



## **Education Coordinating Council**

**February 4, 2010**

**9:30 a.m.**

Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, Room 140  
500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles, California

Present: Allison Bajracharya  
Carol Clem  
Renatta Cooper  
Mónica García  
René Gonzalez, representing Ramón C. Cortines  
Leslie Heimov  
José Huizar  
Jitahadi Imara, representing Robert Taylor  
Helen Kleinberg  
Miriam Long  
Aubrey Manuel  
Machelle Massey  
Fernando Meza, representing Richard Martinez  
Judge Michael Nash  
Trish Ploehn  
Ron Randolph, representing Darline P. Robles  
Bruce Saltzer  
Rick Tebbano, representing Christopher Steinhauser

Chair José Huizar brought the meeting to order at 9:42 a.m., welcoming everyone to the fifth anniversary of the inception of the Education Coordinating Council and asking members and the audience to introduce themselves. Huizar particularly welcomed Allison Bajracharya, who has taken Yvette King-Berg's position with the California Charter Schools Association (King-Berg is now executive director over charter schools for the Youth Policy Institute), and noted that Robert Taylor and Marv Southard are both out of town.

In May of 2009, Taylor announced his impending retirement from the post of Chief Probation Officer, and his last day will be tomorrow. Judge Michael Nash has known Taylor since 1986, when Nash was the first judge to hear cases in the Hollywood courthouse and Taylor was captain of the Hollywood Division of the Los Angeles Police Department. "He's a terrific guy and it's been a privilege to work with him as Chief Probation Officer for the last three and a half years," Nash said. "He originally joined the department to help out with some management issues, but then [former Chief] Paul Higa suddenly passed away and Bob was asked to become chief. He

had no experience in probation, but has tremendous leadership. He particularly made his mark in the education area, and I want to thank him publicly for his efforts. We'll miss him, but he's certainly earned the right to retire. Three and a half years in Probation is like forty-five years on the job somewhere else."

Nash encouraged everyone to make the tenure of the new chief—still to be chosen, although Cal Remington, former head of Ventura County's Probation Department, has been appointed on an interim basis—a successful one. "It's a tough position," Nash concluded, "but that person's success is tied to our own and the community's."

### **Update: Los Angeles Unified School District's Public School Choice Initiative**

As members are aware, the Los Angeles Unified School District took a dramatic step last August when it opened a competitive bidding process to vendors wanting to operate certain new campuses and low-performing schools. School board president Mónica García explained that, with a dismal 54 percent graduation rate district-wide, concerns exist in some neighborhoods that new schools will be just new buildings, offering "more of the same," as she put it, rather than spurring creative leadership and instructional reforms system-wide.

With the choice initiative, the district hopes to attract new and innovative administrators who will establish exciting learning environments, craft schools into true neighborhood centers with after-school activities and community classes, and offer a chance to conduct solid research on best practices. "It's something we've talked about for a long time," said José Huizar, himself a former school board member. "I hope that the people around this table will connect with these schools to offer support and provide input into policies affecting the foster and probation students attending these schools."

The school board's August 2009 resolution directed LAUSD's superintendent to establish an application process for outside groups wishing to operate 18 new campuses and 12 focus schools. A total of 180 letters of intent were received in November, and 80 plans were submitted last month. Parents, students, employees, and community members are voting this week at the various campuses, and the results of that vote will advise the school board in its decision, now scheduled for February 23.

"The process is very exciting," García said, "but it's also very distressing to some. The biggest question is who will get these jobs? If external operators—charter schools—are selected, will they honor collective bargaining agreements? Will they create new ones for those campuses?" Applicants are required to meet the terms of the *Williams* settlement with the California Department of Education, which requires in part that year-round schooling be ended by 2012 and that overcrowding be relieved. Public-choice schools may not cherry-pick high-achieving students, but must accept all youngsters from their surrounding neighborhoods.

At present, 309 LAUSD schools are in need of 'program improvement' after having not met their educational targets for at least three years (and in some cases, far longer). Because smaller schools are generally felt to do a better job than larger ones, other district efforts have broken out several campuses into smaller units. An eighth-grader in the Belmont area now has 23 choices for high school, García said, and 80 percent of Belmont's first class under the new structure

graduated last year, as compared with 24 percent in the past. “This is change,” García emphasized. “This is reform. It’s messy, and we don’t always get it right on the first try. Any plan involving community and parent engagement has a focus on kids, and we’re expecting lots of organizing around the best plans [for school choice]. We need to engage in distributive leadership and crossing jurisdictions—I’d love to see social workers co-located everywhere, for instance. I want LAUSD graduation rates transformed. If we go up four percent every year, we can get to eighty percent by 2020. Your voices should be part of that conversation,” she told ECC members. “If a particular service helps with foster kids, then it should be up front.”

Helen Kleinberg raised the issue of parental involvement in recognizing where a particular child will do best in school. But what about foster children, who have no parents to advocate for them? She suggested procedures that would seek out foster and probation youth to involve them in specialized programs, rather than relying on their caregivers to get them in. Leslie Heimov agreed, saying that approximately 12,000 foster children attend LAUSD schools, and it is unlikely that all those foster parents and relative caregivers will be familiar with the school-choice concepts being discussed. Heimov would like to see the ECC facilitate ways to educate attorneys, social workers, and other professionals involved in those children’s lives on the issue.

“LAUSD’s challenge for next year is better engagement with parents and guardians,” García admitted. “We do it poorly overall. If a charter wants to serve a certain community, they have to do it a different way. Public school choice is all about serving kids in the neighborhood, and we need to do more outreach to nontraditional families. Maybe that’s something we can do with the ECC next year.”

From the audience, caregiver Tina Robinson asked about the process for identifying foster youth when they register for school, and René Gonzalez explained that LAUSD has a cooperative agreement with the Department of Children and Family Services for matching data records and being aware of the foster-youth population on any given campus. Because of the privacy issues involved, only staff with a ‘need to know’ are usually apprised of the identity of these youngsters, but it is available; data fields also exist for foster youth in LAUSD school records. Robinson expressed concerns about foster youth receiving different treatment once school staff know who they are, such as being sent home immediately when problems arise, thereby being denied an education. “Our kids should go to those liaisons for foster youth that schools have,” she maintained, “but there’s no intervention. Why aren’t these kids graduating? Because we’re not helping them. It’s a serious problem, and we need to take a serious look at it.”

### **“Promise Neighborhoods” Opportunity Grant**

René Gonzalez prefaced his description of the Promise Neighborhoods concept (an informational handout was included in member packets) with the caution that the formal Request for Proposals is not expected for another few weeks, so details are subject to change.

Beginning with \$500,000 planning grants, the Obama administration plans to seek proposals for comprehensive children’s anti-poverty programs in 20 communities across the nation, modeled on the design of the Harlem Children’s Zone, a 100-square-block area of Harlem, New York, that has over the past three decades significantly improved educational outcomes from birth to college for the young people living there. Miriam Long, the City of Los Angeles’s deputy mayor

for education, youth, and families, praised the Harlem project, but also highlighted several contrasts between its environment and that of Los Angeles. “Harlem is a very dense community that is built vertically, not horizontally, like we are,” she noted. “It’s also 30 years into its process, has its own schools, and receives \$60 million in philanthropic funds.” Any zone in Los Angeles, Long warned, would likely look very different.

The Promise Neighborhoods concept is unique in that educational organizations cannot apply, and nonprofit community-based organizations are taking the lead. In addition, a match for the government dollars from philanthropic services and funding will be necessary. Part of the project is stabilizing neighborhoods in terms of housing and employment, and another element is creating a continuum for transitions across grade levels from preschool to college—encouraging conversations between early childhood programs and the elementary schools, for example, to help prepare children for kindergarten.

To improve the Los Angeles area’s less than stellar track record with regard to being awarded Federal grants, Long wants some innovations in the Promise Neighborhoods application process. “Everybody’s at capacity,” she said. “No one has new money. Where do city, county, school district, and philanthropic services overlay? If we look at that, we might come up with our own idea of what’s needed in our community. Our success will depend on good relationships with the school districts, and on working together.” The Advancement Project has begun a map of where services are concentrated, and is in the process of identifying communities that already have an infusion of resources. “We want to coalesce as one effort around a limited number of proposals,” Gonzalez said, “with the broader vision of bringing together the public and private sectors to plan for the city around major initiatives and ideas.” Everyone needs to have “skin in the game,” as Long phrased it, and be a part of the effort.

Marcia Tabora from the Department of Mental Health pointed out that Harlem Children’s Zone didn’t start out with \$60 million. “It began with heart and hard work,” she said. “It was a mission. [Founder] Geoffrey Canada believed in valuing each child. If a kid got into a fight at school, Geoffrey or the teacher would go to the kid’s home at dinnertime and talk with the kid and the parents. What we need to figure out is how he got that cultural buy-in from teachers and staff. Who will do that? It’s an important piece.”

“Harlem started out with people walking a couple of blocks and asking folks if they needed any help,” Long commented. “Unfortunately, we don’t have that luxury.” The formal RFP will emphasize school involvement and have more of an educational focus, Gonzalez acknowledged, but he sees no reason why all the elements of a safe and healthy community could not be part of the project on the ground.

“If you all agree,” ECC director Carrie Miller told members, “this would be a wonderful opportunity to build on the values in our Blueprint. We’d like to explore making the ECC integrally involved in any effort in Los Angeles that moves forward.”

### **Follow-up: Promoting School Stability for Foster and Probation Youth**

Maryam Fatemi from the Department of Children and Family Services opened a discussion about the seven recommendations to promote school stability for foster and probation youth that

were developed by an ad hoc ECC group formed last July. (Copies of the recommendations were included in member packets, and are attached to and made part of these minutes.)

- With regard to the training mentioned in **Recommendation 1**, Ron Randolph asked about consolidating training among agencies and finding ways to offset its cost, which can fall under Title IV-E funding. DCFS staff trained front-office staff at the Pomona Unified School District on AB 490, Fatemi said, and would be happy to provide similar training to other school districts and to anyone else who is interested. LACOE's Foster Youth Services division also has AB 490 training materials, Pat Levinson said, if school districts prefer to do the trainings themselves. Levinson's office number is (213) 637-3103 and her cell phone is (310) 490-3029.

Although **Recommendation 1** does mention "caregivers" with regard to training, Helen Kleinberg suggested more of an emphasis on relatives, since about half of DCFS children are placed with kin who may not live anywhere near the child's school of origin. "Can DCFS look at other relatives, who might live closer?" she asked. "Or advocate with relatives so they understand the importance of children staying in their original schools, and maybe transport them there? There's a big piece needed about educating relatives."

- Marcia Tabora requested language specifically mandating the inclusion of youth in transitions and decision-making, although Carrie Miller explained that, by definition, case planning meetings (mentioned in **Recommendations 2 and 3**) do include youth.
- With regard to considering semester and school-year end dates (the first bullet of **Recommendation 2**), Leslie Heimov admitted that, "Lawyers and the court are the worst offenders in not considering these things, and I'm glad for this specific reference. Nobody wants to make kids stay in care longer than necessary—and we can't do that legally, anyway—but if we think more about it, we can find some alternatives, like asking reunifying parents to take kids to their old schools until they finish a semester, for example." Nash remembers discussions on this issue with his judicial officers, and promised to research whatever directive was initiated.

Machelle Massey would like the third bullet of **Recommendation 2**—*Educational personnel/advocates should be included in case planning meetings whenever possible*—changed to require the presence of those individuals always. "Someone needs to be there," she said. "Without them, who is saying that a given move will be detrimental to the kid?"

- With regard to **Recommendation 4**, Massey inquired about agencies that administer a number of group homes under one umbrella, and that may shuffle youth among them because of conflicts with staff or other residents, or because they are getting in trouble at school. "Is anyone contacted when they do that?" Massey asked. "Are the agencies making those decisions, or are they just sending them off to another group home that they run? Those high-level authorizations should be happening now."

Bruce Saltzer would like Recommendation 4 to specifically reference the case planning meetings mentioned in Recommendations 2 and 3, to ensure that school stability considerations are integrated into those conferences. Case planning meetings occur whenever any

placement move is contemplated, Miller said, and if Recommendations 2 and 3 are implemented, those considerations will definitely be addressed.

- Saltzer appreciated the qualifying language in Recommendation 2 (“Every effort should be made to keep youth in their school of origin for the remainder of the current school year *when it is in their best interest to stay there.*”) and wants similar language added to the second bullet of **Recommendation 5**, so it reads: *Contract language should require foster family agencies (FFAs) to make every effort to find a placement within a youth’s school-of-origin attendance area if that is consistent with the youth’s educational needs and best interest.* Heimov agreed with Saltzer’s point in concept, but observed that timing was often an issue. “Especially at the beginning of a case, we often don’t know the child’s educational needs because the assessments aren’t yet complete,” she said. “The default school may be in the child’s neighborhood, but—especially if it’s low-performing—is that the school that will best serve that child’s needs? We’re creating a circular problem if we don’t clarify that.”

Throughout the recommendations, Heimov suggested adding specific references to holders of education rights. “Meetings happen, but it’s not always clear who the holder of a particular student’s education rights is. Those people need to be involved.” Rick Tebbano expanded on that concern, asking if holders of education rights could be established prior to students’ enrolling in school. “We had a couple of instances in Long Beach where it took a month before a surrogate was appointed,” he said, “and the kid was special ed. We had a very hard time trying to set up an IEP and determine appropriate placement. Is there something the courts can do?”

Fernando Meza encouraged good relationships with DCFS and local attorneys in solving quandaries like this. “We have similar situations [in Pomona],” he related, “and we just move forward and try to do something for those kids. We have issues all the time with group homes, but we don’t let that stop us. We pick up the phone. Too many kids are falling through the cracks as it is.”

A holder of education rights is appointed only when the court has specifically limited parental rights, Judge Nash explained, and it is the court’s obligation to appoint one as soon as possible. “The first question we ask in the very first hearing is ‘Who holds the education rights?’” he said. “Is that person accessible? Is that person capable? We take that into consideration at every step.” In addition, the name of the holder of education rights should appear on every minute order associated with the case. “That was one of the changes that came out of the ECC-sponsored dialogues with county staff and school superintendents,” Nash noted. “We’ve implemented the new procedure in both the dependency and delinquency courts. Every once in a while, though, I’ll still see a file without one. If that happens, school districts can always contact me directly. We can fix it. If we start getting inundated, we’ll know there’s a [systemic] problem.”

Issues around holders of education rights tend to be those of practice, not of law or policy. “For most kids, their parents are the holders,” Heimov said. “Forty percent of [dependency] cases are in reunification, and those parents should be actively engaged in their kids’ education decisions, even if they don’t yet have physical custody. That’s the goal—it’s one of the best ways to nurture reunification. I would hope that schools are making the effort to engage and connect with parents, not just assuming that foster kids all have [non-parental] holders of education rights.”

Unhappily, the timely flow of paperwork is another matter. Even when minute orders do contain the name of the holder of education rights, Pat Levinson said, those records often don't follow students when they change schools. Contacting the child's attorney or social worker, or an education liaison, is an option, but sometimes that takes time. Fortunately, Nash said, the electronic transmission of minute orders is nearing. Until then, Linda Jones, a Foster Youth Services staff member stationed at Edelman Children's Court, said that she can immediately find out the identity of the child's attorney, and can obtain the name of the holder of education rights within 24 hours. She offered her help to all school districts and can be reached at (323) 526-6543. Jennifer Hottenroth, chief of DCFS's education division, can also obtain that information, and can be reached at (213) 351-5775.

In that vein, Machel Massey would like language added to the school stability recommendations mandating that agencies moving a child's placement arrange for all educational records to be prepared and ready for transfer *before* the move.

Although the ECC's goal may be school stability, Aubrey Manual stressed the importance of placement stability as well. "Kids are being moved too easily," he said, "and that damages them." In the case of frequent runaways, audience member Tina Robinson said, agencies often request a transfer because they fear a blot on their scorecard when the youth is consistently AWOL. She encouraged mental health treatment for chronic runaways.

Any number of reasons exist for placement moves, Heimov said, from a team decision-making meeting being set up too quickly to caregivers giving seven-day notices. "We all agree that placement stability is important," she said. "That's part of why we're here. But the school situation can be so bad that the placement fails, too. We're here to do a better job."

**Aubrey Manual moved that the ECC support the school stability work group's recommendations with the amendments noted in this discussion. Bruce Saltzer seconded the motion, and it was passed by acclamation.**

### **Director's Report**

Carrie Miller highlighted information in her written director's report and its attachments.

- The November 30 education dialogue with school district superintendents led to parent training partnerships between the Department of Children and Family Services and the Los Angeles County Office of Education. Minutes of the meeting were included in member packets.
- Also included in packets was the first quarterly report to the Board of Supervisors with regard to LACOE's plan to address the juvenile court school program's operating deficit, outlining the five central factors contributing to that ongoing situation.
- An information sheet on proposed Federal legislation to address truancy issues and provide services to bring youth back to school—the RAISE UP Act (Reengaging Americans in Serious Education by Uniting Programs)—was distributed, along with sample language for letters of support.

- As members may have recently read, the ACLU and Public Counsel have filed a lawsuit against LACOE and the Probation Department regarding meeting educational standards at Camp Challenger. The Probation Department and LACOE have been working together, and with community partners, to provide improved educational opportunities for probation youth. The ECC will likely play a role in helping to ensure this lawsuit gets resolved.
- The ECC will be represented on the Foster Youth Services new program development team, which will help determine current and future program design, criteria for identifying target populations, program evaluation outcomes, and relationships with collaborative partners. Anticipated programmatic changes will be reported to the California Department of Education in the Foster Youth Services year-end report in August 2010.
- Miller distributed the schedule for upcoming ECC meetings, showing Thursday meetings start at 9:30 a.m. on May 27, 2010; October 7, 2010; and February 3, 2011.

### Updates

- **Conversations about the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) at the Federal level are ripe for advocacy from the ECC, Mónica García said, and she moved that the group draft a letter. Renatta Cooper seconded the motion, and it was approved by acclamation.** José Huizar suggested that the Board of Supervisors be asked to adopt the ECC's recommendations with regard to this legislation, and Miller agreed to send a draft letter to ECC members electronically for review and feedback.
- Maryam Fatemi thanked Bruce Saltzer for following up after the discussion at the last ECC meeting about early childhood education, and helping to coordinate a meeting between foster family agencies and DCFS.
- Renatta Cooper expressed appreciation to Carrie Miller for addressing the NAACP in November about services for foster youth, and for agreeing to return in March. "She cleared up a lot of misapprehensions," Cooper said, "and I very much appreciate her willingness to come out on a Saturday for this very important outreach. Her presentation was excellent and she greatly impressed the school district staff who attended. That's the kind of thing that takes us beyond sitting around this table—getting information out to people."
- As many are aware, the lack of transportation funding attached to AB 490 remains an issue. An opportunity now exists to draw down Federal funds for transportation, Fatemi said, and the California Department of Social Services and the Child Welfare Directors Association are collaborating to write an all-county letter with instructions on how to accomplish that.
- DCFS recently collaborated with the Los Angeles Education Foundation (LACOE's non-profit partner), Fatemi announced, to connect 50 Head Start and Early Head Start grantees with DCFS regional offices at a USC function in an effort to increase enrollment in early childhood education programs.



## **Public Comment**

- Tina Robinson urged a look at the needs of foster children whose parents are incarcerated, mentioning the Obama administration's plans for re-entry programs. She also advocated stability in group home placements, as well as coordinating with the faith community and clergy councils to educate grandparents and other relative caregivers on their rights and responsibilities with regard to the education of children in their care. "Older people are still churchgoers," she said, "particularly in the African-American community. I suggest you do your training there. When they first get those kids, they're in shock and they often don't hear what the social workers might be telling them." Maryam Fatemi noted that upcoming trainings with kin providers would cover AB 490 and other education issues, and appreciated the idea of connecting to the community through clergy councils. Fernando Meza mentioned the group Grandparents as Parents, and Miriam Long said that the City of Los Angeles's Department of Aging could also facilitate trainings.

In addition, Fatemi said, DCFS maintains two kinship centers, one in West Los Angeles and one in Santa Fe Springs, and Casey Family Programs sponsors another in SPA 6. DCFS also recently received a kinship navigation grant that will be implemented in SPAs 3 and 8, areas where no centers currently exist. Robinson suggested that foster family agencies and other organizations with the appropriate facilities open up their conference rooms for training sessions. "We need to let the community in. Sometimes we even need to go door to door to reach our people."

- Vani Dandillaya from the Chief Executive Office announced a new homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing program that provides financial assistance to eligible renters in the form of security deposits, monetary payments to landlords and utility companies, and so on. The website (shown at the bottom of the flyer she made available) allows users to enter information to determine their eligibility, which is presently limited to specific geographic regions. If interested parties live elsewhere, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (<http://lahsa.org>) can provide referrals. For more information, please contact Dandillaya at (213) 974-4190.
- Eugenia Wilson from Living Advantage, Inc., expressed her appreciation to the ECC for listening to community members. "It's difficult, but we're here for a common goal—our kids, our future. They will be the ones taking care of us."

## **Next Meeting**

The next ECC meeting is scheduled for:

**Thursday, May 27, 2010**  
**9:30 a.m.**  
Location to be announced

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



## **ECC School Stability Workgroup Proposed Recommendations**

1. Social workers, probation officers, and caregivers must be trained on the importance of implementing AB 490 and on how to best minimize placement moves.
2. School stability discussions must be included in all case planning meetings (TDMs, MDTs, etc.).
  - Every effort should be made to keep youth in their school of origin for the remainder of the current school year when it is in their best interest to stay there.
  - Semester and school-year end dates should be considered, along with their impact on grades and school credits, when any school move is contemplated.
  - Educational personnel/advocates should be included in case planning meetings whenever possible.
3. Case planning meetings must be held when a placement move is imminent.
4. Internal controls should be established to ensure that school stability has been considered in any placement move resulting in a change of school. (For example, Regional Administrators or high-level managers would authorize these moves.)
5. State law that requires placing agencies to promote educational stability by considering placements within a youth's school-of-origin attendance area must be enforced [WIC 16501.1(c)(2)].
  - Court proceedings should hold staff accountable for adhering to this statute.
  - Contract language should require foster family agencies (FFAs) to make every effort to find a placement within a youth's school-of-origin attendance area.
  - To increase the likelihood of youth remaining in their schools of origin, the feasibility of aligning FFA contractors with DCFS offices should be determined.
6. School district front-office staff must be trained on AB 490 requirements.
7. Transportation options to and from a youth's school of origin should be examined with school districts, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and local city and state departments of transportation.