asked for patience toward those, like herself, unfamiliar with “what the system looks like” as they learn its complexities. She seeks a deeper understanding for all regarding who is responsible for the inspiration of a child—a responsibility that cannot be ‘siloeed’ within a single department or school district.
- ◆ Though the ECC’s mission statement advocates raising the educational achievement of foster and probation youth “to equal that of other youth,” Harriette Williams urged a push toward the highest national standards.
- ◆ Gwen Bartholomew recommended outreach to principals and teachers from front-line staff and relative caregivers, to communicate when upsetting activities in the home (police visits, arrests, etc.) may cause a child to act out in school.
- ◆ Carrie Watson encouraged members to register for participation in the work groups, or to call the ECC office if they are not able to sign up today.

José Huizar thanked ECC members and the audience for the “richness in discussion” at today’s meeting, and expressed his appreciation again to Sharon Watson for her leadership and to Supervisor Yaroslavsky for his interest and support.

There being no further public comment, Beatriz Olvera Stotzer moved that the meeting be adjourned; Maria Reza seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:58 a.m.