



Education Coordinating Council

October 24, 2007

3:00 p.m.

The California Endowment Center for Healthy Communities

Redwood Room

1000 North Alameda Street, Los Angeles, California

Present: Yolie Flores Aguilar
Berisha Black
Carol Clem
Jullie Eutsler, representing Howard Sundberg
Mónica Garcia
René Gonzalez, representing David L. Brewer III
Leslie Heimov
José Huizar
Jan Isenberg, representing Darline P. Robles
Rafael Lopez
Aubrey Manuel
Richard Martinez, representing Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana
Machelle Massey
Teresa Nuno, representing Evelyn Martinez
Trish Ploehn
Bruce Saltzer
Nina Sorkin
Marvin J. Southard
Robert Taylor

Chair José Huizar brought the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m. and asked ECC members and the audience to introduce themselves. He welcomed Nina Sorkin as the newly elected chair of the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families, and congratulated Leslie Heimov on her appointment as executive director of the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles.

Huizar praised the progress being made on implementing Blueprint recommendations; today's meeting concentrates on early childhood education, an area of much interest to the large audience in attendance. Both the president and vice president of the Los Angeles Unified School District school board (Mónica Garcia and Yolie Flores Aguilar) are present as well, adding to the unique connections that enable the ECC to achieve its goals. The Blueprint recognizes the

importance of enrolling children under the supervision of the Department of Children and Family Services, as well as the children of DCFS and Probation youth, into high-quality early care and education programs, and a set of recommendations will be presented for expanding participation in those programs.

Staff Updates

- The ECC's latest progress report to the Board of Supervisors was submitted on August 14. The next is due in February, when lead consultant Sharon Watson hopes activities can be broken down by specific Blueprint recommendation.
- Another in the ongoing series of school superintendents' meetings with county department heads and the juvenile court's Judge Michael Nash will take place on November 2, hosted by the Los Angeles County Office of Education. At least 32 school districts have confirmed their attendance so far, and one of the topics will be the Blueprint recommendation about easing transitions between different levels of education. A report on that meeting will be made to the ECC in January.
- The ECC meeting calendar for 2008 was distributed. Meetings will move back to the last Thursday morning of each quarter in hopes of better synchronizing with member schedules.

Early Childhood Education Report and Recommendations

Chair Huizar thanked DCFS director Trish Ploehn and Chief Probation Officer Robert Taylor for their leadership and generous assistance with the early childhood education report, *Investing in the Future of L.A.'s Most At-Risk Children*. He also thanked Cecilia Custodio and Dr. Rae Hahn from DCFS and Sharon Harada and her staff from Probation for patiently gathering and sharing key information with ECC researchers. Their assistance was especially critical in the preparation of the data report (included in member packets), which brings together for the first time information from three different systems—child welfare, probation, and early care and education—to sound a call to action.

Strengthening Families In considering the long-term benefits of early childhood education for Los Angeles County's most vulnerable children, the ECC is fully in line with many researchers nationwide, and Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey outlined key findings about the integration of early childhood education and child welfare.

Although early childhood programs are very important in getting young children ready for school, they are equally important in helping parents assist their children to do well. Successful efforts include two interventions: a half-day preschool program, four days a week, plus weekly 90-minute home visits by the child's teacher. During those visits, parents are prepared to act as their offspring's first teachers and advocates, learning what skills to work on with their youngsters, how to navigate school systems, how to interact with teachers and other professionals, and so on. Some programs follow the child through third grade, for a total of five years of involvement. Interestingly, programs such as these have also been found to serve as primary prevention for child maltreatment. Participating families are less likely to be reported to a child abuse hotline, and, if they are reported, the children spend fewer days in care. Child welfare and early

childhood communities across the country are currently exploring ways to expand access to these programs for the children needing them most, and an unprecedented level of openness to that idea seems to exist among elected officials, heads of agencies, and school districts.

Brain development research, too, shows not only that young children's brains develop in interaction with adults, but that the brain scans of abused and neglected youngsters are noticeably different than those of other children. Although some of these differences can be overcome, purposeful efforts over time must be made to enable these children to catch up with their age mates.

Report Overview ECC consultant Terry Ogawa reviewed the three Blueprint goals in the early childhood area:

- ⊗ Enrolling larger numbers of DCFS children, and the children of DCFS and Probation youth, in high-quality early intervention, care, and education programs
- ⊗ Providing better support to families (parents, relative caregivers, and foster parents)
- ⊗ Preparing DCFS and Probation children for transitions to preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, adult education, vocational school, college, and employment, and for transfers between schools

The *Investing in the Future* report outlines several activities under each of these goals, including the Steps To Excellence Project (STEP), a quality rating system now being initiated in nine communities within Los Angeles County. Its intent is to help inform parents about the quality of licensed care available for their children, and Ogawa acknowledged the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and the county's Office of Child Care for their help in making Los Angeles the first county in the state to pilot a rating system like this.

Although braiding together initiatives from the child welfare, probation, and early childhood arenas makes sense, the three systems have historically evolved with distinctly separate mandates, policies, regulations, and funding streams. (The term 'caregiver,' for example, means something different in each.) A primary challenge remains the overwhelming need for services versus the relatively small amount of money available for those services. "Building cooperation and collaboration is difficult when the need is so great, but the pot is so small," Ogawa said. The data report accompanying *Investing in the Future* is a great achievement, presenting for the first time combined information from the three systems to shed light on how initiatives might move forward. Ogawa acknowledged researchers McCroskey and Becki Nadybal for their work.

Data Report The data report combined 'point in time' caseload counts with considerations of the mobility of children within the system and policy changes being made in departments. It analyzed data from five sources:

- ⊗ DCFS caseload information on all children age five and under who were served in calendar year 2006; this included cases from previous years that were still open as of January 1, as well as all cases opened during 2006
- ⊗ Data on two cohorts of children five and under who entered DCFS in fiscal years 2004–2005 and 2005–2006
- ⊗ Data on licensed child care spaces in Los Angeles County

- ⊗ A survey of Probation youth on parenting and pregnancy, from September 2007
- ⊗ Data on child care usage by families receiving Women Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition services

Jacquelyn McCroskey summarized the report findings.

- DCFS can facilitate access to high-quality early childhood education and family support services for a very large number of vulnerable children and their caregivers—20,203 children age five and under were part of the DCFS caseload in 2006.
- Between a quarter and a third of these children are under the age of one year, but an extreme shortage of infant care spaces exists.
- African-American and American Indian children are disproportionately represented in the DCFS population, compared to their concentrations in the general population.
- Geographically, the highest concentrations of young children were in SPA 6 (one in five of all children served), along with SPAs 2, 3, 7, and 8.
- Forty percent of young children entering the system are staying at home with their families, and another large percentage are placed with relative caregivers. Families who can't find or pay for early childhood programs should be a focus, as should helping foster family agencies improve access.
- Child care capacity is strained in many areas, and is misaligned with the numbers of children needing care, especially in terms of infant slots.
- A small sample of WIC data suggests that foster parents make less use of early childhood programs than do biological parents.
- A recent survey of probation youth, excluding those in probation camps, indicates that 453 youth were pregnant or parenting.

Maps were included in member packets that showed a point-in-time distribution of young children in placement—the first stage, Terry Ogawa said, in overlaying need with resources such as Head Start programs, Los Angeles Universal Preschool sites, and so on.

Recommendations *Investing in the Future* lays out the tremendous need for systems to move beyond the current patchwork of services by embracing a policy that intentionally coordinates and organizes them under one umbrella. The report's overarching recommendation is that the ECC **adopt a unified strategy that integrates the systems of early care and education, child welfare, and probation, for young children age five and under.**

1. **Convene key stakeholders** (DCFS, Probation, the Department of Mental Health, First 5 LA, the Chief Executive Office's Office of Child Care, the Association of Community Human Services Agencies, and others) **to determine how to operationalize a Los Angeles County child welfare/early care and education initiative.**

2. **Ask representatives of existing systems to commit to this strategy by signing a Memorandum of Understanding to build this integrated child welfare/probation/early childhood education initiative.**
3. **The ECC should spearhead a countywide initiative that ensures that all children from birth to age five who are under the supervision of county departments have the opportunity to participate in high-quality child development programs.** A similar initiative in Illinois aimed to enroll 100 percent of three- to five-year-olds in Head Start or similar programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The effort achieved 50 percent of its goal within a year.
4. **Make policy changes and investments (Federal, state, and local) to provide public and private agencies with the flexibility they need to blend services and funding for these children. Create a common policy agenda that advocates for additional funds to expand high-quality child care services.**
5. **The ECC should partner with First 5 LA, DCFS, Probation, DMH, and other agencies to develop a marketing and information strategy that specifically targets individuals, professionals, parents, and caregivers associated with DCFS and youth in the probation system.**

Robert Taylor moved to accept these recommendations; Marv Southard seconded the motion, and it went to the floor for discussion.

Discussion With regard to **Recommendation 1**, Robert Taylor moved to add the Department of Public Health to the list of stakeholders, with an eye to involving visiting nurses who perform in-home visits—a proven strategy, he said, for preventing delinquency and the need for foster care. Marv Southard also would like DPH to look at families’ substance abuse treatment needs. Yolie Flores Aguilar moved to also include the Los Angeles Unified School District in the stakeholder list, since one goal of its early childhood division—which serves 30,000 children—is for youngsters entering kindergarten to have had a strong early childhood education experience. Teresa Nuno asked that First 5 LA join the stakeholder table, too, to discuss investments and current funding opportunities. In addition, Flores Aguilar moved to add the words “that includes a focus on strengthening families” to the last portion of the bolded recommendation language.

Taylor questioned the need for the MOU proposed in **Recommendation 2** if the strategy will ultimately be approved by the Board of Supervisors, but Sharon Watson explained the importance of stakeholder systems’ signing a public commitment to work together. Chair Huizar also noted that the Board does not have jurisdiction over all the agencies involved, and that the MOU would simply be a commitment to move in a general direction.

Even with a strong preschool experience, Taylor said, research shows that substantial drop-offs in educational performance after age seven are prevalent. He suggested that **Recommendation 3** focus on overall outcomes for children, not just on a single age grouping, and proposed developing a comprehensive transition plan for youngsters regardless of age. Taylor believes it would also be helpful to develop a matrix of skills—academic, interpersonal, leisure activities, cogni-

tive, spiritual, mental health, physical wellness—that are necessary for youth to be successful, establishing a holistic model on how to comprehensively take care of a child.

Recommendation 3 is limited to children age five and under, Terry Ogawa explained, to take advantage of all the early childhood programs available. Some state-subsidized child care programs go up to age 12, however, and efforts to integrate those with other systems will not focus solely on young children. Ogawa and the ECC's youth development consultant, Michelle Koenig Barritt, have discussed the continuum that needs to be created to maintain services to children after age five. Mónica Garcia proposed adding an element to Recommendation 3 that promotes a vision of early childhood education as a part of the pre-kindergarten through higher education pipeline, setting the cornerstone for that expectation. Garcia also referenced the Illinois readiness study, which tried to achieve 100 percent enrollment throughout an entire state in a single year. "Our recommendation sounds as if it's limited to kids already in the system," she said. "I'd rather have it say that as a county, we're going to enroll *all* three- to five-year-olds, period. If we do this right, it's about every child. The scope is what we're challenged by." In its initial year, the Illinois initiative achieved half its goal—50 percent enrollment—and Berisha Black asked about Los Angeles County's enrollment percentage, which Jacquelyn McCroskey said is unknown. No baseline exists because the data is not consistently and comprehensively collected.

Rafael Lopez suggested more clarity in Recommendation 3 about who will do the work over what period of time. The ECC will convene the stakeholders mentioned in Recommendation 1, Watson explained, and those stakeholders will then identify a lead, desired outcomes, and a time-frame. (DCFS has already committed to obtaining baseline data and to tracking progress.) If oversight from an offshoot of the ECC is necessary, with a separate staff and resources, stakeholders will need to decide the shape and funding of that vehicle. Under its current Board of Supervisors authority, the ECC will sunset in another year.

Nina Sorkin reminded attendees of a United Way report from five years ago, *Success by Six*, that found the benchmark for language development to be age two; she emphasized the importance of capturing the birth-to-age-three population (served by Early Head Start) rather than concentrating on ages three to five. Other research indicates that the repetition of second grade tends to be an automatic predictor of the failure to finish high school, and Sorkin urged the continuation for older children of encouragement and enrichment programs.

McCroskey expressed her pleasure that so many First 5 LA colleagues were in the audience, as eight years of conversations have been conducted there around this very issue. Enormous efforts have gone into preschool programs, she said, but the under-three population still requires much attention. She emphasized the need for an "in-depth immersion in what we've learned about the openness of systems in Los Angeles, so we don't bat our heads against the same walls." The *Investing in the Future* report references programs for three- to five-year-olds because there are so many, Ogawa said, but she agreed that the focus needs to be on a comprehensive, family-centered initiative for children through age five. The Illinois school readiness initiative, for instance, began with universal preschool, but also looked at ways to connect with parents and develop positive relationships from before a child's birth through the preschool years.

Trish Ploehn noted the similarities between Recommendation 3 and the county's Healthier Communities, Stronger Families, Thriving Children (HST) prevention initiative. That effort's two prongs, one administered through DCFS and one through the Chief Executive Office, are currently being combined and should go before the Board of Supervisors for approval next month. Partnerships with HST, First 5, and other initiatives are essential, Watson agreed, as the ECC's intention is to build on what already exists rather than beginning a parallel process.

Marv Southard voiced concerns about **Recommendation 4** that were similar to those expressed about Recommendation 3: unless someone is directly in charge of making policy changes, policy doesn't get changed. If the stakeholder work group is responsible, that needs to be made clear. Some needed policy changes are already evident, Watson said, such as allowing pregnant teens to sign up for the central eligibility list for subsidized child care prior to a baby's being born, rather than having to wait until after the birth, as is now required.

In response to René Gonzalez's question about the report's recurring references to "high-quality programs," Kathy Malaske-Samu of the county's Office of Child Care explained that the Steps To Excellence Project (STEP) establishes a rating system for licensed care that looks at six components affecting child outcomes, and also creates a support system for child care providers wanting to improve. STEP, which was developed by the Policy Roundtable for Child Care, launched pilots in nine communities in July. The rating system incorporates LAUSD standards, and details and specific materials are available at <http://www.childcare.lacounty.gov>. First 5 LA has long been active in discussing quality rating mechanisms, and a wealth of research on evidence-based practices has also analyzed the kinds of standards necessary.

At present, only about 10 percent of licensed child care slots in Los Angeles County meet the STEP standard, Malaske-Samu said, and between 7 and 8 percent are judged to be actively harmful to children. Those providers who fall in the middle are not doing any damage, but are not promoting the expectations the ECC would like to see, either. As an incentive to improve services, STEP introduces a tiered reimbursement rate that increases payments to providers as they move up the quality scale. One pilot is being done through Connections for Children in Santa Mónica, and that city has allocated \$3 million for the first year of the pilot; DCFS has committed further funds for years two and three.

With regard to the thrust of all the recommendations, Leslie Heimov urged the inclusion of an accountability piece referencing the court system, to ensure that agencies refer families to these programs and that families attend. "The buck stops with the court," she said.

Bruce Saltzer further commented that Recommendations 1 and 2 seem overarching, whereas Recommendations 3, 4, and 5 seem like elements under the first recommendation. Huizar agreed that the recommendation structure may need to be reconsidered in light of concerns about different child populations and the goals of the overall 'pipeline' of services.

Audience members also contributed suggestions for the recommendations:

- The stakeholder group should quickly divide the changes needed to achieve Recommendation 4's stated goals into three areas—legislative, policy and procedural, and philosophical.

- Centers for young children need to focus on the social and emotional education of children and families, as well as on their preparation for the academic world. The ECC should look for long-lasting nonprofit centers that have weathered the struggle for limited funding, and help these proven approaches remain viable. What have those centers done to make their mark in their communities? Why have people worked to keep them open?
- Penny Markey reminded the group to keep the quality-of-life departments in mind—libraries, parks and recreation, and others. These agencies already work closely with DCFS and Probation on many initiatives, and are eager to support the central participants in this effort.
- A strong correlation exists between teacher education/training and the quality of the classroom experience, but low pay scales tend to push early childhood teachers out of the field. Assistance with capacity-building and the business end of things could be very helpful for providers, and the disparities between need levels and the number of programs (especially for infants and toddlers) must be addressed.
- The California League of Women Voters has named 2008 as a ‘year of education,’ looking at pre-kindergarten through grade 12 and the policy and legislative changes necessary for education reform.
- Research shows that children who experience the most sustained benefit from preschool programs have the strongest parent involvement. However, foster parents or relative caregivers have many other commitments, such as medical or court-ordered appointments, multiple children in their care, and so forth. Linking parent involvement with school outcomes is an important component.
- Kathy Malaske-Samu provided flyers for the state Department of Education’s new application for general child development dollars to serve children from birth to age 12 who are in the system or have working parents. “We’ve been wrestling since World War Two with these issues,” she said. “We need to partner with other constituencies that are part of the child development world. Working together, we can make a difference.”

Having taken extensive notes of today’s discussion, ECC staff members plan to incorporate the various suggestions into the draft of *Investing in the Future* and distribute a revised version to ECC members within the next couple of weeks. **Hearing no objections to the recommendations as modified, Chair Huizar declared them approved as amended.**

Huizar thanked everyone for their participation in the discussion, saying that early stimulation provides the framework for the rest of children’s lives. “Providing good, solid, high-quality services is a basic thing,” he said. “We’ve accomplished a lot in setting the direction we’d like to go in, but there are many blanks still to be filled in. That’s how the ECC started, as an idea that has flowered into what we see today—an opportunity to improve the lives of thousands of kids.”

Announcements

- Jan Isenberg noted that the Los Angeles County Office of Education serves 24,000 children in Head Start programs, and its parenting and community services section also has training

programs for family child care in multiple languages. LACOE is also involved with state pre-school programs and in supporting WIC parents within the county's 81 school districts.

- The next meeting of the stakeholder group for the prevention and early intervention component of the Mental Health Services Act will take place tomorrow, October 25, from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. at St. Anne's. Children from birth to age three are one focus of this recently begun planning process for mental health services; most decisions will be made at the SPA level.

Public Comment

A member of the audience asked about plans to add preschools to schools that don't already have them within the county's 81 school districts. That issue will be discussed at the upcoming meeting with school superintendents scheduled for November 2.

Next Meeting

The ECC's next meeting is scheduled for:

**Thursday, January 31, 2008
9:30 to 11:30 a.m.**

The California Endowment Center for Healthy Communities
1000 North Alameda Street, Los Angeles, California

At the request of Yolie Flores Aguilar, the meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m. in memory of Vivian Weinstein, a respected child advocate in Los Angeles for many decades.