

February 14, 2008

To: Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
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From: Sharon G. Watson
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**PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN
“EXPECTING MORE; A BLUEPRINT FOR RAISING THE EDUCATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT OF FOSTER AND PROBATION YOUTH”**

At its meeting on February 14, 2006, your Board approved “*Expecting More: A Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster and Probation Youth*,” developed by the Education Coordinating Council (ECC), and instructed the ECC to report its progress in implementing the recommendations in that document to your Board every six months. The first Progress Report was delivered to your Board on August 14, 2006, the second on February 14, 2007 and the third on August 14, 2007; this is now the fourth report.

The ECC and its members have made terrific strides in implementing the recommendations in *Expecting More* during the past six months and we thank your Board and the Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation for the significant financial support that made a lot of this progress possible. Much is being accomplished in the quest to raise the academic performance of children and youth under the supervision of DCFS and Probation, especially in those areas requiring inter-departmental and/or inter-sector collaboration.

For example, the ECC is participating on the Comprehensive Education Reform Committee, created by the Chief Probation Officer in response to Supervisor Knabe’s June 19, 2007 motion. This Committee was charged by your Board with developing a comprehensive plan to “dramatically reform education programs in the County’s juvenile halls and probation camps, including the feasibility of charter schools and other innovative models of education.” In partnership with the Children’s Planning Council (CPC), the ECC convened a broad group of public and community stakeholders to provide input and advice to this Committee, including the Commission for Children and Family Services, Public Defender, New Visions Foundation, Advancement Project, Association of Community Human Service Agencies, Girls and Gangs, Helpline Youth Counseling, and one of CPC’s parent representatives. Chief Taylor presented a draft of the plan to the ECC at its meeting on January 31, 2008, which the ECC endorsed with a few amendments. It is anticipated that the final plan will be presented to your Board next month.

In addition, the ECC is participating on the planning committee for a Los Angeles version of the Children's Defense Fund's highly successful conference, "America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline Crisis," held in Washington, D.C. last fall. The Los Angeles conference is scheduled to be held on May 14, and will highlight the work being done within the county to prevent youth from becoming a part of this pipeline.

Some of the key achievements with respect to individual Blueprint recommendations are:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Recommendation #1: Higher numbers of children in the care of DCFS, and the children of foster and probation youth, should be enrolled in high-quality early intervention, care, and education programs that are culturally and linguistically responsive.

- In October 2007, the ECC released "*Investing in the Future of L.A.'s Most At-Risk Children.*" This report recommended that the ECC convene key stakeholders to design an integrated, countywide initiative that links the early childhood education, child welfare and probation systems to ensure the healthy development of the county's young children. This stakeholder group will present an action plan for this initiative to the ECC at its April meeting.
- A second report, "*Data on Needs and Resources for Preschool Children Involved with Child Welfare and Probation,*" was released at the same time, highlighting information that will be helpful to the design of the initiative. For example, over 20,000 children under the age of 6 came to the attention of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in 2006, with over half from 0 to 2 years old. Maps were created, in partnership with Healthy City, showing where DCFS children, ages 0-2 and 3-5, reside. Additional maps, showing the location of early care and education programs in these areas, are being developed so that young DCFS children can be quickly connected to high quality education resources.
- To help increase these connections, the ECC and DCFS, in collaboration with the Child Care Resource Center, USC Head Start and Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Head Start agencies, conducted an outreach effort to connect caregivers of young DCFS children with Head Start programs that had immediate openings. DCFS reports that approximately 10% of caregivers/foster parents who were sent notices followed up with contacts to Head Start agencies.
- In addition, DCFS convened a workgroup to identify and develop additional strategies to substantially increase the number of its children that are enrolled in a high quality early education or child care program. As a first step in this process, the workgroup conducted a survey to determine how many DCFS children were already enrolled in these kinds of programs and, for those that were not, what the reasons were for not enrolling the child. The survey results/analysis will be available shortly.

- 145 applications to participate in the County's Steps to Excellence Quality Rating Program (STEP) have been received by the Office of Child Care, 70 from child care centers and 75 from family child care providers. 130 of these applicants also requested mini-grants, and 85 child care professionals have participated in STEP training activities since September 2007.
- The Los Angeles County Office of Child Care reports that a total of \$1.4 billion from various funding sources was spent on direct early care and education services in the county during the 2006-07 fiscal year.

Recommendation #2: Community organizations and county departments should offer increased support and resources to parents, relative caregivers, and foster parents to help them be good nurturers and provide the positive learning environments that will ensure that their children are ready for school.

- The Children's Planning Council launched its Abriendo Puertas (Opening Doors) project, which is providing parenting and leadership training for immigrant Latino parents with children ages 0 to 5. 81 participants attended the first set of training sessions, which are peer-led, with a planned expansion to begin this spring. The Public Library and other county partners are helping to make this project a success.
- Children's Bureau's Magnolia Place, a comprehensive, neighborhood-based, primary prevention program that builds supports for young children from the prenatal stage through age 5, opened last month. Magnolia Place houses several early childhood education programs, a Parent Leadership Council, mental health/substance abuse/domestic violence treatment services, adult education and employment support programs, a credit union and financial literacy services, a pediatric and women's health and dental clinic, legal aid and a county satellite office to connect families to essential services and resources. Families are a very important part of shaping the programs and services at Magnolia Place.
- The Tel Aviv/Los Angeles Partnership of the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles' Families At-Risk Project is working to promote the importance of early intervention, service integration and public/private partnerships for children and families, and to develop a shared community agenda that provides supports so that children can thrive within their own families. Two ECC members and the Council's early childhood education coordinator participated in the Los Angeles delegation's visit to Tel Aviv in October 2007 and in hosting Tel Aviv representatives in Los Angeles earlier this month.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation #3: Higher numbers of DCFS and Probation youth should be enrolled in skill-building and enrichment programs that include non-system students and provide opportunities for positive and enduring connections to nurturing adults.

- The ECC is convening a first-ever Resource Fair for approximately 500 DCFS and Probation youth, caregivers and those who work with these youth. This event will bring together countywide resources for vulnerable youth, ages 0 to 24, in the areas of early childhood education, after-school and summer programming, literacy, arts and culture, school transitions and college readiness. The California Endowment has graciously offered the use of its entire facility to stage this event on June 25, 2008. Over a dozen partners, including county departments, the City of Los Angeles, schools, and community-based and youth organizations are involved in planning this Fair.
- There has been a significant expansion of academic mentoring programs in the Los Angeles and Compton Unified School Districts. Five new Children Uniting Nations/MPLAY programs at LAUSD middle schools—Virgil, Gompers, Bethune, Drew and Markham—are scheduled to open this spring and will, collectively, serve 200 foster youth. The Children, Youth and Family Collaborative is now operating 20 academic mentoring programs in LAUSD and Compton USD elementary, middle and high schools, a 35% increase from 2006.
- Members of the Los Angeles Youth Transition Action Team worked to more than quadruple the number of foster and probation youth participants in the Summer Youth Employment Program, from 43 in 2006 to 174 in 2007.
- The Los Angeles City Workforce Investment Board is creating incentives for providers of its Hire LA and summer youth employment programs to give priority enrollment to foster and probation youth.

Recommendation #4: Youth should be systematically engaged and meaningfully involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating the programs, activities, and events in which they will participate.

- The City of Los Angeles Youth Council Coordinator is seeking to increase the participation of foster and probation youth on that Council. Information regarding a recent contest to design a Council logo, with a substantial prize for the winner, was distributed to DCFS and Probation youth in an attempt to peak their interest in the Council.
- The LAUSD/Casey Family Programs/RAND school intervention project that is targeting youth in foster care who have experienced trauma, included youth on its community advisory board.

- LACOE’s “Transitions 411” conference, to be held in August 2008, will focus on self advocacy strategies for foster youth, including skill training and information to help them better represent their own interests with respect to education and transition issues. The California Youth Connection is a key partner and will help to identify the best methods to share information for participants.
- Department of Mental Health (DMH)-supported youth drop-in centers are involving youth in the design, implementation and evaluation of offered services. In some sites youth participate in the development of selected groups and co-facilitate many of them.

Recommendation #5: Families, caregivers, and agency staff should pay greater attention to preparing DCFS and Probation children and youth for transitions to preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, adult education, vocational school, college, and employment, and for transfers between schools.

- In January 2008, First 5 LA re-authorized funds for its very successful School Readiness Initiative which, in partnership with First 5 California, funds 42 centers and programs throughout the county that provide a wide range of services to help children from birth to age 5 get ready for school.
- The Westside Infant-Family Network (WIN) provides infant mental health care and comprehensive support services through six West Los Angeles agencies, networking existing basic services (child care, homeless services, medical clinic, food pantry, etc.) with new mental health services through a shared team of bilingual therapists. Since its launch 18 months ago, WIN has served 361 individuals in 82 families.
- The Pomona Unified School District is partnering with the DCFS Pomona office and Casey Family Programs to improve educational continuity and school stability for children in out-of-home care. Pomona USD and DCFS are using ECC’s just-completed Pomona USD data match information to identify shared students so that they can provide them with targeted services and supports.
- Mediated a legislative issue between California group homes and former foster youth (AB 497) to prevent group home youth from being required to attend Non-Public schools until a lengthy Individualized Education Plan (IEP) could be completed. The revised bill requires that the IEP process be expedited so that group home youth can be more quickly placed in the most appropriate educational setting.
- In the past six months, DCFS’s new team of education consultants completed work on 778 referrals. 221 cases or 28.4% of these referrals involved enrollment issues, 192 cases or 24.7% were for academic issues (including poor grades) and 170 cases or 21.9% were for IEP issues. The next three highest requested areas of service involved education records, child behavior or special education issues.

- Middle school-based Deputy Probation Officers (DPOs) are working with the department's high school-based DPOs to assist middle school probationers successfully transition to high school in Probation's Summer School Transition Project. In addition, Camp-To-Community Transition Program DPOs are working with parents and school officials to facilitate transitioning youth from probation camps to appropriate community schools. Approximately 75-80% are now being enrolled or have enrollment appointments within 48 hours of their release from camp.
- The California Community Colleges launched a Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) which mandates that a FYSI liaison be on each community college campus in order to improve foster youth access to student services and resources, increase retention, and raise academic performance.
- LAUSD and the Children, Youth and Family Collaborative launched Boys Uplifted, an academic program for at-risk boys at three South Los Angeles schools that prepares participants for admission to four-year colleges and helps participating students secure scholarships.
- LACOE, through a Juvenile Detention Settings grant, is providing transition skill training to incarcerated youth at four probation camps (Afflerbaugh, Paige, Kirby and Miller) to help them make easier transitions from camp to the community and to school.
- The ECC is now overseeing the issuance of \$100,000 in college scholarship funds to 12 probation youth honored at the department's Success is Our Future event last May. These funds, provided by a private donor, will help meet the financial needs of these scholarship recipients throughout their undergraduate years.
- Worked with the Prosper Academy to finalize a conceptual framework for a residential academy for DCFS and probation students in Los Angeles County, based on the *LA Model for Residential Academies* developed by the ECC at the request of the Board of Supervisors in 2005. We are also helping them locate a suitable site for an academy. In addition, the ECC helped create the California Academies for Residential Care (CARE), a group of 5 counties (Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, Santa Barbara and Ventura) interested in implementing residential academies throughout the State.

Recommendation #6: The ECC should participate in and work to align local efforts to create safer schools (including passages to and from), particularly within and among the seven school districts represented on the ECC.

- Brokering a partnership between the MTA, a LAUSD charter school and two offices of the Board of Supervisors, to launch a pilot program whereby students will receive free Transit Access Passes to help them get to and from school. The program will then track student attendance increases that result from safe and reliable transportation.

- LAUSD, the Mayor of Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles Police Department are working together to target crime in 20 middle and high school gang reduction zones created in September 2007. Several of these schools—Dorsey, Jefferson, Jordan and Roosevelt high schools and Markham middle school—have high numbers of foster and probation youth.
- Probation has worked to develop School Safety Collaborative/Safe Passages programs for youth traveling to and from schools in high crime areas, especially at schools where the department has out-stationed DPOs. These safety collaborative groups have been successful in reducing violence and gang attacks, as well as increasing school attendance.
- DCFS provides a half-time social worker to the ABC Unified School District as part of its Federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant program. This partnership is proving to be successful in keeping families out of the child welfare system. A similar program is being planned for the Montebello Unified School District this spring.
- DMH Prenatal to Five (P25) program staff and school mental health coordinators in SPA 8 are serving as partners in the Lennox Safe Schools Alliance (LSSA). DMH is assisting with the preschool families' component of the LSSA by facilitating access to various training resources for staff and families regarding social-emotional development and mental health issues.
- The City of Commerce, in collaboration with the Montebello Unified School District and the Public Defender's Office, hosted a 3 Day Drug Store event to teach sixth-graders about the dangers of drug use. Participating schools included Bell Gardens, Macy and Suva Intermediate and Laguna Neuva and Rosewood Park Elementary.

DATA AND INFORMATION-SHARING

Recommendation #7: The enhanced sharing of information among school districts, county departments, the juvenile courts, and counsel for children who appear in those courts should be assured by concurrently working to:

Resolve differing views about what federal law and California law allow, especially regarding federal confidentiality regulations, so that placing agencies (such as DCFS and Probation) and counsel for the child can access school records without a court order or authorization from a parent/guardian/holder of education rights, thereby enabling them to carry out their responsibility to meet the educational needs of children in their care

Establish a clear and consistent understanding of federal and state confidentiality laws among school districts, DCFS, Probation, and children's counsel so that infor-

mation necessary for school success is routinely shared in a timely and effective manner

Pursue amendments to the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), if needed, to clarify that child welfare agencies and legal representatives are able to independently access, share, and receive educational information with and from all school districts

Advocate for school districts in Los Angeles County to include child welfare personnel among those designated as eligible to receive ‘directory information’ on enrolled students. (School districts currently include juvenile justice personnel, but those provisions have not been interpreted in Los Angeles County as including DCFS employees.)

Draft a court order that would permit county departments and the youth’s attorneys, while a youth is under the Juvenile Court’s jurisdiction, to access pupil records, grades, transcripts, special education assessments, individual education plans, and current attendance records

With foster and probation youth, develop guidelines for information-sharing that do not violate their need for privacy and confidentiality

- The process for DCFS, Probation, children’s attorneys and CASAs (Court-Appointed Special Advocates) to obtain complete educational records from school districts is now in place. Attorneys from the Children’s Law Center’s three law firms and CASA of Los Angeles volunteers have been trained on the use of the Student Records Request Form (SRRF) developed by the ECC in 2007 following the blanket order issued by the Juvenile Court. The Probation Department has issued a directive to Deputy Probation Officers to begin using this form and DCFS has revised its education record request form to incorporate language from the SRRF.
- Brokered an agreement between DCFS and LAUSD whereby DCFS will send LAUSD, three times per year, the names of all department youth. LAUSD will then identify who are district students so that they can be connected to specialized services.

Recommendation #8: The ECC should work with the Chief Administrative Office, county departments, school districts, and placement provider agencies to ensure the development of an electronically based information system that includes the individual educational records of DCFS and probation youth.

- The CEO is moving forward with a plan to expand the mHUB database system, pioneered by the Violence Intervention Project at its DCFS medical hub, to all DCFS medical hubs countywide. This will enable critical health and mental health information of department youth to be shared across hubs as youth move to different communities. The ECC is pursuing adding student educational information to this countywide system.
- Continuing to work with the Commission for Children and Families, Children's Action Network, Casey Family Programs, the Data Quality Campaign and the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care on securing permission from the U.S. Department of Health and Human services to create an electronic-based educational record system for DCFS and probation students.

SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT

Recommendation #9: Educational liaisons and school-based staff should be provided with the information they are requesting about who these youth are, the names of those responsible for their education (holders of educational rights, caregivers, caseworkers, attorneys, etc.), how best to contact them, and what services and supports are available for these youth.

- Completed data matches with the Pomona and Montebello Unified School Districts, DCFS and Probation to determine the names of shared youth, which schools they attend, and how they are faring academically compared to other district students. Additional data matches are now underway with the Los Angeles, Long Beach, Norwalk/La Mirada and Lancaster school districts.
- DCFS created a one-page information sheet, at the request of school superintendents, outlining department contact information (who to contact and how to contact them) for school district personnel seeking information about DCFS youth. This document is solving a big dilemma for school staff who, unfamiliar with DCFS's structure, had resorted to calling the DCFS hotline whenever they had a question about a youth. This information sheet was distributed at the ECC's School Superintendents meeting in November 2007 and to all school-based education liaisons.

Recommendation #10: School-based staff should be trained regarding the educational and emotional needs of foster and probation youth and ways to meet those needs.

- LAUSD Local District 3 created a Resource Coordinating Council to develop programs that will promote student learning and coordinate educational and support resources at schools and in the community. This Council is training school staff about the needs of foster and probation youth and has linked local resources, such as those offered by the Department of Mental Health, to these programs.
- As a result of a recent LAUSD program re-design, that district's Foster Care Unit is now supervising 70 tutors who are providing assistance to youth in residential treatment facilities. This Unit, with the capacity to expand to 110, will now be able to make resources for foster and probation youth available to many more youth in care.
- Pomona Unified School District held customer service staff development trainings in November 2007 and January 2008, which included presentations from both DCFS and Probation staff on issues relating to system youth.
- The Probation Department now requires juvenile field DPOs to take a series of state-certified training courses in Adolescent Development and Trauma, Loss and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among Incarcerated Youth.
- DCFS has developed a training module for all new social workers that highlights the importance of education to children's well-being and includes basic educational concepts and requirements for the children they serve. New social workers must now complete this training before beginning casework activities. In the summer of 2008, training sessions will also be conducted with DCFS social workers and line managers that address the importance of school-related database information, quality pre-school and child care, accessing mentoring and tutoring programs in communities, IEPs, and education rights holder issues. In addition, staff will be presented with a framework and tools for helping families navigate the education system to improve academic outcomes for their children.
- The Department of Mental Health, in collaboration with LACOE and LAUSD, co-sponsored a "Focus on Prevention" forum in November 2007. 200 school district representatives participated and were educated about the Mental Health Services Prevention and Early Intervention Plan, best and promising practices with respect to priority populations, including trauma-exposed children, children in stressed families, children/youth at risk of school failure and juvenile justice involvement, current gaps in needed services and prospective funding opportunities.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Recommendation #11: County departments, school districts, and the judiciary should cross-train key stakeholder groups on their collective and individual responsibilities for ensuring that foster and probation youth receive a solid education.

- LACOE and LAUSD convened the education liaisons from 18 school districts and county departments in October 2007 for a day-long training on the unique needs of foster and probation youth. Schools requested additional information on how to navigate county systems. As a first step in this process, LAUSD, LACOE, CASA of Los Angeles and the juvenile court are organizing a tour of the court for school liaisons and other school personnel this spring, so that they can learn more about how the court operates.
- LAUSD continues to convene bi-monthly Community Partners meetings, which include city and county departments, to collaborate on program design and share resources. That district is planning to conduct additional cross-training sessions with DCFS and Probation school-based staff and LAUSD school principals, deans and office staff on the educational and emotional needs of system youth.
- The Probation Department has conducted several training sessions with juvenile court bench officers on its Title IV-E Waiver implementation plan and on its camp re-design both of which address the educational achievement of probation youth.

Recommendation #12: DCFS/Probation caseworkers, caregivers, and the courts should each be accountable for the educational success of foster and probation youth through a three-pronged approach:

DCFS and Probation caseworkers shall ensure, using multidisciplinary team decision-making and case conferences, that academic expectations are established for these youth and that educational plans are developed which outline the activities youth should participate in to meet those expectations. These team meetings should include, at a minimum, youth, parents, caregivers, and school representatives.

Caregivers and others identified in the plan shall implement these educational plans by facilitating the child's involvement in the agreed-upon programs and activities.

Courts shall monitor the creation of these plans and the progress made in achieving them, and hold the involved parties accountable for their implementation.

- All judicial officers are using the education information form in the education case plan developed by the ECC; they are now regularly asking questions about the education of the children and youth they are responsible for and requesting education reports from the field. The court is also working with the Probation Department to train staff on the use of the education case plan.

- The ECC worked with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and DCFS to incorporate educational questions into Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings. Met with over 50 TDM facilitators in December 2007 to determine how education planning could be included in these meetings and all facilitators were trained on the agreed-upon protocol in January 2008.
- The Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA) reported that, as a result of the AB 490 letter signed by the superintendents of ECC member school districts and other interested districts, 87% of the youth in the care of its agencies are now enrolled in school within 3 days. As ACHSA agencies serve 30% of the overall foster youth population in the county, this is a very significant improvement.

In summary, ECC members, partners and community organizations are successfully making *Expecting More* a reality and the Council looks forward to reporting further progress in its next report in August 2008. If you should have any questions or require any additional information, your staff may contact the ECC at: (213) 974-5967.

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