



Education Coordinating Council

April 27, 2006

9:30 a.m.

First 5 LA, First Floor Conference Room
750 North Alameda Street, Los Angeles, California

Present: Berisha Black
Carol Clem
Amy Cooper, representing José Huizar
Julie Eutsler, representing Steve Gocke
Helen Kleinberg
Miriam Aroni Krinsky
Evelyn V. Martinez
Judge Michael Nash
Terry Ogawa
Lisa Parrish, representing David Sanders
Darline P. Robles
Bruce Saltzer
Marv Southard
Machelle Wolf

Guest: Susan Abagnale

Vice Chair Michael Nash brought the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. and asked ECC members and the audience to introduce themselves. He thanked First 5 LA director Evelyn Martinez for hosting the meeting, and noted that Chair José Huizar was in city budget deliberations and had asked his education deputy, Amy Cooper, to represent him. David Sanders was in Washington, DC, and Kathleen Duba was attending a district principals' meeting.

As attendees may be aware, the ECC lost a valued member earlier this month with the sudden death of Chief Probation Officer Paul Higa. Nash praised Higa's integrity, knowledge, and experience, and especially his vision and plans for how the Probation Department could make much-needed improvements in its services to the youth of Los Angeles County. "Paul represented a great hope that he'd be the one to lead us in the right direction," Nash said. "It's a terrible loss for the county and a horrible loss for his friends and family." The new Chief Probation Officer, Robert Taylor, was a high-ranking officer in the Los Angeles Police Department for many years and offers fine leadership skills and great integrity, though he is new to the Probation Department. Nash urged ECC members to extend help to Taylor in implementing as much of Higa's legacy as possible, and hoped that he would join ECC meetings.

Vice Chair Berisha Black announced that the Board of Supervisors had on February 14 unanimously adopted *Expecting More*, the ECC's Blueprint for raising the educational achievement of foster and probation youth, and that all five Board offices have expressed an active interest in seeing the Blueprint implemented. The Board motion was included in member packets and is available on the ECC's website at <http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org>.

Education Dialogue

On April 19, Darline Robles, in partnership with the ECC, co-hosted a dialogue at Los Angeles County Office of Education headquarters for 20 school district superintendents and their representatives, and a panel of departmental leaders from Children and Family Services, Mental Health, Probation, and the Juvenile Court. (All the county's 81 school districts were invited, but many were on spring break.) A summary of that meeting was included in member packets.

Although the ECC has been discussing the barriers to information flowing from schools to county agencies—which Judge Nash said should be resolved soon—participants stressed the importance of data flow *to* schools as well. The co-location of services was embraced by several districts, and everyone was interested in the data that the ECC is collecting and the opportunity for school districts to provide input into breaking down barriers and coordinating efforts. All agreed on the value of the dialogue, and that similar gatherings should take place at least twice a year. The next meeting will be scheduled sometime this fall.

Data Match Reports

Because information-sharing issues are very complicated, the ECC is beginning to create baseline data by asking school districts to match data from DCFS and Probation against their enrollment records. Jacquelyn McCroskey highlighted “Educational Status of Probation Youth Enrolled in Los Angeles County Office of Education Programs,” a document analyzing LACOE data from November 2005, with a particular emphasis on the results of the Star Advantage Tests administered to youth as they enter juvenile hall. Though this is far from an optimal time to assess academic achievement, these tests are the most standardized data that now exists. About 80 percent of youth taking the test are between 15 and 17 years old.

		Reading grade level	Math grade level
Juvenile halls (2,047 students)	In regular education (79%)	4.9	5.7
	In special education (21%)	3.8	6.0
Camp schools (2,064 students)	In regular education (80%)	5.3	5.5
	In special education (20%)	4.0	4.4
Community day schools (676 students)	In regular education (87%)	7.0	9.0
	In special education (13%)	4.1	4.6

McCroskey expressed appreciation to Cynthia Lim of the Los Angeles Unified School District for her staff's work in producing a second study, which matches DCFS and Probation caseloads as of December 2005 with students enrolled in LAUSD in February 2006. The analysis examined the 8,027 DCFS students (including voluntary family maintenance cases) and the 2,746 Probation students in terms of:

- Distribution by school type and grade level
- Ethnicity, gender, and language classification
- Eligibility for special education services
- Identification as gifted, a category in which David Sanders has expressed interest with respect to discovering what factors have enabled them to overcome their disadvantages
- Achievement levels in English language arts and in mathematics, which show a significant drop from those for LAUSD as a whole—already low—in grades 2 through 11

The study also looks at suspension, expulsion, and dropout statistics; and two appendices show an aggregate distribution of foster and probation youth by LAUSD local district, plus the numbers identified in each individual school. McCroskey acknowledged the underreporting inherent in the data, saying that these figures may not be exact, but they do outline trends. More data matches are in the works—including information on foster and probation youth failing the high-school exit exam—and McCroskey will provide results to the ECC as they become available.

Both Terry Ogawa and Amy Cooper commented on the value of the LAUSD data for the city's planning of programs and services, and promised to distribute the study to Los Angeles city council offices and city departments. Miriam Krinsky said that previous data has been invaluable in Sacramento and other parts of the country to underscore the critical education issues faced by the largest population of foster youth in the U.S. She suggested making the new studies available to county leadership, possibly mapping the information by supervisorial district and by school. Cynthia Lim will develop language that more clearly states the caveats (much mobility in the overall student population and the fluid status of foster and probation youth, for example) in terms of interpreting the study.

Andrea Zetlin, a Cal State Los Angeles professor who co-chairs the ECC's data work group, cautioned against planning for an equal distribution of funds across the county or city and ignoring the geographic concentrations of youth needing services. High-schoolers who are reading at a fourth-grade level need intensive intervention, many hours a day over a long period of time, and this is very costly. Cooper said that one key recommendation of the children's budget recently released by the Los Angeles City Commission for Children, Youth and their Families was to start thinking less about equal distribution and more about tailoring service delivery, and José Huizar has asked the city's chief legislative analyst for a report on this issue.

Berisha Black remarked on the "red flag" of the disproportional representation of African-Americans in DCFS and Probation caseloads, and said she would like to hear what the county is doing about that. According to McCroskey, a study of the county's juvenile justice system

recently completed by the Children's Planning Council identified ethnic disproportionality as a significant issue, and both departments are aware of it.

Citing the success of the ECC's previous outreach to youth, Krinsky recommended holding focus groups with foster and probation students identified as gifted, to find out what common characteristics or patterns have helped them to succeed. Have they been in relative care, or had mentors? Did they enter the system at a certain age? What about their siblings? A graduate student in the audience, who as part of her dissertation is working with six former foster youth in their first year at college, volunteered to share the in-depth data she is collecting.

Reports on Blueprint Implementation

Juvenile Court Presiding Judge Michael Nash reported on steps taken at the court.

- At the beginning of March, he drafted a blanket order instructing schools to provide educational information to DCFS, Probation, children's counsel, and court-appointed special advocates (CASAs). The proposed order was distributed for comment to over 100 stakeholders, including the 81 school districts, and Nash received responses from both LACOE and LAUSD, as well as a letter from the U.S. Department of Education stating that such a blanket order was not consistent with the provisions of the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Nash then sent out that letter and the responses he received, inviting additional comment that he hopes will provide a basis for further action. Anyone affected by this issue is urged to contact his office by May 5.
- A training on the Blueprint for dependency court judicial officers was held last week, and an educational packet was created for each of them. Similar trainings for the delinquency court are also planned, as are 'brown-bag' trainings in dependency to incorporate other players.
- A volunteer panel (318e) addressed educational issues and developed a protocol for the dependency court that has been very successful. That protocol is being revised for the delinquency court, and by the next ECC meeting, training should have begun.

Department of Children and Family Services Lisa Parrish expressed her appreciation for the ECC's efforts around information, saying that data and the Blueprint are serving as tools to keep DCFS focused on creating accountability among caregivers, caseworkers, and service providers in meeting the educational needs of students.

- An internal work group has discovered that all the elements in the Blueprint's sample educational case plan are gathered by existing DCFS forms and systems. The group has been charged with making those education data elements accessible and with training caseworkers on the importance of inputting and extracting them for court reports and management reports. Marv Southard asked if that information could be shared with the Department of Mental Health for DCFS children having open cases there—perhaps in an aggregate way by service provider, if data on individual children is not possible. His department has always wanted to measure educational achievement, since that is often an indicator of whether or not mental health services are helping youngsters, but anything more than caregiver opinion has heretofore not been possible.
- DCFS's medical hubs, now operational nearly countywide, are screening young children for developmental progress and referring them to specialized services when necessary.
- More staff have been approved for team decision-making facilitation, so that all children facing out-of-home placements get TDMs and those in care get them regularly. Helen Kleinberg again suggested that the ECC develop a list of age-specific issues and transition concerns that could be used in TDMs.
- The department is redoubling its efforts to enroll young children in preschool and early childhood programs, and is also focusing on services for youth approaching the high-school exit exam and graduation. Funds have been set aside to hire an education consultant for each regional office by September, to assist and problem-solve with caseworkers.
- DCFS's education and mentoring sections have been combined and more staff have been brought on to provide academic and college mentoring to support youth, set up a college database, and work with other mentoring programs.

- Plans are underway to share the Blueprint's seven basic agreements with the caregivers of the 11,000 children placed with relatives, the 6,000 placed with foster family agencies, and the others placed with licensed caregivers, so they understand their ability to engage around educational issues and their role as educational advocates for the children in their families.

Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA) Bruce Saltzer distributed a written report from his association, which consists of over 80 agencies that serve a wide range of children in foster family agencies and residential treatment. He particularly thanked Sacha Klein, the association's child welfare policy director, and Miriam Krinsky for their help. ACHSA is publicizing the Blueprint internally through its association newsletter and website, and has also responded to several of the Blueprint's specific recommendations.

- *Increased support to parents and caregivers:* ACHSA has compiled a list of free and low-cost tutoring resources, has published tips for enrolling children in LAUSD programs, and will sponsor a training on educational advocacy skills. Member agencies regularly train on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and on recognizing developmental milestones.
- *Enrolling foster and probation youth in enrichment programs:* ACHSA serves on the ICAN Mentoring Task Force, has helped to ensure the inclusion of probation youth in a foster youth mentoring program, and has sponsored member-agency training on successful mentoring. An ACHSA committee also addresses emancipation issues.
- *Youth engagement:* ACHSA has sponsored two youth engagement meetings in 2006 and has disseminated examples of client satisfaction surveys to its members. Group-home members maintain resident advisory councils that represent the perspectives of youth.
- *Transition preparation:* ACHSA is working with others to enforce the provision of AB 490 that requires the immediate enrollment of foster youth despite any missing documentation, and has invited the Children's Law Center to speak on this issue to member foster family agencies. It has also supported the inclusion of a measure in group home and FFA contracts that tracks an agency's performance in getting children enrolled.

- *Electronically based information system:* ACHSA supported the development of the Child Health and Education Electronic Record (CHEER), and conducts annual surveys on the Health and Education Passport Binder.
- *Stakeholder cross-training:* ACHSA committees are open to presentations from the ECC, and its newsletter can advertise training opportunities.
- *Accountability from caseworkers, caregivers, and the courts:* ACHSA has worked with DCFS to expressly include caregivers and community-based agency staff in team decision-making meetings.

ACHSA recommends that the ECC discuss the concept of academic success within the scope of options available to the particular desires, strengths, and skills of each child, avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach.

Department of Mental Health Marv Southard reported on actions his department is already engaged in, as well as its plans for future action steps.

- At present, 70 providers offer school-based services at 700 schools, about 40 percent of those in Los Angeles County. That number would be larger, but the bulk of funding for these services comes from EPSDT, and some districts are reluctant to accommodate programs that are not open to every child.
- In rehabilitation option services, educational attainment is one of the treatment goals for every child, just as employment status is for adults.
- Since many believe that identifying children with mental health issues in middle school may be too late, DMH is focusing on children birth to age five and their family needs.
- According to the Mental Health Services Act, full-service partnerships must include measurable outcomes in a variety of life domains. DMH is expecting proposals for about 3,000 full-service partnership slots to provide children wraparound-type mental health services, and

hopes to make educational achievement one of the mandatory recorded outcomes. The problem is one of data, and it is not completely solved, though the state agrees with the concept.

- Sometime within the next year, the guidelines for the MHSA's outreach and early intervention component, allocating 20 percent of the Act's total funds, will be released. In the case of Los Angeles County's overall \$250 million per year, that means that \$50 million will be available for prevention and early intervention. The county now has an opportunity to think ahead, plan locally, and let its data influence statewide policy.
- One huge barrier to achievement in middle school and high school can be substance abuse, and Southard hopes to expand treatment services by using EPSDT mental health benefits. In past years, an audit exception has been triggered by the very mention of a history of substance abuse, but Southard believes such treatment is clearly an acceptable use of the funding stream and should be maximized. "Ultimately," he said, "it would have a remarkable effect on outcomes."

City of Los Angeles According to Amy Cooper, José Huizar is working with the ECC and the city's Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families to think about a leadership role in moving the Blueprint forward at the city level. The recently released children's budget shows that almost \$530 million is expended by city departments yearly on services for children and youth. What is offered to foster and probation youth?

- Huizar's motion to support foster and probation youth was filed before the city council this month and has been referred to committee. It calls for a number of departments to report back on whether they give priority to these youth in their programs, how many each department serves, which programs are targeted to this population, what caregiver outreach departments conduct, what barriers exist to serving foster and probation youth, what additional outreach and services could be provided with additional capacity, and what resources would be needed to expand.

- The other 14 city council offices need to be educated about the ECC, the Blueprint, and the educational status of foster and probation youth, and Cooper expects the data matches to be the “hook” that will get them interested.
- With the help of the Children’s Law Center, Foster Care Awareness Month will be recognized by the city for the first time with a ceremony next Friday at a special city council meeting in Van Nuys. Foster care heroes will be honored, and art produced by foster youth at a series of Children’s Law Center workshops will be displayed.
- Thanks to Madeline Hall of the Los Angeles County Education Foundation, AB 2798 is on the city’s agenda, legislation that would establish a three-year pilot program of academic and vocational education to youth in probation camps, ranches, and forestry camps. Cooper also asked to be informed of other legislation on which the city should take action.

Children’s Law Center Miriam Krinsky highlighted CLC’s Blueprint accomplishments.

- With the California Youth Connection and other groups, CLC has co-sponsored AB 2489, which supports higher education for foster youth; it is the third in a series of bills that started with AB 490 two years ago. A number of foster care bills are before the legislature this year, and it may be difficult for all of them to be funded. Krinsky will e-mail a fact sheet to the ECC office about pending bills affecting transition-aged youth.
- CLC is arranging an outreach meeting with Cliff Allenby, the interim head of the state Department of Social Services, about implementation efforts.
- The Department of Education is sending a flyer on school enrollment procedures to schools so that registrars, administrators, and staff will have information on enrolling foster youth.
- A Blue Ribbon Commission was formed at the end of March that includes Krinsky, Judge Nash, Justice Marino from the California Supreme Court, Department of Social Services leadership, and Assemblywoman Karen Bass. A hearing on transition-aged youth was held this month, and a separate hearing for education issues is being scheduled.

- Activities for Foster Care Awareness Month in May include the roving art and poetry display created by foster youth (mentioned by Amy Cooper), which is being compiled in a booklet to be distributed nationwide, and an event in Washington, DC, on May 10 and 11 where foster youth will be hosted by members of Congress.
- A core of education experts is training lawyers and investigators on the Blueprint, making sure staff know and understand the issues, and will make themselves available for other trainings as needed.

Los Angeles County Office of Education Darline Robles reported on LACOE's activities in addition to its convening the education dialogue with school superintendents.

- With respect to priority enrollment in early childhood programs, Robles will send the data match to LACOE's delegate agencies.
- Regular regional meetings with school districts will include an agenda item on AB 490.
- In LACOE's annual bulletin to school districts, they will be asked to give foster and probation youth priority for enrichment programs such as the homework hotline, Title I training, and other academic activities.
- In meetings with court schools, considering foster and probation youth for community day schools will be an agenda item.
- LACOE is sponsoring AB 1777, a three-county pilot program for 2,000 youth who have moved from foster care to the delinquency system that will provide a transition counselor for six months after their release from court schools into permanent placement, thus assuring a significant adult who will support their education.

Announcements

- As a member of the First 5 LA Commission, Jacquelyn McCroskey reported that First 5 is beginning to discuss how high-quality early childhood centers can strengthen their outreach

to parents to prevent child abuse and neglect; members have also met with representatives from Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP).

- Bruce Saltzer said that ACHSA agencies are expressing concerns about the timelines for IEPs, which are often not meeting the Federal law requiring assessments and IEPs to be done within 50 days. He will prepare materials for the ECC's July meeting so the group may consider this issue.

Public Comment

- Madeline Hall from the Los Angeles County Education Foundation explained that AB 2798, mentioned by Amy Cooper, has moved to the Appropriations Committee and has received favorable comments from the Republican Caucus. It is a three-county pilot intended for expansion into juvenile court schools, providing intensive literacy support and including post-release follow-up for a year. The copies provided include a sample support letter.
- Suzanne Silverstein from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center met with ECC's Carrie Watson to discuss involving foster and probation youth in Cedars' outpatient programs, as well as in the inpatient services they offer to transition-aged youth. One school-based program works with autistic children and those with major developmental lags, and a companion program works with even younger children to transition them into preschool. Parents and families are an integral part of both programs, and the majority of children are mainstreamed when they finish preschool. A full work-up that includes a psychiatric evaluation assesses children and families, and remarkable strides are made even with children who do not respond to traditional mental health services and medication.

Another Cedars program is affiliated with its Department of Psychiatry and provides school-based services in 11 schools from Angeles Crest to South Central. If staff were aware that foster or probation children attended, they would make sure they were involved in the group therapy offered. Cedars would also consider raising private monies (the services are not funded by DMH) and expanding this program if numerous foster youth were involved.

- Norma Sturgis, the coordinator of LAUSD's Foster Care Unit, reported on the district-wide school training going on, reaching 300 schools so far. She acknowledged the difficulties of getting to all 900 schools despite the current interest in the foster care and probation population. LAUSD is committed to providing school-site advocates at all district schools.
- Alan Eskot, the director of education for Optimist Youth Homes, made several points:
 - The numbers of DCFS and Probation students in nonpublic schools listed at the end of the LAUSD data match appendix are inaccurate by a large factor. The schools themselves number over 100, and Optimist alone has 130 Probation students enrolled.
 - Since the biggest problem for students in grades 9 through 12 is missing transcripts, he suggested stapling whatever transcripts a school has to the youngster's IEP, thereby enhancing the chances that subsequent schools will receive the information.
 - Despite AB 490, it is increasingly difficult for agencies to get students enrolled in public schools when it is appropriate. The number of dual-enrolled children at Optimist has fallen from between 20 and 30 to just 9. This is particularly a problem when children transfer out of residential treatment and move home. In that event, a youngster may continue to attend the Optimist nonpublic school, for example, but LAUSD is not allowing dual enrollment in Eagle Rock High School, as was permitted in previous years.
 - Nonpublic schools test achievement levels every six months, and Eskot is happy to be involved in integrating that data into ECC efforts.

The next meeting of the ECC is scheduled for Thursday, July 27, 2006, at 9:30 a.m., at a location to be determined.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.