



Education Coordinating Council

January 29, 2007

3:00 p.m.

The California Endowment, Yosemite Room A
1000 North Alameda Street, Los Angeles, California

Present: Berisha Black
Carol Clem
Monica Garcia
Rene Gonzalez, representing David Brewer
Leslie Heimov
Helen Kleinberg
Elizabeth Lem, representing Darline Robles
Rafael Lopez, representing Lark Galloway-Gilliam
Aubrey Manuel
Evelyn Martinez
Judge Michael Nash
Trish Ploehn
Bruce Saltzer
Marvin J. Southard
William Stelzner, representing Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana
Robert Taylor

Guest: Lisa Mandel, Third Supervisorial District

Vice Chair Michael Nash brought the meeting to order at 3:15 p.m. and asked ECC members and the audience to introduce themselves. David Brewer, new superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, had planned to attend today's meeting but was called to Sacramento. Chair Jose Huizar met with Brewer in November, and Berisha Black, Monica Garcia, Huizar's deputy and ECC staff met with him on January 18. Garcia reported Brewer's pleasure at seeing the coordination among agencies in Los Angeles, his desire to work with the ECC, and his signing of the AB 490 letter that was then redistributed. Additional meetings with Brewer are planned.

Election of Officers

The current leadership structure of the ECC has worked well, and its officers have done much to take the ECC Blueprint recommendations to their respective constituencies for action. **Helen Kleinberg moved that the current slate of officers be retained for another year:**

Chair: José Huizar, City of Los Angeles Councilmember
Vice Chair: Michael Nash, Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court
Vice Chair: Berisha Black, Emancipation Ombudsman and former foster youth

Aubrey Manuel seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

ECC Annual Report

The annual report included in member packets presents a comprehensive review of the ECC's accomplishments in 2006:

- Raising awareness of the Blueprint and its recommendations through publications, presentations to organizations, participation in conferences, and juvenile court training sessions
- Developing tools and supports such as the ECC website, legislation and budget allocations to help foster and probation youth, data matches to gather information about those youth, and additional funding and consultant team members for the ECC.
- Major strides in the focus areas of early childhood education, youth development, data and information-sharing, and school-based supports
- Enhancing accountability among caregivers, caseworkers, service providers, schools, and others regarding the educational needs of system youth
- Strengthening relationships and role awareness through a first-ever meeting between school superintendents, county departments, and the juvenile court—a second meeting is planned next week—and participating in groups attempting at the state level what the ECC has laid out in its Blueprint

Nash encouraged everyone to read the annual report, and recognized in particular the efforts of Sharon Watson and the consultant team in making the ECC's achievements possible. When the Board of Supervisors adopted the Blueprint last February, it asked for progress reports from the ECC every six months; the next is due on February 15, and the annual report will serve as the basis for that document. Sharon Watson encouraged anyone knowing of accomplishments that may have been missed to contact the ECC office, and staff will try to include them in the report to the Board. In addition, the achievements of ECC members and partners are being posted on the ECC website, and she requested that everyone continue sending their updates.

Collaborative Agreement for Sharing Education Information

A second meeting on the memorandum of understanding to share system youth's education information was held on December 6 with representatives from the Department of Children and Family Services, the Probation Department, the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the public defender's office, County Counsel, CASAs (court-appointed special advocates), the Children's Law Center, and the ECC. Participants agreed on a process for sharing education records and other student information among county caseworkers, school personnel, children's attorneys, and CASAs. Following approval by the ECC, the agreement—which was distributed in member packets—will be signed by the heads of

the agencies and organizations involved in the process, and then shared with all school districts within Los Angeles County. “Different organizations have different needs,” Monica Garcia acknowledged, “and many people have spent many hours figuring out how our institutions might work better to serve children and to share records. If the ECC ratifies this agreement today, we will have changed the way institutions work in L.A.”

Aubrey Manuel moved that the proposed collaborative agreement be ratified; Elizabeth Lem seconded the motion, and it went to the floor for discussion.

Lem suggested modifying the agreement’s language to state that the sharing of identifying information has been only one of the biggest barriers, rather than the biggest, to connecting system youth with services. The Blueprint, however, states clearly that “The sharing of key educational information among county agencies, schools, and caregivers has been repeatedly identified by many stakeholders as the *biggest systems barrier* to achieving the ECC’s goal.” Lem also requested language to ensure that the Student Records Request Form be legible, as faxed copies are sometimes smudged and unreadable. The form itself, though, requires legibility as a condition of its acceptance. In response to another suggestion from Lem, Sharon Watson said that the use of middle initials and titles on the signature page would be made consistent.

Helen Kleinberg asked how this agreement relates to the method by which parents receive copies of these same records, and Watson explained that ensuring that caseworkers share information with parents will be another stage in the process. If parents are the holders of educational rights for the child, they can request records on their own, but many do not realize they have that ability. The agreement’s final paragraph acknowledges that obtaining parental consent for the sharing of records should be a first step; if that isn’t possible, though, another mechanism now exists. Kleinberg asked that language indicate that the ECC intends to do more work in this area. In answer to a question from Bruce Saltzer about how the agreement relates to the blanket order issued on July 15, Judge Nash stated that the courts are enforcing that order as necessary, and it has helped shape and facilitate the discussions leading to this agreement.

The collaborative agreement to share the education records of foster and probation youth was approved without objection. The appropriate signatures will be obtained, and the ECC will monitor progress on the agreement’s implementation to discover where barriers continue to exist. “We’ll do everything possible to break those barriers down,” Nash said, “so that youth get a fair opportunity for a reasonable education, and so that we have the tools we need to pursue better educational outcomes for them. We have a long way to go, but this is a good first step.”

Role of Education in Los Angeles County’s Title IV-E Waiver Plan

Department of Children and Family Services director Trish Ploehn reviewed this history of the Title IV-E waiver, an agreement reached with the Federal government in March 2006 that will allow DCFS and the Probation Department more flexibility in the way they spend their funds. Previous funding was based on the numbers of children in out-of-home care, but with the departmental emphasis shifting to serving children within their homes and communities, Los Angeles County needed a way for the Federal and state governments to fund departments differently. The waiver will allow the county to spend a capped allocation—current projections estimate between \$58 and \$70 million over the waiver’s five years—for programs and initiatives

other than out-of-home care. DCFS and Probation have been planning for months on how to use these funds to improve outcomes for children and to partner with communities to ensure that children who can be served in their own homes are served there. Children who come into either the dependency or delinquency systems should stay for the shortest time possible, returning either to their own homes, safely, or to alternate permanent homes.

Community outreach, focus groups, and analyses of national research yielded 200 possible approaches for the use of this newly flexible funding. These were narrowed down to eight major strategies to implement first, based on what each would cost, what its impact would be, and how fast it could be accomplished. (The quicker the turnaround, the more reduction in caseloads, and thus the more savings available for reinvestment.) “Chief Taylor and I agree,” Ploehn said, “that if children don’t come out of their relationship with our departments with an education, then we’ve done them no good. It’s a huge priority.” Education threads through all eight strategies:

- **Prevention.** A \$5 million allocation will get a prevention initiative started, asking the community in each of the eight service planning areas to decide on what is needed locally. In addition, \$2.5 million from another budget item will establish eight mentorship programs, one in each SPA, as well as five academic mentoring sites.
- **Up-front assessments.** A huge majority of DCFS families struggle with mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence issues. A pre-detainment assessment (similar to the multidisciplinary assessment for children already in the system) will connect families to services in their communities to resolve issues before children are removed. A pilot phase is already in place at eight DCFS regional offices, and education is a major component.
- **Family-finding.** Automated search processes available only recently can help find absent family members prior to children’s detainment, thereby increasing their chances of being placed with relatives. Similar searches for family and other significant adults have been successful with youth emancipating from long-term care, and this adds the process up front.
- **The expansion of team decision-making.** These conferences bring everyone involved in the life of a child to the table, including school personnel, to develop a case plan together.
- **The expansion of family preservation.**
- **Community-based placements.** For children who cannot live with family, the development of placement options in their current communities can prevent them from having to switch schools, a disturbance that often causes them to fall behind academically.
- **Increased visitation.** To strengthen the bonds needed for reunification, visitations—which now average one a month—should increase to four per month. Sibling visits are also critical, since when children have lost parents, those connections may be all they have left.
- **Aftercare.** Youth and families leaving the system should be able to continue receiving services until they are stabilized, especially in school.

Robert Taylor said that the waiver’s collaborative planning process has been extremely beneficial for the two departments as they examined systems and processes for opportunities to

improve and streamline. Judge Nash said that the level of communication, cooperation, and coordination between DCFS and Probation is higher than it ever has been, and is a testament to work done by both in uncovering the possibilities. The goals of the child protection system—safety, permanency, and well-being—all contribute to a child’s ability to do well in school.

Marv Southard announced that the state guidelines for the prevention and early intervention component of the Mental Health Services Act will probably be finalized sometime this spring, and the Department of Mental Health will then engage in another community planning process on how best to spend that allocation. He committed to building on the waiver process to make the effort cumulative rather than duplicative, since prevention and early intervention must partner with education to be effective.

Helen Kleinberg urged the team decision-making process to augment its education component by considering screenings, child care, and in-home services for children birth to age five, who make up a large proportion of DCFS caseloads. “We can’t forget about the little ones,” she said. Focusing on prevention for teen parents in care, so their children don’t end up in care themselves, is also important, and Ploehn said that a county work group is studying issues for pregnant and parenting teens and is on the verge of securing funds to work with agencies specializing in that population. Communities, too, will be asked to determine if pregnant and parenting teens are a priority for prevention dollars. Parenting teens in care are seldom considered part of a geographic community, Leslie Heimov commented, and the county would be well advised to consider that population in some other way.

From the audience, Candace Kavanagh commended DCFS and Probation for their waiver plans, and further praised the ECC for ratifying the record-sharing collaborative agreement.

Pasadena Unified School District/DCFS Data Match

Carrie Watson presented the results of a data match between the Pasadena Unified School District and the Department of Children and Family Services, in which active DCFS caseloads from November 2005 (all students known to DCFS, not just those in out-of-home care) were matched against PUSD’s enrollment file as of February 2006. Of the total 21,321 students in PUSD at that time, 361 were identified as foster youth based on a match of names and addresses—almost certainly an undercount of the actual population. (A large number of group homes also exist within the PUSD catchment area, but many of those youth attend nonpublic schools, which do not appear in the PUSD database. The PUSD director of evaluation estimated that perhaps another 300 foster youth are in nonpublic schools within district boundaries, but emphasized that the figure was only a guess.)

DCFS youth account for approximately 1 percent of all PUSD students, and the majority of DCFS students were in elementary or high school, with the highest number in ninth grade. DCFS students were more likely to be African-American, while the total PUSD student body was predominately Latino. Almost twice as many DCFS students were enrolled in special education programs as the general population, and only six were identified as gifted or talented. Attendance rates for DCFS students were similar to those for PUSD students as a whole, belying the oft-made assumption that foster youth lag behind because they miss class. Achievement scores

resembled those in the Los Angeles Unified School District, with foster youth performing significantly behind the larger population, and an appreciable dip in the middle school years.

Suspension data was available only for DCFS students, and 85 out of the 361 youth—nearly one-quarter—were suspended at some point during the partial school year studied (September through February). Sixty percent of students had only one suspension incident, and nearly half the total incidents (46.6 percent) took place in grades seven and eight. Nearly three-quarters of suspension incidents involved ‘less serious’ violations such as being out of class or off campus, disrupting a school activity, damaging property, possessing tobacco, using profanity, or violating the dress code. Of the remaining ‘more serious’ incidents, an overwhelming majority involved violence, with a few involving drugs or theft.

The ECC performed a data match with the Los Angeles Unified School District in April 2006, and despite the differences in size between the two districts—PUSD’s 21,000+ students versus LAUSD’s approximately 800,000—much of the demographic and achievement data was remarkably similar. More data matches with the school districts that sit on the ECC may determine if these are patterns that persist.

Rafael Lopez asked about the ground-level approach with school leadership to marry this data with long-term prevention efforts. Carrie Watson replied that data matches can serve as a road map for trainings with teachers, administrators, counselors, education liaisons, and possibly the education workers now being hired in DCFS regional offices. The school superintendent meetings are also a vehicle to discover ways in which the ECC can help change these numbers.

Jacquelyn McCroskey stressed that the PUSD numbers were the best use of available data, and cautioned against using the document’s appendix, showing individual schools and the numbers of DCFS youth in attendance, for anything but planning purposes—a way to help districts identify key schools where they can mount resources to make an overall impact.

Sharon Watson complimented DCFS for expanding its academic mentoring programs into middle schools, which both the LAUSD and PUSD data matches identify as a hot-spot for downturns in achievement. “Congratulations on using data to drive program planning for the department,” she said, and Trish Ploehn thanked education section head Lisa Parrish. An audience member emphasized the help that many students also need in fourth and fifth grades, and with the transition to middle school, to prevent them from descending “the downward slope.”

Judge Nash encouraged everyone to think beyond finding all the answers in the schools. “No one here is saying we need to figure out what schools should do better,” he said. “If that’s where our mindset is, we’re bound to fail. We need to look around this table—we’re all stakeholders for kids. Unless we do a better job with permanency, with safety, with other elements of well-being, talking about what the schools aren’t doing is not going to get us where we want to be. It’s all interrelated.” Monica Garcia agreed, saying that the ECC’s role is not just to develop “a practice piece for the school-site folks. We also need a policy piece, where we all serve as advocates. Children with different circumstances need different services. For LAUSD, that’s a big belief change, challenging the notion that one type of instruction is beneficial to all kids. Even surfacing that issue,” she continued, “makes us think as a system about where we’re going for children, and the data piece helps us do that. We’re creating the expectation that results could be different,

and that's very powerful in public discourse. Because Mayor Villaraigosa asked questions, folks are talking about what we might do. Not everybody's on board, but we need to continue to ask those questions."

Pomona Unified School District Update

Pomona Unified's director of pupil resources and school climate, Bill Stelzner, reported that its new superintendent, Dr. Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana, is looking forward to a data match so that it can target services to foster and probation youth. One advantage foster youth have in Pomona is that they are enrolled immediately, even if all the documentation usually required has not yet followed them. Health services, including immunizations and physical exams, are available to all 30,000 district students at Pomona's family resource center, and foster and homeless youth receive special supports in the form of backpacks, school supplies, and uniforms.

Pomona Unified is one of four lead agencies in the area for the DCFS family preservation and family support grants, and has been involved with family preservation since the program's inception 13 years ago. The district also works with DCFS in the team decision-making process, seeking to maintain the integrity of families and prevent detainment. It has a good relationship with the DCFS regional administrator, who has established a community collaborative involving the Probation Department and local community-based organizations. A Casey Foundation partnership with DCFS, the local police, and Probation is also active.

Patti Azevedo, Pomona Unified's mental health coordinator, described the district's Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, a collaborative with five county agencies—including Probation, DCFS, and the Department of Mental Health—that is funded by a \$9 million Federal grant and is in its first year. To provide access to mental health services for all students, intervention specialists and case managers are placed in the district's middle and high schools to accept referrals from teachers, students, parents, nurses, and the family resource center. Drug and alcohol programs at the middle and high school sites also provide services for students suspended or expelled for substance abuse. From September through December 2006, over 375 students were connected with appropriate resources through this program.

Mike Edwards, director of the area's Probation office, has been very helpful in working with students coming out of the probation camps and juvenile halls. Thirty to 45 days prior to release, an intervention specialist/case manager, a school-based probation officer, and the youth's family meet with camp probation staff to develop a plan for the youth's return to school so there is no delay in enrollment. A team also meets in camp to talk about student needs—what their strengths are, what they are interested in, what academic credits they have, and what they need to earn. In November, Safe Schools/Healthy Students representatives met with the directors of all the probation camps to discuss using Camp Rockey's teleconferencing facilities to overcome the logistical challenges of coordinating with camps in remote locations.

Youth Update

Berisha Black introduced Jacque Lindeman from the California Youth Connection, a youth advocacy organization whose mission is to empower system youth to achieve policy and practice changes. It has 24 chapters throughout the state, of which Los Angeles is the largest. Lindeman

reported on the fourteenth annual Day at the Capitol event held in Sacramento last week, at which youth from all chapters, after two days of practice, made presentations to members of the state assembly (state senators were in ethics trainings). This year's agenda concentrated on explaining—especially to the 40 brand-new legislators—who foster youth are, and on encouraging support for Assemblymember Karen Bass's bill to ensure services for the approximately 2,000 youth in halls and camps who have crossed over from the dependency system. The event attracted 170 youth and adult supporters, including 20 youth from the Los Angeles chapter. Lindeman expressed appreciation to the six adult supporters who accompanied them, and to DCFS for its financial support of the venture.

The following day, Casey Family Programs held a summit on educational issues for foster youth in California, planned to be an annual event. About a dozen youth, plus representatives from Foster Youth Services, DCFS, Probation, and other organizations, formed work groups on AB 490, foster youth's special academic needs, higher education, data, etc., making suggestions on policy and practice changes in those areas that were presented to a select committee headed by Assemblymember Bass. In the open forum afterwards, current and former foster youth shared how foster care and education has affected their lives. The policy recommendations from this event will be released this week, and will be available on the California Youth Connection's website along with its other reports. An audience member noted the mention of the California Youth Connection in a *Los Angeles Times* article this past weekend, crediting the organization for many changes that have been accomplished for youth leaving care.

Black announced a 'speak out' event with pregnant and parenting teens tomorrow at St. Anne's.

Next Meeting

Judge Nash drew members' attention to the schedule of meetings for the remainder of the year, and reminded those involved of the school superintendents' meeting scheduled for February 5 at Los Angeles County Office of Education headquarters.

The ECC's next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 26, 2007, at 9:30 a.m., at a location to be announced.

There being no public comment, the meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.