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August 9, 2011

To: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich  
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Supervisor Don Knabe

From: William T Fujioka  
Chief Executive Officer

## **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. Once the ECC became a part of the Chief Executive Office (CEO), Service Integration Branch (SIB), in July 2009 and adopted a smaller staffing structure, the ECC began reporting its progress on this Plan annually. The first Progress Report was delivered to your Board on August 14, 2006; this is now the ninth report.

As your Board directed, the purpose of the ECC is to coordinate efforts to raise the educational achievement of system youth across organizations and jurisdictions, functioning as an advocate, convener and broker that mobilizes resources, resolves barriers, and spearheads innovative policies and strategies. The various members of the ECC collectively reaffirmed their commitment to this role during a strategic planning process that took place this year, grounded in the vision and recommendations set forth in *Expecting More*. In developing the updated ECC strategic plan, over 40 interviews with ECC members and stakeholders were conducted to identify opportunities that build upon prior successes, apply lessons learned, and heighten the impact of the ECC.

*“To Enrich Lives Through Effective And Caring Service”*

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During its May 26, 2011 meeting, ECC members moved to adopt the plan which specifies five priority areas (Early Childhood Education, Youth Education and Development, School/Department Coordination and Support, Data and Information Sharing, System Accountability) and the following eight outcomes:

1. At least 90% of young DCFS children under the age of six—and the children of DCFS and probation youth—participate in high-quality early care and education programs;
2. Educational programs provided to youth in juvenile halls and camps will be reformed so that they significantly increase student academic achievement;
3. System youth participate in after-school and summer enrichment activities that offer a variety of learning experiences, enhance social/emotional well-being, and provide opportunities for them to build positive and enduring relationships with caring adults;
4. DCFS and probation youth successfully transition to preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, adult education, vocational school, and college, and smoothly transfer between schools;
5. Prevent/reduce school truancy and engage truant youth in safe and welcoming educational programs;
6. Departments and schools work in concert to provide system youth with the education and supports they need to attain future success;
7. Share education information electronically across systems; and
8. Courts regularly track and monitor youths' educational plans and progress and hold accountable those most responsible for youths' increased educational achievement—including child welfare workers, probation officers, attorneys, caregivers, parents, school personnel, and the youth themselves.

The ECC continues to implement various activities to achieve these outcomes. Some key accomplishments are:

### **Priority Area 1: Early Childhood Education**

**Outcome #1: At least 90% of young DCFS children under the age of six—and the children of DCFS and probation youth—participate in high-quality early care education programs**

DCFS has made significant gains towards this outcome by developing an innovative and user-friendly electronic referral system to identify and connect three and four year-old children under its supervision to the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Head Start program. The system, developed over the course of two years and initially piloted in DCFS' Glendora and Compton regional offices during May 2011, is now operational in all 18 DCFS regional offices. The "two-click" system is simple to use and requires minimal training. After obtaining caregiver consent, Children's Social Workers can quickly initiate a referral to Head Start for children from their respective caseloads by logging on to the system, followed by a simple click of a button. No additional data entry or work is required. In turn, LACOE Head Start, one of the largest Head Start grantees in the nation, is fully committed to making this partnership work and has designated two staff members to receive and route DCFS' electronic referrals to the preschool program most accessible to each child. **In just one month, DCFS has referred over 450 children to LACOE Head Start using this new system.** The South County regional office has done a particularly effective job, having contacted approximately 98% of caregivers and families caring for children not enrolled in preschool to request their consent for referral to LACOE Head Start. These accomplishments are also relevant to DCFS' focus on helping children attain self-sufficiency by supporting families' and caregivers' connection to early education programs. Efforts are underway to begin tracking enrollment information periodically and to integrate additional early care and education networks into the referral system, such as Los Angeles Universal Preschool and LAUSD's State Preschool Program.

The ECC is supporting DCFS' efforts to include information promoting the enrollment of children in early education programs in caregiver agreements and working with the Dependency Court so that Court Minute Orders related to children between three and five years of age include similar information. Additionally, your Board's approval of the newly updated *Child Care Policy Framework* in March 2011, developed by the Office of Child Care (OACC) in conjunction with the Policy Roundtable for Child Care, paves the way for increased Countywide collaboration to meet this outcome. One of its key components which is also related to the Countywide Youth Self-Sufficiency Initiative—the Strengthening Families Approach (SFA)—is designed to help a broad array of departments and programs enhance child development, increase family stability, and prevent child abuse/neglect among children ages birth to five by incorporating the following five Protective Factors into their work with families: parental resilience; social connections; knowledge of parenting and child development; concrete support in times of need; and children's social and emotional competence. The ECC is partnering with the OCC, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and other local partners to establish a multidisciplinary learning community that will integrate the SFA and Protective Factors into County departments' work with children and families. As a first step, in June 2011 a delegation from Los Angeles, including representatives from the CEO, ECC, DCFS, DMH, OCC, First 5 LA, and the Partnership for Early Childhood Investment, joined over 300 attendees at the Strengthening Families Leadership Summit to develop a more in-depth understanding of the

SFA and exchange implementation ideas with representatives from over 30 states. Next steps include developing and testing local implementation strategies.

### **Priority Area 2: Youth Education and Development**

#### **Outcome #2: Educational programs provided to youth in juvenile halls and camps will be reformed so that they significantly increase student academic achievement**

On October 14, 2008, your Board adopted the Comprehensive Educational Reform Report which contained 35 recommendations designed to improve the educational outcomes for youth incarcerated in the County's juvenile halls and camps. Created through a motion by Supervisor Knabe, the Comprehensive Educational Reform Committee (CERC), of which the ECC is a member, continues to oversee the implementation of the reforms.

Progress has been made in a number of areas, with one of the most impressive being the piloting of an innovative approach for providing educational curriculum to at-risk youth at the probation camp school of Camp Scott/Scudder. In September 2010, the *Road to Success Academy* was launched by LACOE, reaching over 100 young women detained at Camp Scott/Scudder in Saugus. The *Academy* is designed to address the many special needs and unique circumstances of girls in the juvenile justice system. The curriculum uses a project-based approach, based on a national educational model entitled *Big Picture Learning*, which engages students in thematic interdisciplinary learning around essential questions that invite them to delve into content in more direct and meaningful ways. The school program involves daily and special activities to promote self-esteem and empower young women to make positive choices and behavioral changes.

#### **Outcome #3: System youth participate in after-school and summer enrichment activities that offer a variety of learning experiences, enhance social/emotional well-being, and provide opportunities for them to build positive and enduring relationships with caring adults**

DCFS' Youth Development Services implemented six computer training camps Countywide from May through June 2011 for approximately 170 youth who were either college-bound or already attending college. The training sessions, designed to equip foster youth with the technology and skills needed to successfully transition to higher education settings, took place on weekends over the course of one or two days. Each youth received a free laptop computer, flash drive, printer, and computer software. Trainers provided hands-on instruction to help youth operate their new laptops and maximize their use of pre-loaded software programs to complete a variety of functions, such as tracking expenditures and creating PowerPoint presentations for school.

LAUSD's Beyond the Bell program is also continuing to make special outreach efforts to engage foster youth in summer activities that support achievement and promote social,

emotional, and physical development in a safe environment. Beyond the Bell has set a goal of enrolling at least 1,000 foster youth by the end of summer, followed by an evaluation of enrollment outcomes.

The First Star UCLA Bruin Guardian Scholars launched a summer academy in June 2011, an intense, free 5-week residential program for foster youth entering the ninth grade. This comprehensive college immersion program engages youth in fun and active learning opportunities, including academic courses for college credit, independent studies, field trips, social and cultural activities. The program also provides supervised housing on campus to give youth the full university experience, and offers individualized attention through a caring adult network, foster alumni, and extensive young adult mentorships. The ECC actively supported youth recruitment efforts, posting application materials on its website and distributing information to constituents. The program reached its goal of recruiting 30 foster youth all of which successfully graduated on August 5<sup>th</sup>. Plans are underway to launch another summer academy in 2012.

Furthermore, the Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA) convened a Countywide Resource Fair for DCFS and probation youth at the California Endowment on June 28, 2011, modeled after the ECC's Fair in 2008. Over 600 youth and their caregivers participated in this successful all-day event and were connected to approximately 60 vendors offering everything from free arts and literacy programs to legal services, housing, jobs, and on-site applications for free birth certificates. The fair also offered complimentary dental, vision and Planned Parenthood screenings, and provided hands-on application assistance for Medi-Cal and CalFresh benefits. Youth participated in workshops that took place throughout the day on various topics such as obtaining financial aid for college, sealing juvenile delinquency records, money management and resume writing. Representatives from several organizations—including the ECC, DCFS, Probation, the Interagency Council of Child Abuse and Neglect, California Youth Connection (CYC), and several group homes—did the planning for this fair. Major donors included all members of your Board, Senator Carol Liu, ACHSA, CYC, DCFS and Probation.

**Outcome #4: DCFS and probation youth successfully transition to preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, adult education, vocational school, and college, and smoothly transfer between schools**

LAUSD's Foster Care Unit initiated the new Pathways to College program this year to increase the number of foster and probation youth who successfully enroll and transition to college. Counselors from this specialized unit met with 129 students who expressed an interest in attending college to discuss career choices, college preferences, financial aid and housing options. Youth also received guidance and help completing college admissions, financial aid, scholarship, and housing applications. As a result, approximately 90% of students applied and were accepted to colleges. Of these youth, 22 received college acceptance letters and will attend four-year universities during fall 2011.

The Camp-to-Community Transition Task Force, convened and chaired by the Delinquency Court, continues to coordinate various activities to support probation youths' reentry into their home communities. The six school districts represented on the Task Force, who are also members of the ECC, are developing procedures to clearly articulate how probation youth returning from camp will be effectively transitioned back to their schools. The Task Force is also in the process of revising Probation's multi-disciplinary team meeting procedures and case plans to incorporate transition planning as early on as possible and address transition throughout youths' camp stay. Once revisions are finalized, the new document and procedures will be rolled out Countywide to all camps. Additionally, the CEO is exploring integrating the Task Force with the Gang Violence Reduction Initiative to address juvenile reentry issues in a cohesive manner.

**Outcome #5: Prevent/reduce school truancy and engage truant youth in safe and welcoming educational programs**

Concerned about the over 30,000 truancy (daytime curfew violation) citations handled each year by the Informal Juvenile and Traffic Court (IJTC), Judge Nash, Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court and the ECC's Vice Chair, launched a Truancy Task Force (TTF) in the fall of 2010 to come up with alternative ways of dealing with this issue. Staffed by the ECC, this task force brings together the juvenile courts, law enforcement, the legal community, City of Los Angeles, DCFS, Probation, schools, advocacy organizations and community-based service providers to develop coordinated Countywide approaches/practices that would keep truant youth out of the court system as much as possible and provide useful tools for dependency and delinquency court judges. The TTF devoted its first meetings to investigating what kinds of approaches already exist in the County and, of these, which ones appear to be effective and which ones are not. Its final data-gathering meetings will be held in August 2011, with the first focusing on successful approaches being used in other jurisdictions across the U.S. and the second—a Youth Hearing—providing youth the opportunity to relate their experiences with truancy laws and offer recommendations for alternative solutions. In September 2011, the TTF will begin determining which of the approaches and practices it has looked at could or should be promoted in the County, and what policies and/or collaborations would be needed for implementing them.

Since the creation of the TTF, there have already been a couple of quick successes. First, the LAPD issued a new directive in the spring of 2011 that instructs officers to consider the *spirit* of the existing daytime curfew violation ordinance rather than just its strict enforcement. Officers must now ask students their age and if they have a valid excuse for being in a public place during school hours before determining that they are violating the ordinance; not enforce the ordinance when students are making a good faith effort to get to school, regardless of their tardiness; return students encountered during school hours to their school when that is feasible; not issue citations or make an arrest unless they reasonably believe that an offense has occurred and, in any case, not take these actions on school grounds. Several TTF members helped the LAPD develop this directive.

Second, in response to concerns expressed at TTF meetings about the Court's not receiving adequate school attendance information, LAUSD arranged to send its mobile Grad Van to the Children's Court on July 21, 2011, and at least monthly thereafter. This van houses two LAUSD staff and wireless computers directly connected to that district's data system. School attendance and all other educational records can be printed out, on the spot, for judicial officers, children's attorneys, DCFS social workers, parents, caregivers, holders of education rights, and Court Appointed Special Advocates who present a minute order authorizing their legal status. If there is sufficient demand for this easy access to educational information, LAUSD will send the Grad Van out as often as weekly, and will also work with the Delinquency Court and the Probation Department to offer the same service at locations convenient to them.

### **Priority Area 3: School/Department Coordination and Support**

#### **Outcome #6: Departments and schools work in concert to provide system youth with the education and supports they need to attain future success**

Conceived by the First Supervisorial District, the Gloria Molina Foster Youth Education Program (GMFYEP), now in its third year of implementation, continues to demonstrate how collaboration between school systems and DCFS can improve the educational outcomes of foster youth and contribute to their self-sufficiency. The project has served over 300 foster youth to date and is now implemented across six school districts, having expanded to two additional districts this year – Azusa Unified School District in October 2010 and El Rancho Unified School District in May 2011. Additionally, in February 2011, the GMFYEP Protocols and Procedures Manual was published and contains all of the necessary information for program expansion to additional school districts. The Manual includes a sample MOU between DCFS and a participating school district, an outline of the roles and responsibilities of all staff, a description of the four types of program teams and who should be involved in each, an educational history checklist, educational assessment and case plan forms, a file auditing and quality assurance tool and a special education tracking form. In May 2011, the project also developed credit recovery guidelines to help adults who work with foster youth recover high school course credits completed while they were attending other schools or school districts. The ECC has distributed these credit recovery guidelines to its constituents and has posted a copy on its website ([www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org](http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org)).

The GMFYEP continues to be recognized for championing education for foster youth, and during this reporting period was profiled in news articles from *Education Week*, the *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, and the *Whittier Daily News* for its exemplary accomplishments. The following quote from a foster youth who participated in the GMFYEP captures the impact it has had on her life: "I am not another statistic, a messed-up kid that is going to end up on the streets with no job or education. I can accomplish anything, no matter what I am going through."

In addition to supporting the GMFYEP's implementation, the ECC is also working with DCFS and the State Department of Social Services to include language in caregiver contracts to require that foster youth be immediately enrolled in school, as mandated by AB 490, and ensure regular school attendance.

LAUSD, in partnership with DCFS, DMH, Probation, and the Human Relations Commission, has successfully implemented the second year of the federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SSHS) grant in Supervisorial District 2. Grant activities target the George Washington Preparatory High School (GWPHS) complex, which has the largest number of foster and probation youth within LAUSD, and the 17 elementary, middle, private and continuation schools that feed students into it. SSHS has increased the availability and accessibility of mental health services for youth by placing seven Wellness Facilitators at school sites who help identify and connect students and their families to mental health services. DMH has stepped forward and placed a System Navigator at GWPHS this year to ensure high-need youth are able to access more intensive supports. DCFS team decision making meetings (TDMs) continue taking place at GWPHS and were expanded to two middle schools (Heart and Clay Middle Schools). Additionally, the project has developed an innovative approach that uses school performance indicators (attendance, suspensions and grades) to trigger a TDM for foster youth. Lastly, the Human Relations Commission established a new elective course on social justice, anti-bullying, and harassment at GWPHS in the fall of 2010. This class, and an accompanying *No Haters* afterschool club for middle and high school youth, has resulted in a decrease of students reporting they feel bullied at school. The Second Supervisorial District and ECC played a key role in helping secure this grant, and the ECC continues to be involved in overseeing its implementation.

LACOE's Foster Youth Services (FYS) has submitted an application for funding for fiscal years 2011-14 to the California Department of Education (CDE), soliciting a maximum of \$2.1 million to provide foster youth with tutoring, educational case management, and transitional services. The total amount solicited represents a 27% budget reduction from LACOE FYS' previous allocation, due to budget constraints put forth by the CDE. This application is the culmination of an intensive 18 month planning process during which the ECC and other LACOE FYS local advisory group members canvassed existing resources and service gaps to ultimately identify the three service priorities. In December 2010, LACOE FYS successfully launched a pilot to field test case management services in conjunction with the Countywide Youth Self-Sufficiency Initiative and has co-located FYS staff members in five DCFS regional offices (Belvedere, Glendora, South County, San Fernando Valley and Vermont Corridor). These individuals participate in multi-disciplinary team meetings, provide education consultation services, and collaborate with DCFS social workers, education consultants, and Probation staff to help youth reach their education objectives. Next steps include expanding the pilot to additional DCFS regional offices, contingent upon funding from the CDE.

#### **Priority Area 4: Data and Information Sharing**

##### **Outcome #7: Share education information electronically across systems**

Last year, the ECC developed a mechanism that, for the first time, allowed school districts to share education records with DCFS, the Juvenile Court and all counsel of record, and that solves once and for all, the decade-long disagreement about how education information can be legally shared in a way that is compliant with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This year, the ECC worked with the Delinquency Court and representatives of the District Attorney, Public Defender, Alternate Public Defender, LAUSD, LACOE, County Counsel, Probation Department, and other key stakeholders to finalize similar FERPA-compliant language that can be inserted into delinquency court minute orders allowing school districts to share education records with the Probation Department, the Juvenile Court, and all counsel of record. Once finalized, the ECC will work with the Juvenile Court to include this language electronically into delinquency judicial officers' computer systems.

Additionally, the ECC secured conceptual approval from the State to electronically share educational data with other County departments. The ECC is working closely with the Service Integration Branch to explore avenues for creating a platform that would facilitate this type of data-sharing. A few private foundations have expressed an interest in investing in a platform that would support the electronic sharing of these records.

#### **Priority Area 5: System Accountability**

##### **Outcome #8: Courts regularly track and monitor youths' educational plans and progress and hold accountable those most responsible for youths' increased educational achievement—including child welfare workers, probation officers, attorneys, caregivers, parents, school personnel, and the youth themselves**

This priority area and corresponding outcome, a new addition to the ECC's updated strategic plan, was developed with and embraced by the Juvenile Court in recognition of the unique role it fulfills in overseeing and holding the various systems and individuals serving youth accountable for their educational success. A number of activities are already underway that exemplify the Court's commitment to this outcome. For example, this year the Juvenile Court has stepped up to lead the Truancy Taskforce and the Camp-to-Community Task Force. Also, the Delinquency Court has initiated a new program that recruits and trains community volunteers to be education rights holders for youth who have no parent or caregiver capable or available to educationally advocate for them. Additionally, these voluntary education rights holders are prepared to serve as educational mentors for parents and caregivers, modeling effective and appropriate interactions with representatives from the school their child attends. There is now a pool of 23 individuals that have completed this training process and are ready to be appointed by the Court to serve

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designated families for at least one school year. Next steps include publicizing the availability of these volunteers, updating the Juvenile Court's Delinquency Education Protocol to clearly state the responsibilities of each partner in the delinquency court, and defining the procedure for appointing education rights holders. As demand for additional volunteer education rights holders increases, more trainings will be conducted so that, ultimately, no youth in the delinquency system is left without a viable education rights holder.

As evidenced by all the of above, ECC member agencies, partners, and community organizations are actively engaged in achieving the ECC's *Blueprint* and Strategic Plan goals and outcomes. The Council looks forward to making further significant progress.

If you have any questions or require any additional information, please let me know or your staff may contact Trish Ploehn, Assistant Chief Executive Officer, at (213) 974-4532 or via e-mail at [tploehn@ceo.lacounty.gov](mailto:tploehn@ceo.lacounty.gov).

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