



Education Dialogue with School District Superintendents

November 30, 2009

10:00 a.m.

Los Angeles County Office of Education Headquarters
9300 Imperial Highway, Downey, CA

Present:

- Martha Arellano, Walnut Valley Unified School District
- Patti Azevedo, Pomona Unified School District
- Vicente Bravo, Centinela Valley Union High School District
- Stacy Bryant, Antelope Valley Union Joint High School District
- Lupe Delgado, LACOE
- Zeff Dena, Rowland Unified School District
- William Elkins, LACOE
- Hector Garcia, Burbank Unified School District
- Angel Gallardo, Montebello Unified School District
- René Gonzalez, Los Angeles Unified School District
- Hon. Donna Groman, Juvenile Court
- Gunn Marie Hansen, Compton Unified School District
- John Herren, San Gabriel Unified School District
- Cara Lee, Hacienda La Puente Unified School District
- Patricia Levinson, LACOE
- Kathy Licursi, Burbank Unified School District
- Carrie Dunbar Miller, ECC
- Hon. Michael Nash, Presiding Judge, Juvenile Court
- Cecilia Ornelas, Bassett Unified School District
- Louis Pappas, Covina Valley Unified School District
- Trish Ploehn, Department of Children and Family Services
- Dolores Preciado, Garvey Unified School District
- Ron Randolph, LACOE
- Gerry Riley, LACOE
- Darline Robles, LACOE
- Nick Salerno, El Monte Union High School District
- Raynette Sanchez, LACOE
- Andre Sauvageau, Rosemead School District
- Referee Sherri Sobel, Juvenile Court
- Toby Spainhower, Mountain View School District
- Norma Sturgis, Los Angeles Unified School District
- Robert Taylor, Chief Probation Officer

Los Angeles County Office of Education Superintendent Darline Robles welcomed attendees and asked for self-introductions. She thanked everyone for attending the ongoing dialogue between school district leadership and county departments on behalf of foster and probation youth.

Judge Michel Nash, presiding judge of the juvenile court, remarked on the increasing convergence between the courts and the educational system, which as recently as ten years ago functioned on parallel tracks that seldom crossed. The Education Coordinating Council sponsors these dialogues as an opportunity for updates, questions, and concerns to be voiced by all parties.

Juvenile Dependency Court's Education Committee: Referee Sherri Sobel

Nash introduced Sherri Sobel as a long-time referee in the juvenile dependency court who has chaired its education committee for many years, and the foremost juvenile court expert in educational issues in the state of California.

Sobel presented some background on the education committee. "Years ago," she said, "it occurred to me that we weren't doing as much as we could to educate our foster youth. With no one to advocate for them, they end up at the bottom of the barrel in many ways. The issue from a legal standpoint is what advocacy looks like when the educational system requires an administrative review [by the court] for pretty much everything that happens to these kids. When I passed the bar in 1984—I had been a teacher before that—the education code was pretty thin. Now I can't even lift it any more, and the dependency code is about the same." Sobel initially convened nonprofit organizations and private attorneys who worked in the dependency court with children needing special education services, beginning an advocacy program through which private counsel requested 'fair hearings' for special education students, setting the stage for jointer motions from the juvenile court to the various school systems involved.

At about the same time, the parent surrogacy program for children who were wards and dependents of the court was undergoing changes at the national level. "In every state," Sobel said, "there wasn't enough money to pay surrogates, few people were involved, and turnover was high. The Feds gave up, agreeing to allow local courts to appoint surrogates from the bench. That year, in an effort to get around the need for surrogacy at all, California added to the definition of the word *parent* something called a *responsible adult*, which is exactly the same as a surrogate. When you see the terms *surrogate* and *responsible adult* on juvenile court forms, remember that in California they're the same thing." Some children, however, have no one to advocate for them. A program is underway designed to fill that gap with community volunteers, and the court is doing its best to identify a responsible adult for every minor. "We know that's one of the biggest problems you have," Sobel told school representatives, "not knowing who to talk to about these kids."

The court's education committee is currently attempting to address two challenging areas for school districts—the movement of students and the movement of their records. "We're putting into place something we hope will help with the records end," Sobel said, "and we're *really* trying to cut down on the movement of kids." The committee also wants to see further training for private service providers, children's lawyers, and parents, and is committed to responding quickly to schools' questions and concerns. "If you have a kid of ours," Sobel told attendees, "just let us know. We'll help." Overall, the juvenile court's goal is to work with departments and school districts to make sure that youth in problematic circumstances get what they need to formulate a better life, Sobel said, "from the time they walk into our courts and your schools. If we

can serve these kids when they're three years old, when they're eight years old, we'll all have less to do. We want to work together to make that happen."

Department of Children and Family Services Update: Trish Ploehn

When director Trish Ploehn joined the Department of Children and Family Services 30 years ago, it was clear that "our job was to protect kids," she told district staff, "and your job was to educate them . . . and never the twain should meet. In the last five years, though, child welfare as a profession—particularly in Los Angeles—has come to the conclusion that if we're going to serve these kids, we have got to do it as partners. My job is to protect them, but my job is also to ensure that they find a permanent home and achieve well-being. And they can't achieve well-being without an education."

About 18 months ago, a pilot project in the Montebello and Pomona school districts began identifying foster youth needing special attention. "Nobody cared whether or not they graduated from high school," Ploehn said. "They had 1.4 grade point averages and were maybe 100 credits behind in junior year. But when they connected with adults who cared about them, they blossomed. Last June, several of them graduated after being in the program for only a year. One young lady said it wasn't until somebody reached out and nagged her every day—"Did you go to school? Did you do your homework?"—that she cared enough about herself to follow through."

Ploehn wants to hear from school districts about how DCFS can better serve schools and be more effective partners. "With all of us working together, these kids should do better," she said. "I'd like to figure out with you how to achieve that."

Delinquency Court Subcommittee: Judge Donna Groman

Donna Groman has been involved in the juvenile courts for more than 20 years as an attorney, referee, commissioner, and judge, and has "seized the education bull by the horns for our delinquency system," as Judge Nash put it. Groman now serves as judge at the David V. Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center in South Los Angeles and chairs the delinquency subcommittee of the court's education committee chaired by Referee Sobel.

"The concept of bringing everyone together in these meetings inspires me," Groman said, "and I feel privileged to be here among high-level school district administrators. Despite all the funding cuts we face these days, if we all have our hearts and souls focused on the benefit of the children we serve, we can eke out that last little bit of energy and effort on their behalf."

As attendees are aware, the delinquency court deals with higher-level offenders—youth who are charged with misdemeanor and felony criminal offenses. (Infractions such as truancy and curfew violations go to the informal juvenile and traffic court.) "When I came back to the delinquency system after four years in the adult system," Groman said, "I was delighted to see a move on the Probation Department's part to focusing on rehabilitation for these kids, rather than incarceration or removal from their homes. That's been a profound shift, and we have Chief Robert Taylor to thank for it. And education is the key to rehabilitation. Without it, kids are committing crimes, involved with gangs, doing drugs—there's no good result for any kid who isn't attending school and who isn't performing at a basic level while they're there."

Groman believes the courts should consider educational issues from the very first day they see youth and their families. "Just as in the adult system, the first hearing in delinquency court is the

arraignment to hear the charges, usually about 60 days from the arrest,” she explained. “In the past, we just scheduled the next court date and that’s all that would happen. Now, we’re starting to immediately look at the youth’s school performance. Are they in school or not? Many have been arrested for behavior that got them kicked out of school to begin with, usually because of a ‘zero tolerance’ policy. If they’ve been out of school since that time, and then we wait to see if they’re going to be sent to camp or into placement, that can be two or three months down the line. We need to deal with the school issue at the very first opportunity.”

Budget cuts have affected the numbers of DCFS education liaisons, but Public Counsel has set up a nonprofit legal clinic across the street from the Kenyon courthouse to offer minors and parents assistance with school issues two days a month, and the public defender’s office also has resource attorneys who handle cases involving educational and Regional Center issues. “But a whole lot of kids can’t be served by those few resources out there,” Groman said. “It’s still a problem to figure how to get them back in school.”

Another issue addressed at the initial delinquency hearing is the possibility of undiagnosed special needs. “Truancy doesn’t always mean a willful, ‘bad’ kid,” Groman said. “The kid could simply be unable to perform, and have given up.” For students with attendance problems, the bench ascertains whether the student has been evaluated for special education needs, been screened for an Individualized Education Plan, or received any special accommodations. Attorneys give parents a letter to present to the school district requesting IEP screening, which can be a tremendous step forward in many cases.

The delinquency subcommittee consists of public defenders, district attorneys, representatives from public interest law firms, other attorneys, and representatives from the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Pomona Unified School District, and LACOE (including Pat Levinson from Foster Youth Services). Members are working on a number of issues, including:

- **Training** for probation officers, judges, attorneys, and community volunteers on education issues. “Public interest law firms such as Public Counsel, the Alliance for Children’s Rights, and the Learning Rights Law Center have graciously volunteered staff to do these trainings,” Groman said, “and we’re able to offer them at no cost.”
- Addressing the hurdles that probation officers face in obtaining **school records**. “For hearings, we need to know about grades, attendance, special education needs, and any other accommodations for this student,” Groman said. “Without that information, we can’t make good decisions. Probation officers are making those requests, but they’re not receiving the records. They have only about four weeks to write these reports, and they’re too busy to keep following up with school districts. The ECC is working on a minute order form so records can be provided immediately, and we also want to look at accessing them electronically, as LACOE and LAUSD are now able to do.”
- Expediting the obtaining of **transcripts**. “Youth move from school district to school district,” Groman said, “often spending only a few weeks here or a few months there. We need all their credits to appear in one place so they’re not forced to repeat classes they’ve already taken. How demoralizing is that?”
- Streamlining the **AB 3632** process so youth are not waiting six to nine months in juvenile hall for those services to be implemented

Transition from Probation Camps to Community Schools

Another focus of the delinquency subcommittee is the transition back to community schools for youth who are removed from their homes and placed in a group home, foster home, or probation camp. On their return, many do not re-enroll in school. “Imagine coming home from camp, where every movement of yours is supervised,” Judge Groman said, “to suddenly having no place to go during the day and nothing to occupy your mind. It’s a very serious situation. If kids don’t go back to school once they’re out of camp or placement, it sets them up for failure.”

It’s often hard to determine which difficulties came first for these young people, Chief Robert Taylor acknowledged. “Our assessments show them reading at the fourth- or fifth-grade level, and they’re sixteen years old,” he said. “What happened? Is it the kids themselves, or have interruptions throughout their lives made them fall further behind in school? How did they get there?” Because of these and other considerations, the education reform effort now underway within the Probation Department recognizes four pathways for students:

- ⊗ A high school diploma (passing the California High School Exit Exam, or CAHSEE) for students of the right age who have earned the appropriate credits
- ⊗ A GED (General Education Development) certificate for students with the requisite skills or abilities who lack the appropriate credits
- ⊗ Career technical education for students who aren’t interested in graduating high school, but who simply want jobs (as many as 17 percent, according to a recent UCLA study)
- ⊗ Preparation for two- or four-year colleges for bright students who may want to bypass high school altogether

“When a kid comes to court and it looks like a placement situation,” Taylor said, “we want a full assessment and history—criminal, educational, social/psychological, and medical. If they’re sent to camp, that information forms the basis of their case plan, including substance abuse treatment if that’s necessary. Kids spend three to nine months in camp, and another assessment is made before they’re released. Where will they go when they leave? To a comprehensive high school? To vocational training in the community that might lead to an apprenticeship and a job? Rather than treating them all the same, we look at each individual kid and his or her unique set of circumstances. It requires a lot of time.”

And the re-entry process is complicated. Youth in camp attend LACOE schools, but if they go to a group home or foster home, they enroll in the local school district there. When they return to their families, all those entities—plus the Department of Mental Health, if the student has been receiving those services, and any vocational training programs involved—must coordinate to return students to an appropriate educational venue in their home district.

Groman distributed a handout on a pilot transition program that has been active for the past year in Camp Onizuka and Camp Holton for youth returning to schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District. The process starts 90 days before the student’s release, when Probation’s notification to LACOE and the youth’s home district triggers the gathering of all the student’s records. A cross-assessment team (formerly called a multidisciplinary team) then meets 45 to 60 days prior to the youth’s release to make recommendations regarding:

- ✓ The school the youth will attend
- ✓ Any treatment needs in the community (mental health or substance abuse services, for example)
- ✓ Employment needs
- ✓ Safety concerns affecting school choice (resulting from gang affiliation or nonaffiliation)
- ✓ After-school and athletic activities
- ✓ Alternative placement if the parent's home is not suitable or available

The Camp Holton pilot is on hiatus while seasonal firefighting crews are quartered there, but will resume when minors move back in. Another pilot program is being developed for youth returning home from Rancho San Antonio's group home to LAUSD schools, and plans are also underway for youth re-entering the Long Beach Unified School District from camp placement.

Once the re-entry program is honed, the goal is to roll it out to all school districts countywide, one camp and one community at a time. "Because of the size of our system," Taylor said, "that's the only real way you can do it. We have 3,200 kids in custody in Los Angeles County—more than any other county, and more than in 48 of the 50 states, including California, which has only 1,500. It's a complicated process and we want to do it right." He thanked Groman for her dedication in getting the program off the ground, and expressed appreciation to LAUSD representative Norma Sturgis, as well as to LACOE's Ron Randolph and Darline Robles. Sturgis said that working on the project has helped put many effective procedures in place within LAUSD. "Everyone is supportive and willing to make changes and embrace other partners," she said. "It's been a wonderful process to build those relationships."

"Every youth deserves to have a smooth transition from camp and placement back home," Groman stated, praising Sturgis's counseling staff for working diligently to get youth returned to comprehensive high schools whenever appropriate. "When probation kids get back into the scholastic stream, many want to play sports, or be on the debate team, or simply graduate with their friends," Groman said. "It's important that they're not automatically sent to alternative schools."

"In the past, just as Trish [Ploehn] said about child welfare and education, there's been a chasm between child welfare and juvenile justice," Taylor commented. "Even though we've done a lot of work together over the past few years, foster kids are still often viewed as the 'good' kids, while Probation kids are the 'bad' kids. Sometimes, though, we need to remember that they're the *same* kids."

Attendees expressed eagerness for the countywide rollout. Even in K–8 districts, youngsters may be on probation and not allowed to return to their school of origin after placement because they have been expelled. In some areas, the nearest county school may be some distance away, and if students' parents have no car, districts of origin are not responsible for transporting them. Without a closer county facility, youth may spend months out of school. Although she was not sure of the precise timetable for rolling out the plan, Groman is happy to work with individual school districts on implementing temporary measures.

Groman invited everyone interested to attend education subcommittee meetings, and ECC director Carrie Miller will send contact information for Groman and Sobel to everyone on the distribution list for the education dialogue meetings.

Juvenile Court Updates

“As you see, those parallel tracks I talked about earlier are beginning to intersect,” Judge Nash noted, “but we’re still only scratching the surface. The fundamental philosophy behind the juvenile court is to deal with one kid at a time, and we’re trying to find more and better ways to do that. Hardworking, dedicated people are coming together in all systems. With the leadership of Sherri Sobel and Donna Groman, the real nuts-and-bolts issues are being taken care of.”

- **Chief Taylor** will leave his position in early January, and Nash thanked him for imparting a new attitude about serving youth humanely that has affected the whole Probation Department.
- Nash would like a conversation with school districts, either as part of an education dialogue or during a regular ECC meeting, about youngsters being sent to court for **minor violations**.
- For the past year, a **disproportionality** work group has been studying the overrepresentation of African-Americans in the county’s child welfare system. Key stakeholders have examined statistics and research about the issue, as well as promising practices locally and elsewhere, and are now implementing two initial strategies. The group is also studying key decision points that affect disproportionality (including investigation, entry into foster care, exit from foster care, and reporting), especially as they pertain to other entities such as schools and law enforcement. Nash expects to ask for school districts’ help in this matter within the next several months .
- Nash wants to develop a similar work group to study the issue of **truancy**. Of the more than 170,000 citations heard last year by Los Angeles County’s informal juvenile and traffic court, between 10,000 and 15,000 were for truancy. “We’ve talked with the ECC about creating a task force so stakeholders can study the issue and look at the different ways it’s being dealt with,” Nash said. “With 80 school districts in Los Angeles County, there have got to be some successes happening.” He will put out a call for participants in 2010. Attendees recommended contacting Sherman Garnett, coordinator of child welfare and attendance at the San Bernardino County Office of Education, who has had great success in involving the District Attorney’s office in that area’s truancy program.

Participant Issues and Concerns

- Nick Salerno was pleased to hear that gang-related issues were being considered as students transition back to school from probation camps, and also praised the recognition of different educational pathways for youth. Obtaining accurate student records, however, continues to be a problem. “If we don’t get records,” he said, “we can’t determine grades or credits. We can’t do our job properly. The last thing we want to do is set up a student for failure.”
- Salerno also urged mindfulness about the disproportionality of nonwhite students in **special education** classes, which is believed within minority communities to exist nationwide, according to Sherri Sobel. The problem for the courts is differentiating between children having true special education needs and those who have simply not been nurtured or enriched, or who come from parents with undiagnosed issues themselves. “We need to evaluate those children properly and make sure our tests aren’t biased,” Sobel said. Students are sometimes misclassified solely because of their lack of educational experience, Darline Robles noted. “They don’t have a disability,” she said. “They just haven’t been exposed to education long enough. We need intervention programs that help them realize, ‘I can learn.’”

Judge Nash stressed the importance of every child having a safe, permanent, healthy home. With the proper nurturing, young people who test poorly may improve. “I’ve seen kids our system has labeled as ‘hopeless’ get in the right home situation and turn things around,” he said. “It puts a heavy burden on us to make sure that happens for as many kids as possible, both in dependency and delinquency court.” Trish Ploehn has also seen children connect with a particular teacher or other school-based adult and have their lives changed. “Don’t feel like it’s all up to you when things go sour with these kids,” Nash told school district representatives. “The court system needs to be the squeaky wheel for them getting what they need. Don’t think for a minute that we don’t have the major part of the obligation.”

- Although the Los Angeles Unified School District is eager to participate in anything that will improve outcomes, René Gonzalez suggested the possible **integration of multidisciplinary teams**. “We’re challenged to participate in every assessment that takes place,” he admitted.
- With regard to sharing information, Cecilia Ornelas said that her district’s biggest problem has been identifying students served by the Probation Department or the Department of Children and Family Services, and the name of a **contact person** in those departments would be helpful. Carrie Miller will send everyone the contact sheet developed last year expressly for that purpose.
- Salerno applauded Sobel for her thoughts on offering support to very young children sooner rather than later. “The earlier we can provide stability,” he said, “the better off the kids will be.” Robles agreed, saying that training parents and identifying issues for children birth to age three is at the heart of good practice. The **children of foster youth** are a special concern for LACOE staff, she noted, because they lack status in the system.

The juvenile court has begun a ‘zero to three’ work group, Sobel said, to examine parenting issues for that age group, particularly in light of the legal requirement that teen mothers in the foster care system be placed with their babies whenever possible. “Only when we find out the mom isn’t parenting correctly is a petition filed for that baby,” Sobel said. “Even when a petition *is* filed, the law requires that the mother and baby be kept in the same foster home. I would love to sit down with school districts and come up with some ideas for young mothers. I have twelve-year-olds with babies in court—you must see them, too. We need to talk about how we can nurture both those human beings together so those babies aren’t lost.”

DCFS and pro bono attorney groups have convened a work group on pregnant and parenting teens, Trish Ploehn said, that is grappling with identical issues. “As soon as we’re aware that a kid in the system has become pregnant,” she said, “we want to convene a multidisciplinary team and bring all resources to bear around that child, since we can’t bring the baby into the system unless there is detriment by the mother. When the law changed that Referee Sobel mentioned, the funding source for the baby also changed, and we can now offer the caregiver full funding for the baby, rather than just a supplement. That’s definitely an incentive to keep moms and babies together in safe foster homes where caregivers have special training.” The work group has no strong education presence yet, and Ploehn invited individuals interested in participating to contact her.

- Robles asked Ploehn for clarification on policies within the Department of Children and Family Services with regard to **foster and adoptive parents**. “Nonprofits and other service providers

are under the impression that to become a foster parent means you must be willing to adopt,” Robles said. “Can you clarify that? We want to be able to give out the correct information.”

A requirement in DCFS’s foster family agency and group home contracts, effective October 1, requires foster family agencies to do what the department has done since 2004, Ploehn explained—bring in families who want to serve as caregivers for foster children as ‘resource families.’ The process replaces the two separate tracks for foster parenting and adoption that had existed in the past, and means that all resource families get the highest level of training available. “It’s a single certification,” Judge Nash said. “The same license, the same training—if they’re okay to be a foster parent, they’re okay to adopt.”

“But we still ensure that they can be foster parents if that’s all they want, or only adopt if that’s what they want,” Ploehn added. “Families often come in thinking they don’t want to make a foster relationship permanent, but then they fall in love with the child and change their minds. In the past, if the child wasn’t able to reunify, those families would have to start all over with the adoption training and approval process, and that takes a long time. With the new resource family requirement, everyone is trained at that higher level. Then if they want to adopt, they’re ready to go and can move through the court process rapidly. But in no way do we *require* them to adopt.”

If families are not interested in adopting, the department makes every effort not to place children there who seem likely to need that option. “There are no guarantees,” Ploehn cautioned. “Sometimes we’re sure that certain kids will reunify, but they don’t. Sometimes we’re sure other kids will need adopting, but their families step forward and clean up their act. Ultimately, this program is to meet the needs of the children, not the caregivers. If kids can’t go back to their own families, we want to ensure the least amount of movement possible for them.”

- Robles asked about **sentencing time at probation camps**, saying that the six- to nine-month timeframe discussed a year or two ago gives LACOE schools more time to work with students than shorter sentences do. The court is moving to eliminate three-month commitments in favor of five- to nine-month commitments, Nash explained, but all systems must be ready to implement the change at the same time to prevent overcrowded camps and backed-up juvenile halls. “We could implement it tomorrow,” he said, “but it won’t work until all the pieces are in place. We *are* going to get there—Probation thinks maybe by March.”
- “What is being done by the courts to ensure that **parents** are held accountable?” Robles asked. “It can’t be only schools that worry about truancy and other issues.” The dialogue with parents as they are getting their children back is a major component in Sobel’s dependency courtroom, particularly because of the legal requirement for an ‘affirmative finding’ prior to any ruling to remove parents’ rights to make educational decisions for their children. “I use that as a carrot,” Sobel said. “I tell parents, ‘I’m allowing you to retain your right to make educational decisions, but I will remove that right if you do not advocate for your child.’”

In dependency court, parents are interested parties, represented by attorneys and involved because their children are at risk of being—or have been—removed. “In delinquency court,” Judge Groman pointed out, “it’s the youth themselves who are charged with crimes. The parents sit at the back of the courtroom. They have no attorneys, they have no opportunity to speak. Hearing between fifty and sixty cases a day, I can’t have a dialogue with every parent. My vision for delinquency court is to develop a parent support group in the courthouse so

they can participate to a larger extent in the process. If they don't get to discuss things with the judge, they can speak to a parent ombudsman or support person before they leave the building. We're also developing a training program for parents whose kids are in camp, so when they return home, the parents are better prepared to deal with them. That's a huge issue that we haven't really touched on." Nash believes there is room for great improvement in how the delinquency system involves families, and Chief Taylor mentioned the wide variety of factors—prison sentences, substance abuse, and so on—that can affect parenting skills. "It certainly requires more than training sometimes," he said.

As a former school principal, Robles remembers her biggest challenge being a lack of leverage to require parents to become involved, even in simply getting students to school. "Down the road the kid was going to end up falling behind because the foundation wasn't there," she said. "There's no magic pill, but I'd love it if there was something we could do together to give school administrators some teeth."

- **Families who are not in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems** may also need help, especially when grandparents or older siblings are raising children. Grandparents as Parents, LACOE's parent training centers, and DCFS's kinship support centers were mentioned as resources. Ploehn said that Michael Gray, head of the kinship section at DCFS, could further inform school districts about what is available, and Robles suggested that LACOE work with DCFS and possibly Probation to create specialized parent training.
- Patti Azevedo said that the Pomona Unified School District has ongoing difficulty in persuading local **group home** staff to act as parents to the DCFS and Probation youth placed with them—attending school meetings, for example, or allowing students to participate in activities that perhaps don't fit well with the group home schedule. "What can we do to help get them involved?" she asked.

If parents still hold education rights, Groman said, they can give permission for students to be involved in activities. "When kids are in out-of-home care or in camp, that's a great time for parents to learn to be part of the education process. If the parent says the kid should play football and the group home won't arrange for that, the probation officer or the social worker should be brought in. And if there's no parent, the court can help." Ploehn suggested bringing the group home to the table and explaining why the activity is beneficial to the child. In addition, the child's social worker should make the activity part of his or her case plan. "Once the court approves the plan," Ploehn said, "it will happen."

Closing

Darline Robles thanked everyone for attending, and said that a date for a spring dialogue would be selected shortly.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.