



Education Coordinating Council

January 29, 2009

9:30 a.m.

St. Anne's

155 North Occidental Boulevard, Los Angeles, California

Present: Jenny Aguas, representing Mónica Garcia
Carol Clem
Reuben De Leon, representing Evelyn V. Martinez
Leslie Heimov
Jitahadi Imara, representing Robert Taylor
Harvey Kawasaki, representing Trish Ploehn
Yvette King-Berg
Rafael López, representing Miriam Long
Machelle Massey
Martha Trevino Powell, representing Nina Sorkin
Ron Randolph, representing Darline P. Robles
Bruce Saltzer
Marvin J. Southard
William Stelzner, representing Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana

In the absence of Chair José Huizar, who was unexpectedly called away, Marv Southard brought the meeting to order at 9:39 a.m., asking that Education Coordinating Council members and the audience introduce themselves.

- Vice Chair Michael Nash is out of town this week, Vice Chair Berisha Black is working on a month-long project in Georgia, Trish Ploehn is in Sacramento, and Robert Taylor is meeting with the Chief Executive Officer this morning.
- Miriam Long, the City of Los Angeles's deputy mayor for education, youth and families, has been appointed the city's representative to the ECC, with Rafael López (director of the city's Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families) serving as her alternate. Southard characterized Long—who will attend in April—as “a dynamite addition to the group” whose inclusion offers a valuable partnership.
- The California Community Foundation was so impressed with the final report the ECC submitted in October on its just-completed two-year grant that the foundation approved two additional years of funding in December, totaling \$100,000.

- The next biannual meeting of school superintendents is scheduled for March 9, 2009, at the headquarters of the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

Proposed Institutionalization of the ECC Within the County's Chief Executive Office

As members know, the ECC was created by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in November 2004 with a sunset date of July 1, 2009. Supported by an outstanding consultant team, the organization has achieved much during its tenure, including the completion of at least several components of every recommendation in its Blueprint for action.

At the July 2008 meeting, members expressed the desire to continue on as a collaborative entity to accomplish all the work still remaining, and staff was directed in October to move forward with the option of continuing the ECC in its present structure, but as a primarily county-funded effort. (The Children's Council—formerly the Children's Planning Council—serves as the ECC's fiscal agent, and all ECC funding commitments are currently scheduled to cease at the end of June.) Chair José Huizar drafted a memo to the Board of Supervisors, spurring Supervisors Antonovich and Yaroslavsky to introduce a motion (copies of which were in member packets) directing the Chief Executive Officer to report back in 60 days on the feasibility of institutionalizing the ECC within the Chief Executive Office, ensuring that no new net county costs are incurred. The Board unanimously passed that motion on January 6.

Discussions are underway with Kathy House and Brian Mahan from the Chief Executive Office regarding the transition, and today's conversation will provide feedback on issues or concerns members may identify that will then be incorporated into the March report to the Board.

In response to a question from Ron Randolph, ECC director Carrie Miller said that details of the funding model to be used—budget, staffing, and how county and private resources such as the California Community Foundation grant will be integrated—are still being worked out. Deputy Chief Executive Officer Miguel Santana, who heads the county's children and families' well-being administrative cluster, has been invited to the ECC's April meeting to talk about the final plan. Marv Southard mentioned the model already in use within the Chief Executive Office to deal with the county's homeless population, through which staff works with cities and other entities to find common solutions, using allocated resources more intelligently and thereby saving money in the long run. Stability of funding—so that the ECC is not subject to a continual problematic dedication of resources—is also a concern, although Southard commented (referring to the current economic downturn and subsequent budget crisis) that plans should be drawn up based on “what we might imagine in more calm times,” as he put it, “assuming improvements to this extraordinarily choppy present moment.” The plan is to move from a mostly part-time consultant team to full-time county staff, which will also contribute to the body's permanency.

Emphasizing the commitment the ECC must maintain to ensuring that foster and probation youth receive more services, Rafael López made three recommendations:

- At least one permanent full-time-equivalent (FTE) position must be built into whatever structure is chosen. (This is the plan, lead consultant Sharon Watson explained, and several Council members had suggested after the last meeting that the ECC have input as to who that person should be.)

- ECC staff should be housed in the offices of The Children’s Council rather than in the Chief Executive Office, creating useful synergy with another organization having cross-departmental membership.
- The ECC should remain in place as a transparent, public oversight body guiding the work. “The audience involvement with this group has been a real godsend. Few structures anywhere allow for this kind of participation,” López said. “It’s important that we continue the authority of this group.” Leslie Heimov agreed, emphasizing that the core of the ECC concept is bringing together the collaborative will, energy, and decision-making authority of people who can make things happen.

Watson, who moved into the executive director position at The Children’s Council last August, explained that The Children’s Council—as part of its move from planning to more directly improving outcomes for children and families—recently downsized, reducing Council numbers from 51 to 33 and laying off 15 staff. “We have the space,” Watson said of The Children’s Council headquarters, “and we’re certainly open to welcoming ECC staff. It’s a question of where the ECC could get the most work done as it moves deeper into implementing the Blueprint. There are advantages to being at the CEO, which is over all county operations and can convene county departments—that’s one of the reasons for the original concept of the ECC.”

Even with the CEO providing direct county funding, the partnership with The Children’s Council as the ECC’s fiscal agent is expected to continue, giving the ECC the flexibility to solicit private funds and pay for additional events or consultants outside the normal county ‘pocket.’ Some kind of dual reporting status for staff—with accountability to both the Chief Executive Office and the ECC—is also being explored. (As a Board-created body, the ECC already has accountability to that entity, to which it makes progress reports twice a year, in addition to its accountability to the Council.)

Heimov suggested stepping back from specifying the role of The Children’s Council in terms of housing ECC staff, as she is reluctant to tie anyone’s hands in ongoing negotiations with the Chief Executive Office. Southard concurred. “This is the early developmental phase of a complex relationship,” he said. “We all agree that the intention is for the ECC’s relationship with The Children’s Council to allow for flexibility with regard to outside funding. That flexibility and the need for fiscal stability are the two poles of this process in the long run, and they will need to be balanced.”

With friendly amendments from Leslie Heimov and Bruce Saltzer, Rafael López moved that the ECC support its institutionalization within the Chief Executive Office, recommending that the process embrace the following goals:

- ✓ **Maintain the current structure of the ECC as a body.**
- ✓ **Establish full-time staffing for the ECC.**
- ✓ **Include representatives from the ECC in the selection process for full-time staff.**
- ✓ **Ensure that the ECC’s placement within the Chief Executive Office allows the maximum flexibility for multiple additional funding sources, including those from the private sector.**
- ✓ **Maintain staff’s joint accountability to both the ECC and the Board of Supervisors.**

Bruce Saltzer seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Details of the transition will be presented at the April meeting, and ECC members will be polled in the meantime if issues arise that need immediate attention.

Proposed Creation of a Countywide Education Division

Supervisor Gloria Molina recently requested that the Department of Children and Family Services, with the Chief Executive Office as a key collaborative partner, look at creating a countywide education division. DCFS director Trish Ploehn has asked the ECC (in her absence) for its initial thoughts on the idea. A work group—consisting of Harvey Kawasaki from DCFS, Carrie Miller from the ECC, and Jenny Serrano, the Chief Executive Office’s transition-aged youth coordinator—will develop a proposal for Supervisor Molina, but members have not yet met. “The group doesn’t have any preconceived concepts,” Kawasaki said, “beyond expanding to include Probation, the Department of Mental Health, and other ECC members.”

Kawasaki proposed several questions as a basis for the ECC’s discussion:

1. Is there a need for a countywide education division?
2. What should be the charge/focus of this division? (What is its ‘business’?)
3. What do you see as its primary goals?
4. What must be in place structurally to ensure the integration of the division’s efforts with other efforts—those of the ECC, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, and school districts (in other words, not creating another silo)?
5. Other than ECC members, who are this division’s natural partners?
6. What should this division *not* do?

Several members expressed confusion as to proposed division’s purpose. “I don’t get it,” Leslie Heimov said. “That’s what the ECC is supposed to be doing, isn’t it? The departments have their hands full doing their jobs. If the county’s looking for a place to spend money, they should hire more social workers or more providers of mental health services. I don’t see how this is a priority, given the many other areas that need resources.” Bruce Saltzer agreed; if the proposed division’s focus is on foster and probation children, as is the ECC’s, it makes more sense to dedicate additional staff to the ECC itself. “Spending more money on additional infrastructure within the county seems like a waste,” Saltzer commented.

Ron Randolph asked about the division’s proposed activities—collecting data? providing assistance to school districts in educating students? monitoring or evaluating the adequacy of programs?—wondering if they would not duplicate the charges of the many other agencies overseeing school districts now. “If you ask school superintendents if they need another oversight agency,” Randolph said, “the answer would be a definite *no*. But if you ask if they need assistance and funding, that answer would be *yes*.” He suggested a more descriptive name for the division, and very definitive, discrete terminology in its charge and goals.

As much as the child welfare and education systems fail children in foster care and probation, Rafael López pointed out that, “It is someone’s job right now in the county to see that foster kids get summer jobs, for example. If we need to institute a policy that foster and probation kids get absolute priority for those jobs, then we should do that. How will this division alter what we already have? Simply changing which county staffers work with school districts won’t make much difference. These youth need a place to articulate for themselves what they want, and the county should put in place formal mechanisms to make that happen. Any new division should have the sole purpose of getting these kids the services they need.”

“What stops the Department of Mental Health, LACOE, Probation, and DCFS from having this discussion?” Jitahadi Imara asked. “Do we need a formal structure like this to do that? Can our informal relationships generate ideas to be integrated into the system and made part of our deliverables? If that can’t happen, then there may be a need for this division. But if there is a need, then what is the charge and the mission of the ECC? Is it too broad to do what is being proposed with this division? Can we achieve this aim without such a formal structure? If not, where should the structure lie? We need to go through a process to answer these kinds of questions.”

As a former foster and probation youth, Mabelle Massey commended DCFS for talking about education at all. “That was never a focus during my time in care,” she said. “School was very important to *me*—I thought about it a lot—but not to anyone in DCFS or Probation.” But creating another silo is not an option. “LACOE has an education division for foster and probation youth,” Massey said. “LAUSD has education liaisons. Maybe there’s a need for a countywide division, but it needs to find the missing pieces and do what other programs aren’t doing. *Ask the youth*. No one ever talks to them about what they want.”

“We need to do *something*,” Maryam Fatemi said. “Every day we see how foster kids are failing in school, leaving the system unprepared, ending up in jail, on the streets, homeless. The data reflects that. But social workers have high caseloads. They’re not able to focus on the educational needs of the kids. Education is something no one can take away from you. With that, these kids can survive when we are no longer in the picture.”

“We know what the work is,” Heimov said, “and yes, it’s under-resourced. But creating another county division is not the answer, not unless it’s going to hire 200 extra staff with caseloads of 25 kids each. We already have more forms than we know what to do with. Every kid is already supposed to participate in an interactive process where they talk about their educational, permanency, and vocational goals. Mostly that doesn’t happen. Social workers don’t have time for it or they aren’t trained in the best way to do it. One more person to parachute into the kid’s life for an hour won’t remedy our failure to ensure good outcomes. Relationships are what help people succeed. We can try and legislate them, but until the case-carrying social worker and the child’s attorney—they also have huge caseloads—have time for them, it won’t happen.”

But simply because another division isn’t needed, Heimov added, doesn’t mean that more collaboration and resources wouldn’t help. “We do need a structure without silos,” she said, “and that structure is the ECC. Once we’re within the CEO, maybe we should look at ways for us to achieve this division’s goals in our strategic plan over the next three to five years.” Saltzer

agreed, recommending that the county consider adding the resources they would have dedicated to a new division instead to the ECC to better implement the action steps already identified.

Southard promised that the ECC would furnish nominations for additional participants on the work group examining this concept—including the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Department of Mental Health, the Probation Department, and youth—and asked that the work group consider the points made during today’s discussion. “How any new division would carve off action items is the thing to define,” he said, “before we can say if it’s a good idea or not.”

Update on First Supervisorial District Education Pilot Project

After ECC’s data match process obtained information last year on the foster and probation youth attending schools in the Montebello and Pomona school districts, the First Supervisorial District asked the ECC to spearhead a project to look at education on an individual level for foster and probation students in those areas. The team began work last summer on a three-pronged approach:

- Creating a true educational case plan for each DCFS student in those districts, conferring with the individual youth to talk about strengths, challenges, what the students want, and how the team might help them to reach those goals
- Full data-sharing between DCFS and the school districts
- Connecting students to community resources (all too often, students are not aware of community-based organizations offering the tutoring, after-school programming, and mentoring services that they need and want)

ECC director Carrie Miller and Jenny Serrano from the Chief Executive Office are the point people for the pilot project, working with school district personnel, DCFS’s Pomona and Belvedere offices, the First District, and Casey Family Programs, which is performing the program evaluation. Assessment and case plan forms (included in member packets) are used by a multidisciplinary team that brings together the youth, their foster parents or caregivers, their biological parents (often the holders of education rights), on-site social workers, school counselors, and others, to update the plan as often as necessary.

Maryam Fatemi—who also oversees the pilot in Montebello, where two social workers are co-located—reviewed the longstanding relationship of DCFS’s Pomona office with the Pomona Unified School District, outlining a previous program that resulted in modifications to DCFS’s social worker training. The pilot project has dovetailed with that, allowing social workers co-located in the Pomona schools to troubleshoot educational matters in ways that case-carrying social workers don’t have time for—researching credits earned in other districts, for example, so that students need not repeat classes. In the last two weeks alone, ECC consultant Michelle Barritt noted, over 60 previously earned units have been found for various students. The pilot has resulted in school counselors being more apt to recommend mid-year schedule changes, and students earning credits through more work-related programs as well. “What the youth I talk to are most excited about,” Miller added, “is that someone’s actually having a conversation with them about school—paying attention to what they say, and following up.”

The social workers outstationed in the Pomona school district are very busy, onsite supervisor Angel Rodriguez said, with over 50 students in high school alone. They make home calls so as not to disrupt the youth's schoolwork, and regularly convene the multidisciplinary teams to make sure that all the practical components are in place for youth to prepare for the careers they want. "We're really seeing these kids blossom as we pay attention to their strengths," Rodriguez said. "They haven't had a chance very often before to focus on what they're good at."

Bill Stelzner, the retired head of pupil services for the Pomona district, stressed the importance of starting education planning early. "We often focus on high school students," he said, "but it's very difficult to develop effective plans when students are sixteen. We need to prepare them when they're younger and address their needs then—keep the motivation going." Helen Kleinberg likewise advocated a piece for very young children, urging that they not be forgotten.

Miller admitted that the focus of the pilot, which runs through September 2009, is on students in high school, to get them to graduate and go on to college. "But the goal is to take the lessons we're learning—especially from the Casey evaluation—and roll out the program countywide," she said, "so that every foster youth has this team approach from preschool all the way through. And we'd like to work with Probation to start similar programs there."

Audience members praised the idea of the project, underscoring the importance of students understanding the practical implications of choosing certain career paths. For many youth, key missing pieces are the basic grammar, vocabulary, and arithmetic skills that they should have mastered in third and fourth grades, yet continue to lack at ages 16 and 17. Help in preparing for the high school exit exam—without which students cannot be awarded a diploma—is vital, and school districts and students alike are interested in more programs and resources to that end.

The pilot process tries to follow students when they leave school after family reunification or placement changes, and encourages families and social workers to maintain the youth in the same school whenever possible. (Placement turnover seems not to be as rapid as it was in the past, Barritt said.) Involving community-based organizations in a student's transition back to home life is very important, and it was suggested that representatives from those organizations be included in the pilot's multidisciplinary team when appropriate.

From the audience, Liz Díaz—a parent of a developmentally disabled daughter, as well as a staff member at the Los Angeles City Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families—recommended finding out from Regional Centers what they might recommend with regard to the multidisciplinary team process, as they have a long history of developing these kinds of intensive, consumer-led plans with every individual they serve.

Leslie Heimov expressed dismay that credit transfers remain an issue, even after the passage of AB 490 and the creation of foster youth education liaisons. "This is their job," she said, "calculating credits when kids move schools. It should be happening within three days. I'm frustrated that people mandated by legislation to do something aren't doing it. We shouldn't lose sight of that. We need to keep holding feet to the fire."

Staff/Member Updates

- Michelle Barritt updated members on the ECC's involvement in Project 51, an anti-bullying program in the Acton-Agua Dulce School District (a copy of Supervisor Antonovich's related Board motion was included in member packets) that began as a bereaved father's response to his 14-year-old son's suicide on a high school campus last October. Project 51—named after the boy's football jersey number—works with students, schools, parents, and communities to report and investigate instances of bullying and harassment, and to provide support to students involved in those incidents. A full progress report on the project will be presented in April.
- Carrie Miller announced that much progress has been made in solving FERPA (Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act) issues about the sharing of educational information between school districts and DCFS. When Judge Nash returns in April, he will present his remedy and lead a discussion on the matter.

Public Comment

Pat Levinson from the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services introduced Linda Jones, a new education coordinator housed at the Edelman Children's Court to represent school districts and LACOE in the courtroom, and to assist with the tutoring program being established in shelter care. Jones's office is located on the building's fifth floor, near the offices of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Foster Youth Services is trying to put reading and other programs into the probation camps to address the needs of foster youth housed there, and Levinson would appreciate help in that regard from other organizations. She reminded members that her agency works with 2,800 youth annually in schools, team decision-making conferences, probation offices, and group homes, and is happy to serve as a resource for others.

Next Meeting

The ECC's next meeting is scheduled for:

Thursday, April 30, 2009

9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

The California Endowment Center for Healthy Communities

The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 a.m.