



Education Coordinating Council

July 30, 2009

9:30 a.m.

Central Los Angeles High School #9
450 North Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, California

Present: Berisha Black
Samuel Q. Chan, representing Marvin J. Southard
Carol Clem
Renatta Cooper
Maryam Fatemi, representing Trish Ploehn
Mónica García
René Gonzalez, representing Ramón C. Cortines
Judge Donna Groman, representing Judge Michael Nash
Leslie Heimov
Aubrey Manuel
Richard Martinez
Martha Trevino Powell, representing Nina Sorkin
Ron Randolph, representing Darline P. Robles
Bruce Saltzer
Robert Taylor
Rick Tebbano, representing Christopher Steinhauser
Sharon G. Watson

Guests: Kathy House, Chief Executive Office
Solomon Rivera, Office of Assembly Speaker Karen Bass

In the absence of Chair José Huizar, Vice Chair Berisha Black brought the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m., asking that Education Coordinating Council members and the audience introduce themselves. Judge Michael Nash is unable to attend today because he is at an annual conference of presiding juvenile court judges; Department of Children and Family Services director Trish Ploehn is likewise out of town, and City of Los Angeles representative Miriam Long has been called away for an emergency.

Black welcomed Sharon Watson in her new role representing The Children's Council of Los Angeles County, and noted that Richard Martinez has been named the acting superintendent of the Pomona Unified School District, now that Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana has been confirmed as the assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education in the Obama administration. Black congratulated Carrie Miller for being hired as the executive director of the ECC

and also announced that ECC intern Gail Yen (a former foster youth) has been accepted at Union College in the fall.

Successful Transition of the ECC into the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office

On July 1, the ECC officially became part of the Chief Executive Office's Service Integration Branch. SIB's Kathy House expressed her pleasure at attending today's gathering, especially after having been present for the ECC's initial meeting more than four years ago. "What's been accomplished is amazing," she said, "and we are very pleased to bring the ECC and its expertise into the county as a formal entity. It gives us an opportunity to look at all the educational resources within the county—and there are a lot—and work together to coordinate them more effectively."

The funding for ECC's full-time executive director position is part of the approved county budget, and the open exam was posted earlier this month. Carrie Miller was hired effective yesterday and will continue to be housed in the SIB offices. Some part-time county staff will be allocated to help the ECC achieve its goals, and staff could be added to the structure in the future. If additional grant money is secured, consultants may also be retained.

The transition into the county should be seamless, House said. As before, the executive director will jointly report to the ECC, the Chief Executive Office (through House herself), and the Board of Supervisors. All those entities are aware of the proposed strategic plan to implement the ECC Blueprint, and expect to continue the partnership. "We're not education experts in the county," House said, "and we'll turn to you to help us understand best practices and what makes sense."

(As a point of information, House noted that Miguel Santana, Deputy Chief Executive Officer over the children, families, and adult well-being cluster, was confirmed yesterday as the new chief administrative officer for the City of Los Angeles. He will leave his position with the county within the next couple of weeks, and Sharon Harper will sit in as cluster head until the DCEO position is filled.)

The ECC's proposed strategic plan (included in member packets) was discussed at length at the ECC's April meeting, after which member input was incorporated and the plan shared with the Board of Supervisors. ECC members now added their comments prior to a final vote.

In response to questions from Bruce Saltzer about a possible competitive bidding process for charter schools within the juvenile halls and probation camps, Ron Randolph explained that the state education code mandates that charter schools in those venues be the responsibility of the Los Angeles County Office of Education, and no bidding process is called for under that structure. A dependent charter school is being considered at Camp Scott/Scudder, and cooperation from local and statewide teachers' associations is being solicited.

Within the strategic plan, Saltzer would like some acknowledgement of the value of the ECC's 2008 Resource Fair and a commitment to identify funds to hold further such events. Miller agreed to add specific language about resource fairs to Strategy 4(b) about developing printed guides, informational activities, or other ways to notify youth, caregivers, and caseworkers about available resources. Leslie Heimov also suggested maintaining an online calendar of job fairs, scholarship deadlines, and other events, especially around higher education. A section for

upcoming events has been added to the Resources tab on the ECC website—<http://educationcoordinatingcouncil.org>—to incorporate data that staff is aware of, Miller said, but she agreed with Heimov that notifications are often received too late to make publicizing them worthwhile. An annual calendar for recurring events is a good idea.

Renatta Cooper suggested incorporating into the plan the need for school counselors to provide specialized information and guidance, both to middle school students who may be having trouble adjusting and to high school students who need help with a successful transition to college. The Pasadena Unified School District wants a counselor at each high school to make those specific connections, since student-to-counselor ratios are normally too high for staff to provide much real assistance. Miller sees this issue as falling into the plan's first strategy, since the education pilot project—expanding to other districts this fall—relies on precisely that kind of one-on-one support. Now that its counseling function is being reorganized, Cooper said that Pasadena might be interested in being part of the pilot's expansion.

Berisha Black moved that the strategic plan be adopted with the additions discussed. Sharon Watson seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Improving School Stability to Minimize the Loss of School Credits

The Los Angeles Unified School District, said board president Mónica García, is organizing itself around the principle of 'diplomas for all.' This year, LAUSD graduated 28,000 students—296 more than last year—and has for the first time scheduled an August ceremony for those students who passed the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in May but didn't receive their scores until June. García believes, however, that hundreds of students might have been close to graduating but did not know it.

"We're all aware that foster youth need an extra scoop of support, at least," she said. "How can we work together so that they don't lose credits, miss important tests, or lose out on graduating when their housing placements change? I'd really like a deeper conversation with ECC members around recommendations and better practices that can help us address this issue."

According to Maryam Fatemi, the Department of Children and Family Services is committed to keeping foster youth in their communities and schools of origin whenever possible, and is working with the Association of Community Human Service Agencies to that end. A work group with ACHSA representatives and members of the DCFS executive team is currently addressing community-based placement and developing specific strategies. Fatemi invited anyone interested in participating to contact her after the meeting.

The system is not doing a good job of complying with Federal and state laws that give foster youth the right to stay in one school for the duration of the school year, Leslie Heimov maintains. There may be agreement for implementing those laws at the highest levels, but much resistance exists on the ground. Social workers are often unable to find placements in a child's community, and schools are resistant to providing transportation or working out solutions. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was passed in 1986, and California has since expanded on its provisions, but few of the creative options for transportation that were initially

discussed have come to light. “We need to get into the neighborhoods and individual school sites,” Heimov said, “and refocus on ways to implement these laws.”

Research has shown, Sharon Watson said, that school stability is dramatically more important to the achievement, health, and well-being of foster children than is placement stability, although many would expect the converse to be true. She suggested that the ECC form a subgroup or committee to develop concrete recommendations to present at its January meeting. “Other districts have solved this problem,” Watson said, “and it behooves us to do the same if we have any hope of our kids taking the next step up in terms of achievement.”

Aubrey Manual believes that the root cause of the high rate of failure for students who are moved from school to school is not academic instability as such, but rather the instability of their placements. “For high school youth in particular, the last thing we need to do is move them,” he said. “We need to keep those placements intact unless there is a health or safety issue. I have a fifteen-year-old right now who’s been in eight placements in the last five months—he’s only a ninth-grader and he’s already been in five high schools. He doesn’t want to go to school. ‘Why should I?’ he says. ‘They’ll just move me again.’ We have got to stop moving kids.”

Many students drop out, Robert Taylor said, when they don’t see opportunities for themselves in the single path toward high school graduation. The Probation Department’s education reform design offers multiple pathways for success, including vocational education for the substantial number of students who simply want to get jobs upon their release. In addition, multidisciplinary teams are now planning the transition for students leaving camps and returning to community schools. “Many kids have automatically been placed in community day schools rather than in regular comprehensive high schools,” Taylor said. “Of course the kid fails—he’s hanging out with the same kids who got him into the juvenile justice system in the first place. Most should go back to regular school.” In the juvenile hall unit where foster youth are housed together, literacy is also an issue. “Many of these kids are 15 or 16 years old and reading at a third- or fourth-grade level, or may be functionally illiterate,” Taylor said. “They don’t want to go to school because that exposes the fact that they can’t read. We’re trying mentors now, caring adults who truly want these kids to be successful and learn to read, and they’re responding. But that requires a high-quality investment, not a cookie-cutter approach.”

In Long Beach, Rick Tebbano mentioned, a basic concern is the timing of probation youth’s release back into community schools. They often return in October, a month into regular classes, or in June and July, when it is difficult to arrange for the necessary screening and placement in appropriate schools. Could releases be timed in concert with the semester schedule? Unfortunately, Judge Donna Groman explained, crimes are committed throughout the year, and youth can’t be kept incarcerated solely to complete a school year. “We have some flexibility,” she said, “but only in weeks, not months. These kids are in a custodial setting in a secure environment. They don’t need to be held longer than their sentences.” Court committees are aware of timing problems—with regard to joining classes already in progress and in terms of earning credits—and are working on the issue.

LAUSD is developing a camp pilot that sets up a timeline for specific activities to take place prior to students’ release, René Gonzalez said, including an analysis of their academic credits,

applying to a new school, and considering which of the multiple education pathways they wish to pursue. “As a team, we look at the best course for that youngster,” he said. “Semester transitions aren’t going to happen, but we can make it a seamless process.”

Similar issues exist on the dependency side. “It may feel like kids are coming out in clumps, but they’re not,” Heimov noted. “We open and close about the same number of cases every week. We have some flexibility, but only a few days. We’re working with staff so they make sure to ask kids about any big tests they have coming up, or projects they’re working on, or teachers they want to say goodbye to. Generally, it’s in a child’s best interest to stay in their current school regardless of placement, as McKinney-Vento calls for.” (Heimov added that the Children’s Law Center also wants to participate in the ECC work group.)

Another ongoing issue is that of placements outside the child’s home community, as another LAUSD pilot in SPA 4 discovered. “We wanted to find foster kids who were just short of earning their A-G credits and help them get there,” Gonzalez said. “But we found that, although their home schools and communities were in SPA 4, they were placed all over the county. They had no access to their own neighborhoods and those connections. We need to talk about that, too.”

Renatta Cooper outlined a pilot being done at Five Acres using a family reunification model that puts less emphasis on placement in that facility (it is used for respite only) and keeps students in their home schools more often. She recommended that representatives of that program be invited to participate in the ECC committee.

A high level of service is lacking for the majority of students, García said, and any strategies to address placement issues must also find a way to support individual students’ overall education plans. Schools may not know that some students are foster youth, for instance, and programs may not exist to identify students who are close to completing their A-G requirements. (One study found 35,000 students in that situation who were not aware of it.) “We need a menu of options for kids,” García concluded, “and we need to address the obstacles that exist from our systems not talking to each other.”

Sharon Watson moved that the ECC form a subgroup to study the issue of maximizing school stability and report back with some specific recommendations at the January meeting. Aubrey Manuel seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Those interested in serving on this group were encouraged to contact Carrie Miller.

Taylor offered special thanks to the Pomona Unified School District, whose program for students transitioning from camps to school was part of initiating these discussions. A Probation pilot with LAUSD is now underway that is expected to expand soon to four other large school districts, including Long Beach.

Impact of State Budget Cuts on Education and Child Welfare

Solomon Rivera, executive director of Assembly Speaker Karen Bass’s Los Angeles office, thanked members for inviting him to address them. Speaker Bass is well aware of the ECC and its efforts, as foster care has always been a priority in her policy work. “From the February budget package through to the events of this week,” Rivera began, “it’s hard to claim any victo-

ries, but we did fight off some things. We wish we could have done more to protect the programs that you all are working on, but if not for Speaker Bass, Darrell Steinberg, and other local Assembly members, it could have been worse.”

California is in the midst of the worst recession since the 1930s, and its deficit has reached massive proportions. The February budget closed a \$36 billion gap with a combination of cuts and new revenues, but the defeat of the May ballot initiatives prevented another \$6 billion’s being raised. Revenues fell 34 percent in the first half of this year as the recession deepened, and this week’s budget amendments had to close a deficit of \$24 billion.

In his May budget revise, Governor Schwarzenegger had originally proposed draconian cuts to health and human services:

- ⊗ Eliminating the Healthy Families program, causing 500,000 children to lose health care
- ⊗ Eliminating CalWORKs, causing 587,000 poor families to lose assistance
- ⊗ Eliminating CalGrants, causing 100,000 students to lose grants for the fall semester
- ⊗ Slashing In-Home Supportive Services, forcing 400,000 individuals into more expensive nursing-home care
- ⊗ Eliminating general-fund dollars for state parks
- ⊗ Eliminating the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants
- ⊗ Eliminating the California Food Assistance program, which provides food stamps for the most needy
- ⊗ Eliminating Adult Day Health Care
- ⊗ Reducing K–12 education funding by \$4.4 billion for the 2009–2010 school year alone

The solutions adopted this week fall into five categories: expenditure reductions (67 percent of the \$24 billion total), fund shifts (4 percent), revenue increases (14 percent), borrowing (9 percent), and other (6 percent). Expenditure reductions include:

- A \$6.5 billion reduction in funding to Proposition 98—legislation that requires that a certain portion of the budget be spent on K–14 education—cutting community colleges by \$695.2 million
- \$2 billion in cuts to higher education over the next two years, causing employee furloughs and fee increases within the University of California and California State University systems (the CalGrants program was, however, preserved)
- Savings gleaned from selective sentence commutations for undocumented persons, decreases in inmate programs, increased corrections efficiencies, and limits on contract reimbursement rates for medical services
- Medi-Cal savings of \$1.4 billion, including funding reductions for private hospitals, Adult Day Health Care reform, and fraud prevention
- Reductions in SSI/SSP grants (though they remain some of the highest in the nation)
- \$509.6 million in cuts to CalWORKs, most of which come from allocating more resources to working individuals and fewer to others

- \$263.5 million in cuts to In-Home Supportive Service, mostly from fraud reduction and prevention and changing eligibility requirements to serve only the neediest

Fund shifts will occur in transportation, aeronautics, the motor vehicle account, Cal FIRE savings, and shifting June employee payroll payments to July 1, which saves \$1.6 billion in the fiscal year. Revenue solutions include \$1.7 billion in accelerated personal income tax receipts and the sale of the State Compensation Insurance Fund to a private entity, yielding \$1 billion. With the suspension of Proposition 1A, \$1.9 billion in property tax funds will be borrowed from local governments to be used for schools, courts, prisons, and health care. These funds, plus interest, must be repaid by June 30, 2013.

Silvera stressed that, although some signs of economic recovery may be appearing, California's budget will continue to present difficulties and the 2009 package does not offer any permanent solutions. He concluded by encouraging ECC members to mobilize their constituencies toward real reform in Sacramento, including the elimination of the two-thirds vote requirement to pass a state budget, and battling the reluctance of a powerful conservative minority to raise the taxes needed to fund health and human services.

ECC members outlined the effects on their constituencies of the budget provisions.

- LAUSD has taken a \$1.6 billion hit over the next three years, and California has now plummeted to 50th in the nation in per-pupil funding. "We're first in prisons," Mónica García commented. "We spend \$242,000 to incarcerate a child year-round, while LAUSD gets \$8,000 for the 180-day school year. We have choices between bad and bad." The district has lost 1,000 jobs from its central office; 2,200 teachers (usually those least senior and most enthusiastic); and 2,000 classified workers (cafeteria workers, janitors, clerks, and so on). No furloughs have yet been imposed, but district officials are preparing for 24 months of reduced revenues.

García agreed with Silvera that the child welfare and children's rights communities must organize to educate their constituencies about political and budgetary realities. "Sacramento cannot hear only about cuts, they need to hear about solutions," she said. "It's time to change the way we function and have regular conversations—not just about budgets and crisis. The ECC has an aggressive, child-focused agenda. Locally, we are the leaders. We have allies. We can envision ways of serving kids faster and more effectively."

- Ten percent rate cuts have been imposed on foster family agencies and group homes, Bruce Saltzer said, after eight years of group homes receiving no cost increases at all. This has an impact on staff retention and on the continuity of personal relationships with vulnerable children. Mental health services are losing between \$60 to \$80 million in contract dollars, and reductions in EPSDT (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment) funding are being considered that will further burden caseloads. Saltzer agreed that a coordinated effort to change the 'two-thirds rule' is desperately needed, and suggested that ECC members take the lead on that.
- Jenny Serrano from the county's Chief Executive Office—which provides policy, practice, and fiscal guidance to county departments—presented a snapshot of the state budget's impact

on Los Angeles County. Based on a preliminary review of available information, the total estimated loss of funding to the county in 2009–2010 will be \$189.8 million, which includes a \$114.2 million reduction to CalWORKs single-allocation funds and a \$12.4 million loss from the deferral of AB 3632 program payments for services provided to severely emotionally disturbed children. Also involved are:

- ⊗ Reductions in foster care rates that will cut overall state funding for child welfare administration by 10 percent, and will cut Title IV-E waiver funds to the county by \$17 million
 - ① Reduced rates for group homes and foster family agencies (as mentioned by Saltzer) will generate state general-fund savings of \$26.6 million and county savings of an estimated \$12.3 million in 2009–2010.
 - ① A provision to tie increases in Adoption Assistance Program payments to need will generate state general-fund savings of \$900,000 and county savings of an estimated \$100,000.
 - ① A \$5 million reduction in funding for the Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP-Plus), which assists emancipated foster youth in successfully transitioning to adulthood, should result in an estimated annual county loss of \$314,000.
- ⊗ Reductions of \$124 million in general-fund support for the Healthy Families program, in which nearly one million children are enrolled statewide (over one-third of enrollees are from Los Angeles County)
 - ① A newly imposed waiting list will deny health care coverage to approximately 83,898 Los Angeles County children.
 - ① Another 113,341 currently enrolled children are likely to lose coverage from November 2009 through June 2010.
- ⊗ Increased per-unit fees at California community colleges—from \$20 to \$26—effective in the fall of 2009
- ⊗ A 20 percent tuition increase in the Cal State system, a cessation of enrollment at all 23 campuses for the upcoming spring semester, and reductions in enrollment by 40,000 students over the next two years

In the child care realm, the overall news was somewhat better.

- ⊗ The June 30, 2009, sunset date was eliminated for the county’s child care recruitment/retention incentive program, which provides educational stipends for child care providers in certain licensed family child care and child care centers.
- ⊗ CalWORKs child care programs remain fully funded.
- ⊗ The governor’s proposal to increase the child care fees that low-income families pay from \$2.00 to \$4.00 per day was rejected.
- ⊗ Reimbursement rates for child care providers were maintained at the current maximum of the 85th percentile of the 2005 market reimbursement rate.

- All courthouses in the county will be closed the third Wednesday of every month starting in September, Leslie Heimov announced. That day had already been reserved for emergency hearings only, but those will no longer take place. “This means overcrowded dockets and shorter hearing times,” Heimov said, “essentially decreasing access to justice.”
- Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act dollars have also dropped—from \$33 million three years ago to \$28 million last year to \$22.5 million this year—Robert Taylor said.

Data Matches

Carrie Miller presented results from two new data matches, which were included in member packets along with a breakdown of information on the individual schools in both districts.

- In the **Lancaster** School District—which includes elementary and middle schools only—341 students were known to the Department of Children and Family Services. That is 2 percent of district enrollment, a figure twice that typical for other districts studied.

On standardized tests, DCFS students’ English-language arts scores were slightly lower than is typical, but for the first time, middle-school students outperformed elementary school students. Also for the first time, DCFS middle-school students slightly outperformed district students in math. Miller hopes that anomaly can be further analyzed to discover reasons for that gain.

- The **Pomona** Unified School District enrolled 284 DCFS students, about 1 percent of its total population (the typical figure for most districts studied). Testing shows less difference in English-language arts scores between DCFS and other students, and less of a decline in scores from elementary to high school. DCFS students’ elementary-level math scores nearly equaled those of the general population, which aligns with the stated goal of the ECC to raise the achievement levels of foster and probation youth to equal those of non-system youth. Because the majority of DCFS tenth-graders in Pomona did not take the high school exit exam, the sample size for that figure is smaller. However, their passing rate by twelfth grade is consistent with other districts.

This is the second data match performed with the Pomona Unified School District, and the results of the two studies are being compared. Miller believes the analysis will show that the district is going in the right direction.

Updates

- The minute-order language discussed at the ECC’s April meeting is nearly finalized, and a formal process is being worked out for getting education records from school districts to social workers. Those protocols are on track to be instituted this fall.
- Leslie Heimov announced that the Children’s Law Center is recruiting volunteers to serve as holders of foster children’s education rights. Materials are available on the back table, and volunteers are currently being trained. She encouraged anyone interested to contact her.

- Judge Groman is also recruiting volunteers for a panel that will serve as the holder of education rights for several youth in the juvenile halls and probation camps who do not have family members or other adults to serve in that capacity.
- Heimov also urged anyone knowing of former foster youth still in need of summer employment to contact her. A series of client satisfaction surveys is being administered among foster youth, and workers are needed.

Public Comment

- Education advocate Brenda Parks urged the Department of Children and Family Services to be consistent in asking caregivers to complete the education-related form that is used when DCFS youth turn 14. She also advised more intensive training for caregivers on navigating the educational and court systems, getting correct mental health diagnoses, and ensuring that mental health services are part of youth's education plans. She further recommended that education advocates in the DCFS regional offices be better qualified, and praised the judges at the children's court.
- From the audience, an educational specialist from the LA Youth Network stressed the need for support for foster and probation students attending college. Too often they have no trusted adult to go to when they need help, and recruiting mentors is not an easy task.
- Gail McFarlane-Sosa outlined the 'Library in a Box' program designed by the Los Angeles County Office of Education, county libraries, and the Probation Department to be an adjunct to the Operation READ program in juvenile halls, probation camps, and community placements. Bankers' boxes containing books, incentives, and other library resources are customized with art created by probation youth, and the bookmarks included invite youth to rate the books they are reading. Every youth who leaves juvenile hall receives a library card, and reading clubs within the halls and camps are engaging youth in many different ways, providing a successful tie-in to the county's online homework help program.

Next Meeting

The ECC's next meeting is scheduled for:

Thursday, October 29, 2009

9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

The California Endowment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.