



## 2006 Annual Report

The Education Coordinating Council began its second year by submitting *Expecting More: A Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster and Probation Youth* to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in February. It received the Board's unanimous approval. The remainder of 2006 was devoted to working with ECC members and a host of public and private partners and community agencies to start implementing the Blueprint recommendations.

Major implementation actions included:

### **Raising Awareness of the Blueprint and its Recommendations**

- The ECC published and distributed 750 copies of its *Through Their Eyes* report, which presents the results of 12 youth and adult caregiver focus groups on the education of youth in the foster care and probation systems.
- The ECC published and distributed 600 copies of *Expecting More*.
- ECC representatives presented information about the Blueprint at over a dozen meetings and conferences of the following organizations: the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council, the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care's design team, the City of Los Angeles's Audits and Governmental Efficiency Committee, Los Angeles County's Commission for Children and Families, the City of Los Angeles's Interagency Team4Kids, the Grantmakers for Children, Youth & Families annual conference, the Children Uniting Nations/USC's "Keeping the Promise to At-Risk Youth" annual conference, and the Casey Family Programs/National Governor's Association's "Roundtable on Putting Data to Work to Improve Child Well-Being." The ECC also participated in the City of Los Angeles's Department of Cultural Affairs "Art Matters" conference and the mayor's education leadership retreat.
- The juvenile court held trainings on the Blueprint for both dependency and delinquency court judicial officers and attorneys, and published an article on the Blueprint in the spring 2006 issue of its PARTNERS newsletter.

### **Tools and Supports**

- The ECC website was launched in January to serve as a central communication vehicle. It includes information about the organization and its current activities, meeting notices and minutes, ECC reports, educational resources, and links to other websites.

- The ECC assisted California's Select Committee on Foster Care to craft several pieces of legislation that would provide increased educational resources for foster youth, such as grant tuition/fee waivers for foster youth at state colleges and universities and expanding the Guardian Scholars and other college support programs. It also worked with the Los Angeles Education Foundation to help shape legislation to fund additional educational services in juvenile court schools, transition services for probation youth, and vocational training opportunities. Additionally, it supported budget adjustments that resulted in \$200 million for additional school counselors, \$22.5 million for reducing county social worker caseloads and establishing new mentoring programs for system youth, and another \$4 million for expanding the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services program.
- The ECC conducted a data match between the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the departments of Children and Family Services and Probation that provided aggregate demographic and academic achievement information on system youth, and identified which infant/early education programs and elementary, middle, and high schools they attend. LAUSD also performed a follow-up analysis to create a profile of the 203 foster and 89 probation youth identified as gifted and talented.
- Based on the LAUSD data match, Healthy City mapped the location of foster and probation youth by city council district, indicating what city resources are available for these youth in each district.
- The ECC also conducted a data match between the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and the Probation Department that provided demographic and academic achievement data on probation youth in juvenile hall schools, camp schools, and community day schools, as well as those enrolled in the Cal Safe program for pregnant teens.
- Additional funding for the ECC was secured from the Board of Supervisors, DCFS, Probation, and the Interagency Operations Group (IOG), as well as a two-year grant from The California Community Foundation.
- Three members were added to the ECC consultant team: Terry Ogawa to coordinate the early childhood development recommendations, Michelle Koenig to coordinate the youth development recommendations, and Becki Nadybal to provide technical assistance for the data and information-sharing recommendations.

### **Early Childhood Education**

- The Policy Roundtable for Child Care is in the process of launching the child care program quality rating system referred to in *Expecting More*. Six sites have been identified and it is anticipated that the system will begin operations in July 2007.
- The director of DCFS sent a letter to the parents and caregivers of all three- and four-year-old children under its supervision that encouraged their enrollment in early childhood education/preschool programs, provided information on how to access these programs, and included a checklist of kindergarten readiness skills. With the help of the Los Angeles County Office of Child Care, the department obtained information from early childhood edu-

cation providers regarding available program openings for these children, and notified its staff of enrollment availability in their communities.

- DCFS is partnering with Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) on a pilot program at the department's Pomona office to increase awareness and training among preschool providers about the needs of children and families under the department's supervision. Training is also being provided to that office's social workers on the importance of early childhood education and how to access resources.
- To assist parents, caregivers, and caseworkers, DCFS has assembled age-appropriate standards for early childhood and for school-aged, high school, and special education students, as well as for youth transitioning to adulthood.
- The Probation Department has begun referring pregnant and parenting female probationers in need of child care to DCFS's Child Care Assistance program. New participants in the pregnant and parenting teen program are also being provided information on State Preschool, Head Start, and LAUP early childhood education programs.
- The Department of Mental Health (DMH) is implementing a Prenatal to Five (P25) program to promote the delivery of effective family-centered and culturally responsive mental health services and supports for young children and their families within the county's service planning areas. For example, SPA 4's Project ABC (About Building Connections) will provide comprehensive mental health services to families with children from birth to age five who are either already in or at risk of entering the child welfare system. Approximately 500 young children and families will be enrolled during this six-year program.

### **Youth Development**

- Obtained the signatures of the superintendents of five ECC-member school districts—LACOE, Lancaster, Long Beach, Los Angeles, and Pasadena—on a letter, drafted by the Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA) and the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, outlining AB 490 regulations. This letter was created at the request of DCFS and the Performance Measures Task Group, and caregivers are now successfully using it to expedite the enrollment of their foster youth in these school districts.
- ACHSA has compiled a list of free and low-cost tutoring resources for its member agencies to use in serving the foster and probation youth in their care.
- DCFS has been actively promoting and facilitating the enrollment of its youth in free tutoring and California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) preparatory programs, and is ensuring that social workers are prompted to enter school names in the department's electronic record system so that foster children can be better connected to tutoring, preparatory courses, and other enrichment programs.
- DCFS has expanded its education and mentoring units and consolidated them into one organizational division to provide more integrated program planning and service delivery. It is now in the process of hiring an educational consultant for each regional office to further assist the

department's efforts to fully implement the Blueprint recommendations, navigate school systems, and address the challenging educational issues faced by department youth.

- The Probation Department is holding quarterly parent empowerment meetings at several school-based supervision program sites that engage, empower, and encourage parents and guardians to become more involved in the academic process, including monitoring youth's homework, attendance, and academic performance. Probation is also working with LACOE to conduct a series of "transition open house" meetings with parents and guardians at camp facilities to provide information on transitioning their children to appropriate educational settings once they are released from camp.
- Probation expanded its library card initiative to include all youth on probation—or at risk of becoming so—to enable them to access free Internet-based tutoring for grades 4 through 12. The department is also providing a series of after-school enrichment opportunities that includes a year-round youth employment program for probation and at-risk youth at various Los Angeles city park sites, faith-based mentoring and life skills coaching, anger management and decision-making programs, and an annual summer basketball camp that includes sessions on health, personal empowerment, and scholastic achievement.
- LACOE has asked school districts to give foster and probation youth priority for enrichment programs such as the live homework help program, Title I training, and other academic activities.
- In September, St. Anne's opened its New Village Charter School for young women in the foster care and probation systems, beginning with 80 ninth- and tenth-graders. Grades 11 and 12 will be added in subsequent years, for a total of 200 students.

### **Data and Information-Sharing**

- The Juvenile Court issued a blanket order, effective July 15, mandating the sharing of basic educational information between schools and DCFS and Probation caseworkers, children's attorneys, and court-appointed special advocates (CASAs). A process for requesting educational records was developed by those named in the order, LACOE, and LAUSD, and will be shared with other school districts at the school superintendents' meeting in February 2007.
- The City of Los Angeles conducted a first-ever survey of city departments to determine whether they give priority to foster and probation youth in their programs, how many each department serves, which programs target this population, what caregiver outreach they conduct, what barriers exist to serving these youth, what additional outreach and services could be provided with additional capacity, and what resources would be needed to expand.
- On June 13, the Board of Supervisors asked the ECC to create a public/private partnership to oversee the development of the electronic education record recommended in *Expecting More*. On July 27, the ECC established the Resource Partnership to do just that, and agreed on a set of strategies for moving forward. Since then, a handful of Partnership meetings have been held and a potential way to link educational information to an existing electronic system containing foster youth health data has been found, an information technology vendor selected,

projected software and server costs identified, and the process of determining the education data elements begun.

### **School-Based Support**

- The ECC helped shape and support LAUSD's Access for All homeless resolution that provides additional staff and services for foster and homeless youth.
- LAUSD has appointed foster youth advocates at 300 of its schools.
- The Long Beach Unified School District has launched a school and community mentoring program that matches youth with administrators and counselors to motivate them to do better in school. It has also established a foster youth partnership with Long Beach City College.
- DCFS is working with LAUSD, Children Uniting Nations, and California State University Northridge to establish an academic mentoring program at Van Nuys High School. Five additional programs at middle schools are being planned for 2007.
- The Probation Department is building collaborations with school districts, the Sheriff's Department, and the county's Human Relations Commission to ensure safe passages to and from high-risk school sites and to establish a team of youth advocates who can intervene in potentially dangerous situations.
- LACOE and LAUSD have hosted meetings with the educational liaisons of over 20 school districts to share information and provide networking opportunities.

### **Accountability**

- DCFS has increased training to caregivers and social workers on the importance of educational outcomes for foster youth and on raising academic expectations, and has formed a departmental team to ensure that case plans include education plans and that team decision-making conferences include educational efforts. It is also developing management reports that highlight the educational information recorded in its electronic case record system.
- School-based probation officers and multi-systemic and family therapy interventionists are now conducting case planning meetings that review short-term and long-term educational goals with parents/guardians and youth.
- DMH's school-based mental health services coordinators have conducted "case study" reviews for selected mental health providers and found that the interventions provided to these youth contributed to higher levels of academic achievement, special awards, increased attendance, more successful peer interaction, better socialization skills, and greater participation in student government, school-sponsored athletics, and social activities. In addition, higher numbers of youth enrolled in accelerated learning programs, graduated from high school, and are attending college. The department is also working to make educational achievement one of the mandatory recorded outcomes for Mental Health Services Act contracts.

- ACHSA and the Performance Measures Task Group supported DCFS's inclusion of a performance measure in group home and foster family agency contracts that tracks the number of children and youth whom agencies are able to enroll in school within three days.

### **Strengthening Relationships and Role Awareness**

- The ECC convened a first-ever meeting between school superintendents, county departments, and the juvenile court to discuss how to make pertinent Blueprint recommendations a reality. Several agreements were reached, and the Antelope Valley and Pomona school districts invited DCFS to outstation social workers at their schools. A second meeting is scheduled for February 2007.
- The ECC is participating on the California Foster Youth Education Task Force and the California Collaborative for Children in Foster Care's design team. Both groups are attempting to accomplish at the state level much of what the ECC has laid out in *Expecting More*.