



Education Coordinating Council

April 30, 2009

9:30 a.m.

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

Present: Bill Arroyo, representing Marvin J. Southard
Carol Clem
Renatta Cooper
Maryam Fatemi, representing Trish Ploehn
Mónica Garcia
Gunn Marie Hansen, representing Kaye E. Burnside
Leslie Heimov
Miriam Long
Aubrey Manuel
Machelle Massey
Michael Nash
Ron Randolph, representing Darline P. Robles
Bruce Saltzer
Nina Sorkin
Robert Taylor

Guests: Martha Molina-Aviles, First Supervisorial District
Miguel Santana, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

In the absence of Chair José Huizar, Vice Chair Michael Nash brought the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m., asking that Education Coordinating Council members and the audience introduce themselves. He extended a special welcome to Miriam Long (the City of Los Angeles's deputy mayor for education, youth and families) and Gunn Marie Hansen (associate superintendent for the Compton Unified School District), who were attending their first meeting.

Breakthrough on FERPA Solution for Los Angeles County

The biggest single barrier to raising the educational achievement of foster and probation youth has always been the inability of school districts to share educational information with the Department of Children and Family Services and the Probation Department, caused by FERPA (the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act). The ECC recognized this obstacle in Recommendation 7 of its Blueprint, and Judge Nash has consistently been a champion for finding a solution. The blanket order he issued in 2006 went a long way toward addressing the problem, and a resolution recently agreed upon with lawyers for various key players goes one step further,

permanently clearing the confidentiality hurdle and also allowing for records to be shared electronically. This advances Recommendation 8 as well, which called for an electronically based information system to include the individual educational records of DCFS and probation youth.

In the new protocol, information-sharing language will be added to each DCFS youth's minute order, effectively transforming it into an individualized court order that follows the strictest interpretation of FERPA. To develop a practical framework for accomplishing this, a work group led by juvenile court referee Sherri Sobel will soon be convened; its goal will be to have a process in place by September. Several logistical issues must still be resolved, and the court's IT staff will need to incorporate the new section into the minute order template.

Bobbie Fesler, long-time Senior Assistant County Counsel who now is General Counsel for LAUSD, thanked everyone involved for their hard work on this issue. "This is a challenging area," Fesler said. "Congress and the state legislatures don't get it—that these laws stand in the way. The laws are well-intentioned, but they don't make sense in this context. We need to ensure that people with important roles to play in protecting at-risk kids from further problems are allowed to do what needs to be done. This is an important day for the future of the children of Los Angeles County, and we hope our work can be a model for the rest of the state and across the nation, for how to do things right." Many organizations have been watching Los Angeles County's FERPA efforts with interest, ECC director Carrie Miller noted, including the American Bar Association, the Child Welfare Council for California, and Casey Family Programs.

Miller expressed her gratitude to DCFS and its education division personnel, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, County Counsel, LAUSD and its school board members, Sobel and the court's education committee, the Children's Law Center, the Court-Appointed Special Advocates office (CASA), and—most important—to Judge Nash and his determination, as Miller put it, "to say once and for all that FERPA is finally solved for Los Angeles County."

Nash himself gave credit to Sobel for the remarkable progress the court has made in the overall area of education during the past several years, and Sobel said that she had been amazed from the beginning "at the willingness and the smarts of the folks in L.A. to put this thing together. I've never seen anything like what people were willing to do for the education of kids in the dependency and delinquency courts," she said. "If they could help, they did. Thank you all."

"Speaking on behalf of caregivers, enough good things cannot be said about this agreement," Aubrey Manuel observed, giving special thanks to Judge Nash for his leadership. Once details are ironed out, Mónica Garcia suggested a press conference to announce the solution nationwide. "We need to stand up and talk about the result and the process and the willingness of those involved," she said. "Maybe we can inspire people to figure out the tough stuff." Bob Taylor hopes that what Los Angeles County has undergone will inspire elected officials to understand that the problem continues to need a legislative fix.

First Supervisorial District Agenda on Education-Related Policy

Martha Molina-Aviles, children's deputy to Supervisor Gloria Molina, praised those in strategic positions who are trying to address educational issues for foster and probation youth. "Without them, we wouldn't be as far along as we are today," she said. "Judge Nash's blanket order

assisted, and I'm very excited about the FERPA solution, but the decision to include the holder of education rights on every court order has been tremendous. Oftentimes, biological parents hold the education rights, but kids are living with foster parents who can't participate in school decisions. This information is key."

Molina-Aviles went on to remind ECC members of the educational pilot project sponsored by the First Supervisorial District in the Montebello and Pomona school districts, which has paid for three full-time social workers to work individually with DCFS students in high schools there. The first six months of the year-long pilot have been very successful, helping several students locate enough credits earned in other districts to graduate, increasing grade point averages by an average of a full point, and connecting youth with tutoring and mental health services in the community. An expansion using a slightly different model is planned for the El Monte, Hacienda-La Puente, and El Rancho (Pico Rivera) districts, where case-carrying social workers will be outstationed in the schools and DCFS will strategically assign cases based on the schools students are already attending. (Although the education pilot deals specifically with DCFS students, Judge Nash said that the new DCFS education consultant unit is already working in that structure with DCFS youth who 'cross over' to the Probation Department, under the jurisdiction of the delinquency court. Architects of the pilot's expansion also want to work with probation youth in out-of-home care.)

As a result of lessons learned through the pilot project, Carrie Miller and the Chief Executive Office's Jenny Serrano have identified a set of policy and legislative issues—included in member packets—to be addressed at the local, state, and Federal levels. Among the largest challenges are data- and information-sharing concerns. For example, the state-designed database used by case-carrying social workers cannot be populated with all the education information needed, and school-based workers must create a duplicate file. Molina-Aviles said that Supervisor Molina intends to make herself available to contact legislators and work with allies like Assembly Speaker Karen Bass to begin addressing these issues. Molina-Aviles also thanked Bonnie Armstrong and Casey Family Programs for helping to formally evaluate the pilot program.

One message brought home by the project is the critical importance of including education in all strategic initiatives, DCFS's Maryam Fatemi said, a concept that departmental director Trish Ploehn has publicly embraced. Another element is observing the provisions of AB 490 to keep students in their school of origin whenever possible (a particular interest of Los Angeles city representative Miriam Long, as well). "We know how disruptive it is to move kids," Fatemi said, "and in team decision-making conferences in Pomona, caregivers have helped out by agreeing to transport students at least through the end of the school year." Transportation is the biggest barrier to observing the law, and Leslie Heimov mentioned two pieces of current legislation—AB 12 and AB 1067—designed to support and enforce AB 490 by making transportation funds available and allowing the use of Title IV-E waiver monies for that purpose.

Mónica Garcia expressed appreciation for Supervisor Molina's leadership in sponsoring the pilot program. "We now see evidence that it's not the kid," Garcia said. "With the appropriate services, these students can succeed." Garcia indicated further interest in the financial analysis—how investments in supportive services directly prevent expenditures related to truancy and other consequences of low achievement. That scrutiny is not part of the formal evaluation design,

Armstrong said, but she believes it would not be difficult to extrapolate answers from other studies. With 12,000 foster children in the Los Angeles Unified system and the cutbacks in supportive services currently being made, Garcia hopes agencies can be spurred to find front-end dollars and avoid the costs of recovery programs.

Plan for the ECC's Transition into the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office

As members are aware, the ECC was created by the Board of Supervisors in November 2004 with a sunset date of July 1, 2009. The organization has functioned under the fiscal umbrella of the Children's Planning Council (now The Children's Council) during its tenure, and almost all current funding commitments will cease at the end of June. Last summer, members began exploring options for the ECC's future—including dissolving it—and agreed in January to recommend that it continue as a collaborative to finish the work outlined in its Blueprint, and that it enter discussions regarding a transition into the Chief Executive Office of the county.

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer for the children, families, and adults well-being cluster, Miguel Santana, began his presentation by congratulating the ECC on putting education at the forefront of the county's work. "There was a time when people thought that the county shouldn't be in the education business," Santana said, "that we had our hands full with health care and social services. But through the work of the ECC and the advocacy of many of the people here in this room, the county has shifted in its thinking. We've recognized that education is a critical component in everything we do. Whether kids are in DCFS, in Probation, or in welfare-to-work programs, education is the key to their self-sufficiency. We want to do everything we can to ensure that they don't fall through the cracks. We act as their parents. They're our responsibility, and we're embracing that responsibility. The ECC can be tremendously helpful in that regard."

Resolving the FERPA issue is a significant milestone, Santana went on, since knowing where system youth are and how they're doing in school is key to agencies working together to provide assistance. He hopes that within five years, Los Angeles County can serve as a model for the rest of the country of seamless information-sharing among all 88 school districts, with county government working hand in hand with them to provide the best education possible. Chief Bob Taylor is changing educational services in the probation camps and easing students' transitions back into their home schools, and similar conversations are occurring with DCFS director Trish Ploehn to make education one of the major pillars of that department's reform. "We sometimes forget that child welfare is not just about safety," Santana said, "but about the future, so our kids transition to adulthood as productive members of society."

Santana explained the restructuring of county government that took place a couple of years ago through which the Board of Supervisors delegated the executive management of the county to its Chief Executive Officer. Most county departments now report to the CEO (rather than to the Board directly), and county agencies have been divided into five clusters. Santana's cluster—whose composition was detailed in member packets—is responsible for social services, and he is delighted to have the work of the ECC institutionalized within that structure. "When the ECC approached us, it was an easy sell," he said. "While we're trying to take on education as a primary area, we don't really have the appropriate infrastructure. It falls under many other people's responsibilities. Having an office within the CEO whose director's sole job is to focus on educa-

tion and ensure that educational initiatives are completely implemented throughout the county—that gets us to where we want to be.”

On March 17, the Board of Supervisors approved the ECC’s transition effective July 1 (a copy of the motion was included in member packets), and its funding is already part of the proposed county budget. Also approved was the creation of a full-time executive director position, and Leslie Heimov has volunteered to be part of the interview panel for those candidates.

The proposed strategic plan—also included in member packets—builds on the ECC’s Blueprint and accomplishments to date in achieving those recommendations. Its five strategies are:

1. To ensure that the dependency education pilot project is successfully completed and introduced countywide
2. To work closely with the Probation Department to ensure that comprehensive educational reform for the juvenile halls and camps is successfully institutionalized
3. To partner with the Los Angeles County Office of Child Care to significantly increase the number of DCFS children under the age of six—and the young children of DCFS and probation youth—enrolled in high-quality early care and education programs
4. To collaborate with youth development programs, county departments, and school districts to significantly increase the number of DCFS and probation youth participating in after-school and summer extracurricular and enrichment programs
5. To resolve the remaining barriers to sharing educational information between county departments and school districts throughout Los Angeles County

In response to a question from Nina Sorkin about the inclusion of mental health in these strategies, Santana said that the county ultimately wants to coordinate and integrate the work of all its departments so that children and families are served holistically, rather than on the “assembly line” that now often occurs when families are passed on from one agency to another. “There are reasons why that happens,” Santana said, “but we don’t think we’re serving kids and families well by that separation. We’re starting to make some progress with integrating services. At Magnolia Place, for example, employees with DCFS, the Child Support Services Department, and the Department of Public Social Services all act as generalists, finding out what the county as a whole can do for a client. We want to include the Department of Mental Health there, too, connecting everyone to the team decision-making process through which all players in a kid’s life have a role in providing case management for the child and family. Next week, we’re briefing the Board about initiatives that can take us closer to that integrated system, proposing changes in state and Federal law to allow for information-sharing. It may take multiple phases,” Santana stated, “but integration is a priority for the county.”

Bill Arroyo added that the Department of Mental Health sees overlap and natural partnerships with other departments on many fronts, especially considering the higher incidence of emotional and behavioral problems in youth served by DCFS and Probation. The Mental Health Services Act’s prevention and early intervention initiative, too, will identify children in need of services

before they end up in the system. “We have great interest in the zero to five population,” Arroyo said, “and want Head Start participating in this effort. The earlier we catch a problem, the less it costs and the more effective we are.”

Gunn Marie Hansen said that the Compton Unified School District is very interested in being involved in the expansion of the pilot project mentioned in Strategy 1. Her district’s police chief has requested social workers on their high school campuses, to be paid for with Federal stimulus money. “Even though that’s only for two years,” Hansen said, “maybe we can work on finding matching funding. We’re very excited about the project.”

In answer to Bruce Saltzer’s inquiry about an encore of last year’s extremely successful resource fair, Carrie Miller explained that logistical issues prevented an event this year, but that revisiting the idea, perhaps under a different structure with additional support, was definitely on the ECC’s agenda.

High-quality after-school programs are a significant topic for the City of Los Angeles, Miriam Long said, particularly in connection with gang reduction at the mayor’s Partnership Schools, which have a significant number of foster youth in attendance. She has asked the city’s departments of cultural affairs and recreation and parks—as well as its Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families—to look for enrichment programs, field trips, and on-campus events that can be knitted together to attract students. In addition, the department of aging can provide caregivers so students do not have to miss school to stay home with an ailing grandparent. Long offered the city’s help for any future resource fairs, and wants to work with ECC members on further youth development programs. Lead consultant Sharon Watson recommended adding “cities” to the partners named in Strategy 4.

Chief Taylor also suggested replacing language in the plan to refer to probation “families” rather than “youth,” in recognition of the fact that when one youngster in a family is involved with the juvenile justice system, the risk of siblings also becoming involved increases five- or six-fold. “We need to underline the need for sensitivity to *all* kids at risk,” Taylor said. “Probation needs to look at the whole family, not just the kid in the system.”

Updates

- Judge Nash summarized the discussion at the **March 9 school superintendent dialogue** (meeting minutes were included in member packets), noting that the Covina Valley Unified School District had thanked the Probation Department and the juvenile court for resolving the longstanding issue of youth being released from camp into its schools with no preparation. Camp officials now alert the district well in advance, provide school transcripts, and work together to prepare for transitions.

At the dialogue, Nash updated superintendents on several juvenile court activities:

- ✓ Delinquency-court training is now complete with regard to bringing on educational advocates to navigate issues with school districts on behalf of youth in juvenile court.
- ✓ The minute-order template includes information on the holder of a child’s education rights.

- ✓ Training has expanded the county's unique substance-abuse treatment protocol to all dependency courtrooms at the children's court. Schools can play an important role in identifying youth with substance abuse issues, Nash said, helping persuade them into treatment with the ultimate goal of keeping them from 'crossing over' into delinquency.
- ✓ A groundbreaking new protocol now systematically monitors system youth on psychotropic medication. State legislation on this topic has repeatedly failed, but has arisen once more in AB 82. "Our hope this time is fueled by the fact that we're the largest jurisdiction in the United States, and we've implemented this protocol successfully," Nash said. "The first go-round of reports is being generated, and we're finally reviewing information we should have known all along—information that's very helpful to the well-being of these youth. We're working with Probation to apply this protocol in delinquency court, too."
- ✓ A pilot project using volunteers from Cal State Los Angeles now tutors youth waiting for their court appearances and provides them with homework help. "We've long believed in L.A. that kids need to come to court," Nash said. "They're the most important people in the process, and we want to know what they want and how they feel. That's not a philosophy that's universally shared across other jurisdictions." The children's court, opened in 1992, was specifically designed as a 'child-sensitive' environment. "But when children come to court, they miss school," Nash continued. "Now, with the assistance of the Children's Law Center, Pat Levinson [from the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services section], Susel Orellana [from the Superior Court], and DCFS, we've launched a groundbreaking study center project, where kids who are waiting in the shelter care area, sometimes for hours, can work on their educational issues while they're at court."
- Nash provided updates on the county's efforts with regard to the **disproportionate representation of African-American children and families** in the dependency system. They include a state project with Casey Family Programs in which DCFS and the juvenile court will test changes in systems over the next few years, and a committee of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges that meets monthly and is devising a way to look at best practices through a racial equity lens and develop clear strategies to reduce disproportionality in the system. Maryam Fatemi thanked Nash for raising this issue, saying that disproportionality was a "huge problem" in the child welfare system. At some point in the future, she would like to update the ECC on strategies developed by the Pomona Unified School District to address the achievement gap for students of color.

The Probation Department is also addressing disproportionality, Bob Taylor said, both through an initiative with the Burns Institute and through the Georgetown Collaborative, a two-year certification program focusing on service integration. "We're looking at the disproportionate minority contacts," Taylor said, "and at the decision points at which minors are brought into the system. The approach holds promise." Nash praised the Georgetown project for helping DCFS and Probation work more closely together to benefit children in the long term, and thanked Taylor and Ploehn for involving Los Angeles County in the program.

- Late last year, Supervisor Gloria Molina asked DCFS to explore the idea of creating a **countywide education division**. After the ECC discussed this in January, a workgroup of

interested parties was convened to consider the suggestion that the ECC assume this role, and Fatemi reported that workgroup members overwhelmingly concurred with that concept. When the ECC moves under the county structure in July, its duties of oversight and accountability over the education of system youth will be identical to those proposed for the additional division, and DCFS pledged to continue to work with the ECC to ensure that youth receive the best education possible. “So many people in the county are trying to do better for the kids and families we all serve that sometimes we end up with lots of committees doing the same thing with many of the same people,” Leslie Heimov commented on the process. “It’s not very efficient. Maybe we should use this example to think about the bad habit we have of forming all those committees. The ECC is a great model for not doing that.” Ron Randolph said that LACOE had the same concerns about duplication, and supports the idea of the ECC’s retaining its countywide role.

- Carrie Miller called members’ attention to the handouts in their packets listing **legislation** of particular interest to foster and probation youth, mentioning two bills in particular that need letters of support:
 - ✓ AB 1393, which creates a priority for current and former foster youth to obtain housing on California university campuses
 - ✓ SB 244, which prioritizes enrollment in early childhood education programs for foster children, allowing them to stay in those programs even after they are permanently placed

Madeline Hall from the Los Angeles County Education Foundation and Terry Ogawa, early childhood consultant to the ECC, have fact sheets and additional information about these bills.

- May is **Foster Care Awareness Month**, and Leslie Heimov highlighted some of the activities planned:
 - ✓ A career day at which employers receiving Federal stimulus money for youth jobs will be interviewing and hiring on the spot
 - ✓ The state kickoff in Sacramento on May 12, at which the educational pilot discussed earlier will receive an award
 - ✓ The Board of Supervisors’ honoring of eight foster-care ‘local heroes,’ also on May 12
 - ✓ On May 16, a job and college fair for foster and probation youth hosted by the foster care unit of LAUSD that will include workshops for youth and caregivers, entertainment, and food (flyers are available from Norma Sturgis)
- The ECC has worked with DCFS to publicize a series of **foster and probation youth town halls** at which elected officials hear directly from youth about their experiences in the system. On March 27, Supervisor Michael Antonovich and Congressman Adam Schiff hosted about 70 foster and probation youth in Pasadena. DCFS director Trish Ploehn helped field questions at the event, which was well received both by the youth themselves and by the elected officials and nonprofit organizations involved. ECC’s youth development consultant

Michelle Barritt announced a second town hall on June 13 with Assemblymember Anthony Portantino, and asked attendees to invite any youth they thought might be interested.

- A **youth forum** is being held today at Central Juvenile Hall, Bob Taylor stated, to listen to the experiences of youth housed there from both the dependency and delinquency systems. At a similar forum a month ago, dependency youth made it clear that they wished to be housed together, rather than with other youth. They have formed a self-named Elite Family Unit, and the department is listening to their suggestions for more interaction with their social workers and some say in the probation staff who monitor them. Maryam Fatemi said that DCFS is working closely with Probation to implement this unit, and has designated staff to receive calls from crossover youth and resolve their concerns.
- As a result of a recent Board motion, the departments of Mental Health and Health Services are working with the Chief Executive Office to identify sites for **comprehensive health centers** to serve both children in schools and residents of local communities, Bill Arroyo said. DMH is also working with LAUSD and private foundations to pool funds for enhanced health and mental health services to communities of high need.

Public Comment

- Jean Cohen announced a forum this evening hosted by the League of Women Voters on the May 19 ballot measures, and invited attendees to view the League's recommendations at <http://lwvc.org>.
- Pat Levinson announced the second annual 'day at dependency court' on May 12, hosted in conjunction with Judge Nash, the Children's Law Center, CASA, and LAUSD. The event is directed specifically to school-district education liaisons, but all are welcome.
- Foster Youth Services sponsors weekend computer camps in the community through which participants receive a laptop, printer, software and 20-plus hours of computer instruction. By the end of this year, the program will have served 362 foster and probation youth. In its first attempts to serve incarcerated youth, the program is expanding into Camps Afflerbaugh and Paige this month and next (camp participants will receive their equipment upon release). Although community camp slots are limited, Pat Levinson promised a wider distribution of information about the program in the future.
- The Los Angeles County Education Foundation operates a July environmental/science camp for students entering the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades that has served 16,000 youth to date, particularly high-need students. Madeline Hall has further information.
- Penny Markey announced a new online tutoring program sponsored by the county library system, available at <http://www.librarytutor.org>. With a library card—foster youth are always eligible for a 'no-fault' library card—and an Internet connection, students can access free help with math, science, English, and social studies from 1:00 p.m. to midnight daily. In July, an adult education component will be added to provide live homework help and assistance with GEDs, other educational endeavors, and preparing for citizenship tests.

- Representatives from the California Youth Connection made a presentation to the county's Commission for Children and Families a few weeks ago, and several spoke of their time in the foster-care system and wishing they had realized the importance of coming to court and speaking up on their own behalf. "That fits nicely with Judge Nash's comments about bringing kids to court," Kim Foster said.
- Jacque Lindeman of the California Youth Connection urged support for AB 1393, which ensures college housing priority for current and former foster youth. She also invited everyone to Sacramento on May 11, when the California Youth Connection will receive a resolution on the Assembly and Senate floors and be honored at a Casey Family Programs reception that evening in recognition of the organization's 20-year anniversary.

Closing

At this last meeting of the ECC prior to its moving within the Chief Executive Office, Judge Nash expressed appreciation to lead consultant Sharon Watson and the "fabulous staff" she assembled. Watson is now executive director of The Children's Council, still keeping her hand in on behalf of children and families. She in turn thanked ECC members for their commitment to the important work of the council, and for carrying it through in their various organizations. "Developing our Blueprint took a year," Watson said, "but it paid off. We've achieved several of the goals set in those recommendations, and we've made inroads on many others. Under the Chief Executive Office, we'll complete that work."

She thanked the ECC's funders, including the Board of Supervisors and Casey Family Programs, which split the organization's first-year funding, the California Community Foundation, and the W.M. Keck Foundation, whose \$450,000 grant over the past two years enabled the ECC to make enormous progress in implementing the Blueprint. She is also grateful to DCFS and Probation for their financial contributions, and thanked the Board for its generous support.

Finally, she expressed appreciation to the balance of the eight-member consultant team—Evelyn Hughes, Becki Nadybal, Jacquelyn McCroskey, Cecilia Sandoval, Terry Ogawa, Michelle Barritt, and Carrie Miller. "They're all hard workers and they're smart," Watson said, "and it's been the most fun I've ever had, working with this group of people who like and respect each other and know how to make the most of each others' skill sets. It's been a joy working with them, and the work will continue. I'll be switching roles and will represent The Children's Council on the ECC, so I'll still be at the table. Thank you all."

Next Meeting

The ECC's next meeting is scheduled for:

Thursday, July 30, 2009
9:30 to 11:30 a.m.
Location to be determined.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:37 a.m.