



Education Coordinating Council

April 27, 2005

9:30 a.m.

SPA 4 Council Office
520 South Virgil Avenue, Los Angeles, California

Present: Yolie Flores Aguilar
Gwen Bartholomew
Berisha Black
Carol Clem
Kathleen Duba, representing Percy Clark
Paul Higa
Miriam Aroni Krinsky
Elizabeth Lem, representing Darline Robles
Aubrey Manuel
Judge Michael Nash
Maria Reza, representing Roy Romer
Bruce Saltzer
David Sanders
Marvin Southard
Rick Tebbano, representing Christopher Steinhauser
Harriette Williams
Machelle Wolf

Guests: Miriam Simmons, Second Supervisorial District
Aaron Nevarez, Fourth Supervisorial District
Susan Abagnale, Casey Family Programs

In the absence of chair José Huizar, Judge Michael Nash brought the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. He thanked the SPA 4 Council for hosting and introduced Celestina Castillo, council coordinator, who welcomed everyone to the facility. She noted that the SPA 4 Council shares the building with the Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness, and invited attendees to tour the SPA 4 Council offices.

Nash welcomed Marv Southard, director of the Department of Mental Health, as a new member of the ECC; his invitation was extended following discussions at the January meeting of the important role of mental health in the ECC's efforts. Nash congratulated Paul Higa on his recent promotion to Chief Probation Officer, and apologized for the absence of Darline Robles, who is touring a school with Laura Bush, and Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, who was scheduled to offer remarks but was prevented from attending by developments in the King/Drew crisis. Nash then asked ECC members and the audience to introduce themselves.

Reconsideration of Core Value Statement

Lead consultant Sharon Watson reminded council members of the lively discussion at the January meeting around the core value statement adopted then: "Education Coordinating Council members and their organizations should give foster and probation youth a high priority for, and facilitate their enrollment and participation in, their educational and school-related programs/services." Members were asked to seek feedback from their organizations on the possibility of adopting this as a policy statement.

- The Children's Planning Council embraced the value statement and had no concerns about its adoption as policy if the word 'special' is added to "high priority," since the foster-care population deserves special treatment.
- The Los Angeles County Board of Education approved the adoption as a policy statement.
- The Los Angeles City Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families expressed a readiness to adopt the core value statement and its underlying emphasis, but recognized the

difficulties in changing policy for over 200 city programs that serve children and families, each with its own funding stream.

- Wanting child care to be accessible to at-risk families, the board of Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) approved in February a fee waiver for foster parents, parents whose children are under the auspices of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and teen parents in the foster-care or juvenile-justice systems. (LAUP is a new nonprofit organization established to provide voluntary access to high-quality preschool for all four-year-olds in Los Angeles County. By September, more than 100 centers and 100 family child-care providers are expected to be operational within the program. Initial LAUP funding includes \$600 million over five years from First 5 L.A., but parents will also be asked to contribute to the cost, paying an annual fee on a progressive sliding scale.)

Especially given LAUP's waiver, which clearly demonstrated the value of the ECC's action, the group was asked for its reaction to leaving the statement as a core value, or, if more leverage is needed to accomplish its purpose, revising it into a stronger policy statement. Should it, for instance, address organizations that ought to have educational programs but don't?

Nash proposed a more clear and direct statement that incorporated the Children's Planning Council's suggested change: "**Education Coordinating Council members and their organizations should *work together and with all stakeholders to give foster and probation youth a special, high priority in all areas relating to their educational needs, including but not limited to facilitating their enrollment and participation in educational and school-related programs and services.***" Miriam Aroni Krinsky moved that this be adopted as a policy statement, and Aubrey Manuel seconded the motion.

Stating her concerns about issuing a policy statement so early in the ECC's life, **Harriette Williams suggested amending the motion to adopt the sentence as a core value statement. The amended motion was unanimously approved.**

Residential Academies for Foster Youth: David Sanders

Residential academies are an option being considered for youth who have a long-term foster care order from the dependency court and who are struggling academically. David Sanders distributed copies of the September 2004 Board of Supervisors motion requesting that DCFS investigate the idea of residential academies for foster youth, as well as the Request for Interest/Information (RFI) the department issued in response.

The concept targets youth age 14 and older who have been in nonrelative out-of-home care for at least 24 months and have had four or more placements. Outcomes for these youth would include a stable placement, high school graduation, post-graduation education or employment, positive adult/mentor relationships, and completion of an independent living program. Twenty-eight responses to the RFI were received. Now that the ECC is in full operation, Sanders is proposing its formal involvement in their review, as well as a recommendation regarding the need for/feasibility of the residential academy idea. (The department has made no commitment to move forward with any of the models contained in the responses, and may or may not ultimately issue a Request for Proposal).

Bruce Saltzer encouraged additional discussion, particularly in light of the department's current push to move children out of group care. Setting up a new group-home environment when existing agencies are receiving fewer referrals seems inconsistent with the direction of the child welfare system. Judge Nash felt that a large number of youth will be eligible, and that the specified outcomes are things the system is supposed to accomplish for all children in any case. What sets this initiative apart? Sanders explained that though a nonpublic school can offer a long-term academic environment, that doesn't connect to an also-optimal long-term placement environment. Miriam Simmons from Supervisor Burke's office said that she herself was a product of a boarding school, and her experience was one of the sources for this concept. She urged the ECC to look at this idea in a positive context. Harriette Williams applauded the department for thinking creatively. "We can't find enough good options for young people," she said, and ideas should be aired in that spirit.

Members agreed that further discussion should take place within an ad hoc working group that would help to inform DCFS's next report to the Board of Supervisors, and recommendations would be presented to the ECC in July. Anyone interested in participating in this group should contact the ECC office. The group will look at successful models including, for example, San Pasqual Academy in San Diego County, as well as existing best practices that can be replicated. Starting this kind of initiative early, before high school, will also be explored, as will possible alternative uses of resources. Might new dollars be better spent expanding wraparound or community-based services, for instance?

California Foster Youth Education Task Force: Miriam Aroni Krinsky

Under the auspices of the ECC and with the support of the Casey Family Programs, the Children's Law Center has formed a California Foster Youth Education Task Force with the state department of education and a coalition of other groups. Eight fact sheets are planned to highlight core issues regarding the educational needs of youth in out-of-home care; Krinsky distributed copies of those on AB 490 and education rights. The full package should be available by the ECC's July meeting. An informational wallet card for youth is also envisioned as part of a youth-targeted 'Education Counts' campaign. The Los Angeles Barristers Association is sponsoring new backpacks for foster youth, and the aim is to tie these efforts together. Any connections to school supply contacts would be appreciated.

It is hoped that last week's statewide education liaison training program will yield a FAQ (frequently asked questions) sheet on AB 490, as well as a 'barrier-busting' document outlining difficult implementation issues.

May is Foster Care Awareness month, and posters are available from the Children's Law Center.

Planning Group Reports on Priority Area Activities

Between quarterly ECC meetings, the Planning Group has been authorized to act as the council's operational body, and it has taken a three-pronged approach:

- Work groups have been established in the four priority areas—data and information-sharing, early childhood education, education liaisons, and youth development. A list of work group leadership and contact information was included in member packets.
- A free e-mail discussion group has been created for each priority area, through Yahoo! Groups. An instruction sheet for signing up was included in member packets, and consultant Evelyn Hughes will moderate the groups.
- Town halls and community forums are being planned to bring in a wide circle of people for a broad perspective on educational issues for foster and probation youth.

Data and Information-Sharing Jacquelyn McCroskey introduced Cynthia Lim to present a preliminary analysis of the first data match between the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Department of Children and Family Services, and thanked all those involved in this historic effort. The number of DCFS students identified within the school district is probably underestimated because of technical and timing issues surrounding the data ‘snapshot,’ since both probation and foster-care populations are very volatile. The only preschool information included is from LAUSD’s school language readiness development programs, a subset of the pre-K population. Most of the data analyzed is from the current school year (2004–2005).

Charts compare aggregate data for the total LAUSD student population and for DCFS students by grade level, ethnicity, language classification, program eligibility (special education and gifted/talented programs), suspensions from school, and proficiency in California test standards. African-Americans are disproportionately represented in the DCFS population, as are students who speak English only. DCFS students are more likely than others to be in special education programs and less likely to be in gifted/talented programs. Their suspension rates are higher—to be expected, since African-American students and special education students in general have higher suspension rates—and their test scores are lower.

This study is the first step toward the ultimate goal of finding out why the numbers differ for DCFS students and changing those outcomes. (David Sanders expressed curiosity about the 161 DCFS students in gifted and talented programs, for instance. What factors have contributed to

that? Are there common characteristics?) Though immense, LAUSD is but a single school district. The eventual plan is to work out the technical issues that will allow data to be gathered from other districts and nonpublic schools, and also to perform similar matches for probation youth.

LAUSD has added a field in its student information record that will make it possible to track and disaggregate other data elements for DCFS students—dropout rates, exit exam scores, enrollment in supplemental services, etc. The possibility of geo-mapping to identify individual schools for case management activities also exists, though confidentiality issues could limit that to schools with higher DCFS enrollments. LAUSD is currently working toward an integrated student data system, and hopes to improve data-gathering at the local school level. A regular feed for DCFS has been discussed, so students in foster care will be identified at enrollment.

Ultimately, sharing school records so that everyone involved in a foster child's life has a regular flow of information—including the court—would be ideal. Legal hurdles still exist, and work on a national level is addressing those, but systems should be communicating student by student.

McCroskey then presented “Research on the Educational Experiences of Dependent and Delinquent Youth: A Review of Recent Literature and Questions for the Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council,” written by McCroskey and staff member Carrie Watson. This literature review is meant to be the start of a series of papers on a number of topics, and the work group is interested in getting feedback.

Little research has been done in Los Angeles County on foster and probation youth and their educational outcomes, and though studies have been performed in other places, no definitive analysis of the issues exists. The paper presents a broad overview, raises questions for the ECC and other stakeholders to contemplate, and identifies areas where the ECC might focus its attention. For example, research indicates that both high-quality early childhood education and youth development can be helpful to at-risk children and families in multiple ways throughout their lifetimes. In addition, though many assume that physical or sexual abuse has the most negative

effect on children, research shows that the long-term effects of neglect can be more harmful, since children's developmental potential is connected to their transactions with the world.

Education Liaisons Pat Levinson reported that out of the 150 people invited (AB 490 liaisons and representatives from DCFS, the Probation Department, DMH, group homes, and others), 50 attended the work group's first meeting. The group's intention is twofold: to better understand educational issues facing foster and delinquent youth, and to develop strategies to deal with those issues. Norma Sturgis reviewed the summary of the meeting, which was supplemented by e-mail input solicited from all districts.

- Challenges to being an education liaison included school stability; data collection and data-sharing; the transfer and tracking of school records; better communication and collaboration across agencies; training for caregivers, community agencies, and school personnel; transportation; attendance issues; and confusion over who holds education rights for individual children.
- Training or professional development topics that might be beneficial included those on laws relating to the foster and probation population, the responsibilities of stakeholders, special education, and sensitivity issues for foster and probation youth.
- Things that are working well within individual districts included collaboration, the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services program, centralized enrollment centers for AB 490, the co-location of services on school campuses, and court liaisons.
- Additional needs and suggestions were for mandates to be funded, for increased staffing and lower caseloads across agencies, for more paraprofessionals, and for more support in training for foster parents.

Thirty people volunteered to participate in the smaller working group that will consider ways for more effective service delivery and support to line staff, as well as strategies for communication and collaboration efforts. Marv Southard committed representatives from the Department of Mental Health, but also urged the inclusion of the alcohol and drug section of the Department of

Health Services, since substance abuse by foster and probation youth and their families is so often left out of the treatment equation. “It’s a huge part of the problem,” he said, “and we can’t afford to ignore it.”

Helen Kleinberg commented on the work group meeting, saying that some underlying tensions stemmed from the fact that school district personnel can lack information about very simple things—how DCFS operates, who to call in an emergency, what a minute order is, that a social worker follows the child from school to school. Educating teachers, principals, and school office staff in these small things—and keeping them up-to-date on legislation—can be as important as making big system changes.

Early Childhood Education The Policy Roundtable for Children is providing leadership for this work group, and Michele Sartell distributed a summary of its work to date. Its goals include providing parenting foster and probation youth with the tools to find high-quality early care and education services within the existing system of licensed care, and helping them subsidize the cost of these services based on their income eligibility. Its activities will include:

- Formalizing foster and probation youth participation in the Centralized Eligibility List
- Educating social workers, probation officers, and the Transitional Resource Centers on how to use subsidized child care for emancipating foster and probation youth who are parents
- Meeting with the Board Deputies about subsidizing child care for emancipating youth and the DCFS wait list
- Researching the location of existing and pending housing for emancipating youth to identify existing child care, or to focus capacity-building in those areas

Youth Development Michele Kipke reviewed the shift in the late 1990s from a categorical focus on problem behaviors and deficits to a focus on youth’s assets and strengths, the promotion of positive development outcomes, and helping youth reach their full potential. Foundations began supporting these efforts, communities began ‘mapping’ their assets, and agencies began to establish youth development programs. The Federal government also started to realize that categorical

funding (one stream of dollars to prevent drug use, one to prevent alcohol use) was a trap, and began moving toward a more integrated approach.

Helping youth reach their full potential addresses their development in several ways:

- Physically (good health habits)
- Intellectually (school success, critical thinking, the ability to reason, awareness of cultural diversity)
- Psychologically and emotionally (positive self-regard, emotional self-regulation and coping skills, 'planfulness,' and strong moral character)
- Socially ('connectedness,' civic engagement)

Features of programs that promote positive outcomes include physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy and a sense that the person matters, opportunities for skill-building, and the integration of family, school, and community efforts. Schools and after-school programs need to offer:

- Safe environments that are supportive and respectful
- Structured activities designed to both prevent problem behaviors and promote youth development
- Programs that promote academic engagement, social connectedness, and mental health
- Opportunities to ensure that every child develops a meaningful relationship with a caring adult
- Opportunities to develop new skills, social skills with peers and adults, self-confidence, and a sense of social responsibility
- Encouragement and support for volunteerism, service learning, and civic engagement
- Career and academic counseling, with both college prep and school-to-work programs

Kipke acknowledged that systems are struggling, citing her own six-months' experience as a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) for a 17-year-old young woman under DCFS. Kipke has worked with the girl's judge, her attorney, her social worker, and her mental health providers. "All these goals?" she said. "This girl got none of them. She has no preparation, no survival skills, and no one in her life telling her she was worth anything. She is not one of our successes. We must do better, and I'm thrilled that this group is focusing on that."

Program models exist, and the group needs to take a broad look at positive development and connections to adults, starting as early in the child's life as possible. The Policy Roundtable for Child Care has a good list of existing programs that could be used a springboard for a more detailed survey, and the City of Los Angeles's Recreation and Parks Department also offers numerous free after-school programs.

Sherri Sobel from the Juvenile Court and Vinnie D'Averso from the Community College Foundation have agreed to provide preliminary leadership for the work group, and its first meeting date will be announced shortly.

Announcements

- ◆ Marv Southard invited everyone to participate in the planning for the Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63), focusing on community supports and services for those who already have a significant mental illness or mental health needs. A children's planning group and a transitional-age group are both holding open meetings; a schedule is available at <http://dmh.co.la.ca.us>. The plan is moving rapidly, with a draft to be developed by June.
- ◆ Another planning process, for prevention and early intervention, will begin once guidelines have been received from the state. "This has been a missing field in mental health for years," Southard said, and the ECC may have particular interest in shaping this plan. He will keep members posted.

Public Comment

- ◆ Pat Levinson returned to the discussion of the ECC's core value statement, encouraging members to consider changing the *should* language to the stronger and more forceful *will*.
- ◆ A representative from the Los Angeles County Library highlighted the contents of an information packet, including an application for a no-fault library card for foster children (DCFS has agreed to pay overdue fees for materials not returned on time) and the Internet address for live homework help for grades 4 through 12, at <http://www.colapublib.org>.

Judge Nash thanked the SPA 4 Council for hosting the meeting and paying for attendees' parking. The next meeting of the ECC is scheduled for July 27, 2005, at 9:30 a.m., at a location to be announced. Please contact ECC staff with ideas for a centrally located venue.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.