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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. 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 tenth 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 in 2010 and adopted an updated strategic plan on May 26, 2011 that is grounded in the vision and recommendations set forth in *Expecting More*. The progress in implementing this new ECC strategic plan is detailed below.

It should be noted that the ECC has had vacancies in both of its staff positions during most of this past year. However, exams for these positions were released in June, so it is expected that these vacancies will be filled by the end of the year. To assist the ECC implement the recommendations in its “*A Comprehensive Approach to Improving*

“To Enrich Lives Through Effective And Caring Service”

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Student Attendance in Los Angeles County” report released on February 2, 2012, the Department of Mental Health awarded the ECC a grant for \$188,100 from its Mental Health Services Act Prevention and Early Intervention Plan funds. This grant, which started on March 1 and extends through June 30, 2013, will also support the continuation of the ECC’s work on related strategic plan goals such as improving the transition of camp youth to schools in their home communities and creating positive school/community approaches that effectively reduce school-related youth misbehavior and minimize court involvement.

Some key Strategic Plan accomplishments during the past year 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

The Head Start and Early Education Referral System introduced by DCFS in May 2011 has dramatically simplified the process of referring young children to early education programs, particularly Head Start, and has made it possible for the department, for the first time, to quantify the number of referrals being made. During the 2011 summer and fall program enrollment period, for example, social workers referred 1283 of the approximately 4400 young children in care at that time to early education programs. Of these referrals, 1113 were made to the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Head Start programs, with LACOE enrolling 484 of these children and LBUSD enrolling 81. Collaborative efforts are now being developed with additional early education providers to find reliable ways of determining youth enrollment in their programs. This referral system is also helping DCFS determine the reasons why parents and caregivers choose not to make a referral, and this information is enabling the department to develop and implement more effective strategies to educate parents and caregivers about the benefits and availability of early education programs for their children.

DCFS is now collaborating with the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), Michigan State University and the LBUSD Head Start program on a grant that is exploring and evaluating new methods and opportunities for enrolling young children under the age of five in early education programs. Begun in October 2011, this project focuses on the 2012 enrollment season and on young children who are placed in Long Beach. Two particularly promising components of this grant are its targeted outreach to typically hard-to-reach families and the enhanced cadre of ancillary support services that are being made available to families. Preliminary evaluations show some promising results that may be able to be replicated countywide.

Two federally funded projects are now underway that support quality early education for young children, age birth to six years. The *Early Care Systems Infrastructure Project* focuses on increasing access for children in the child welfare system, including increasing knowledge and strengthening relationships of stakeholders and providers. The *Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant Project* supports the expansion of child care quality rating and improvement systems, focusing on providers serving children in the child welfare system.

Also, on November 10, Casey Family Programs, in partnership with DCFS, the Office of Child Care, First 5 LA, Zero to Three, the ECC, and other community partners, held a symposium featuring the importance of early learning and development and its relation to child welfare, service delivery and social policy. Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff, founding Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, was the keynote speaker.

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

As the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) has already reported to your Board, much progress has been made in implementing the Comprehensive Education Reform Committee's 35 recommendations this past year. As a member of CERC since its inception, the ECC was instrumental in developing these recommendations and is helping to oversee their implementation. Most notably, since the beginning of 2012:

- A new career/technical education (CTE) program, "Building Skills", was launched at the Challenger Memorial Youth Center (CMYC) on March 5 and is being offered to youth in the three camps housed there. This program uses the Paxton/Patterson curriculum in twenty construction trades, including painting, electrical, finish carpentry, plumbing, roof framing, and surveying. Thirty camp youth have participated in Building Skills to date. In the coming months, this program will be expanded to Camps Mendenhall/Munz, Kilpatrick/Miller, and Scott/Scudder and career areas such as health care and fashion design will be added.
- The AdvancePath Academy was launched at the CMYC at the beginning of April to assist camp youth quickly make up lost course credits in a variety of subject areas. Students work at their own computer workstation, at their own pace, under the guidance of a teacher for a four-hour morning or afternoon session.

Forty-five students are currently enrolled and the Academy will soon expand to serve sixty. Several participants who were more than a full grade behind are already on track to graduate from high school on time.

Students in both of these programs participate in the regular Christa McAuliffe school program for the remainder of the school day. These programs are very popular with camp youth and there are waiting lists of potential participants.

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

As part of the countywide Youth Self-Sufficiency Initiative, the Department of Parks and Recreation held a conference for teen-aged foster and probation youth on October 15 at the Watts-Willowbrook Boys and Girls Club. This well-attended conference offered education and employment workshops to participating youth and provided access to educational advising and work opportunities.

On October 26, 2011 the ECC co-hosted, with the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Public Library, a first-ever forum for after-school program providers to educate them about the critical importance of their programs for DCFS and Probation youth and encourage them to serve (or serve more of) these youth. Data was presented on the number of system youth currently participating in after-school programs, barriers were identified that impede their participation, and examples of successful partnerships were highlighted. Providers were asked what the County could do to facilitate more participation by system youth, and attendees were encouraged, whenever possible, to prioritize DCFS and Probation youth in their outreach strategies and enrollment policies. Forum attendees proposed that an After-school Programs Workgroup be developed to brainstorm strategies and identify and build special partnerships to increase system youth participation in quality after-school activities. This Workgroup was convened on March 15, with representatives from over ten County and community-based agencies participating.

Last month, the California Community Foundation announced that, in partnership with the Ford Foundation, it will provide \$1.7 million to local community organizations to partner with schools to expand learning time for disadvantaged students to give them “the same enriched learning activities typically enjoyed outside school hours by their wealthier peers.” Grantees will be re-structuring after-school programs and, potentially, the entire school day and/or year and helping teachers to creatively re-design after-school activities to spark greater student engagement and give students more time with caring adults. These reforms should directly benefit the DCFS and probation students

attending project high schools and provide some excellent templates for countywide expansion.

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

Under the leadership of the Delinquency Court, the Juvenile Re-Entry Council (a merger of the former Camp-To-Community Task Force and Probation Youth Community Transition Project) has worked over the past several years to develop a protocol to successfully transition probation youth returning home from camp. As one of the most important pieces of the transition process is the timely enrollment of youth in an appropriate school program, a pilot project has been created with the Los Angeles Unified School District (as about half of all camp youth are from LAUSD schools) to test the proposed school transition procedures. A Council subcommittee is reaching out to all 81 school districts to set up meetings in each SPA this fall to get district input on the protocol and encourage their participation in implementing it.

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

As reported to your Board last August, ECC Vice-Chair Judge Nash created a Truancy Task Force (TTF) at the end of 2010 to reduce the number of school truanancies--especially those referred to the Informal Juvenile and Traffic Court (IJTC)--by bringing the courts, law enforcement, schools, cities, and community groups together to identify and then systematize best practices and promising ideas countywide. In the fall of 2011, the TTF formed a workgroup to distill the information the task force had gathered during the past year from various presentations at its meetings, outcome data from truancy prevention programs, agency information-sharing, and research studies. That workgroup prepared a report--*A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Student Attendance in Los Angeles County*-- which was unanimously adopted by the task force on January 10, 2012 and by the ECC on February 2. In developing this report, it became apparent to the task force that the number of excused absences for DCFS and Probation youth (for court appearances, medical appointments, mental health issues, family problems, etc.) was at least as serious a problem as the number of unexcused absences (truanancies), so the task force broadened its focus to address all absences and, accordingly, changed its name to the School Attendance Task Force (SATF).

The 75-page SATF report presents an overview of the importance of school attendance, key facts and definitions, current efforts in the County to move from a criminalization of truancy to prevention- and research-based alternatives, a summary of task force findings and a set of recommendations, both countywide and for each stakeholder

group.

This report generated a great deal of media interest. Seven reporters attended the ECC's February meeting when it voted to adopt the report and there were numerous follow-up articles, blogs and radio/television spots, including a 10-minute segment on the ECC's work in a PBS SoCal Insider special on education. Further, over 2200 copies of the report's executive summary have been distributed to the courts, schools, cities, county departments, community-based organizations, and legal advocacy groups.

Since publication of the report, the SATF created 6 workgroups to implement the report's key recommendations. So far, several significant accomplishments have been made:

- The Juvenile Court made several reforms to the IJTC in January, directing that community service always be available in lieu of a monetary fine for any offense adjudicated in that court, and that any tickets issued for tardiness or while a youth was on his or her way to school be dismissed.

*Unfortunately, all 12 IJTC courts were closed on June 15 due to severe budget cuts to the superior court system. Truant youth are now being referred to the Probation Department and a multi-level protocol has been developed to deal with citations that preserves the positive spirit of the IJTC reforms and ranges from taking no action to issuing a warning letter, counseling, recommending a formal diversion or community service program, and sending the most serious cases to the District Attorney for action.

- At the end of February, the City of LA voted unanimously to amend its Municipal Code section on daytime curfew violations in ways that make it consistent with juvenile court efforts to encourage students to go to school rather than taking punitive measures when they do not. For most offenders, community service and/or referral to programmatic alternatives will now be used instead of assessing fines. As Judge Nash stated at the City Council hearing when the amendment was passed, "school attendance is not a court issue...it is an issue for the student, the family, the school and the community."
- LAUSD and the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department created 13 Youth WorkSource Centers, which will help truant youth and students who have dropped out return to school and either graduate or move into vocational training. The Los Angeles School Police Department has agreed to refer most students to these Centers rather than issuing tickets.

The Centers, which opened on July 1, house LAUSD counselors who are conducting full assessments, reviewing student records, meeting with parents, and connecting youth and their families to resources at the Centers and at individual schools.

- A technical manual is being developed that can be used by all school districts to implement the policies, best practices and program models highlighted in the SATF report. Chapters on attendance, discipline, parent/caregiver involvement and school safety are currently being drafted and others will be added by the end of the year.
- A countywide marketing campaign will be launched this fall to aggressively promote school attendance, with the County Board of Supervisors kicking things off this month by declaring September as “School Attendance Awareness Month.” The City of Los Angeles and LAUSD will then make this same declaration, with as many other cities and school districts as possible encouraged to follow suit and join in the month-long activities being planned, including the first-ever countywide Student Recovery Day scheduled for September 14.

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

Based on a March 10, 2009 motion, the Department of Mental Health has launched a \$2.5 million expansion of Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI)-funded mental health services on school campuses as part of a broader county Integrated School Health Center (ISHC) initiative. Centers are planned in each supervisorial district. Through the leveraging of EPSDT and Medicaid funds, each district could potentially have access to about \$1.8 million for new or existing providers. With school districts now mandated by the State to assume responsibility for the administration of student mental health services, these centers are essential.

The most significant way the County is coordinating the child welfare and education systems is through the Gloria Molina Foster Youth Education Program (GMFYEP), which the ECC has been a part of since its inception. Due to the many successes of this groundbreaking, award-winning program, DCFS is now in the process of expanding it countywide and will partner with at least one school district in each supervisorial district. Twenty social workers will be added to the project and assigned to schools with significant populations of system youth. The program will also be expanded to serve

youth in the juvenile justice system, using Probation's school-based deputy probation officers as core staff. In addition, the Probation Department, leveraging Title IV-E waiver funds, has entered into a \$450,000 contract with a community-based educational organization to serve 300 of its youth (60 in each supervisorial district) in school districts and at school sites identified on a case-by-case basis, with the focus on educational assessments and case planning as well as tutoring and mentoring services (as is generally the case with the GMFYEP). The GMFYEP will begin its countywide expansion with the LAUSD, as that district currently educates about half of the school-age youth in DCFS and Probation and has schools in four supervisorial districts. The Second Edition of the GMFYEP Protocols and Procedures Manual has recently been completed to help with this expansion.

Utilizing a \$1.3 million state contract, the Los Angeles County Office of Education Foster Youth Services (LACOE FYS), in conjunction with the County Departments of Probation and Children and Family Services, provided foster children and youth with increased tutoring and academic, social, personal and vocational services during FY 2011-12, with 2245 youth receiving 3943 identified services. Thirteen credentialed school counselors served 597 youth and 650 students received tutoring between January and June from one of four newly contracted agencies.

On June 9, at a countywide summit on reforming child welfare in Los Angeles County, "United Voices for Children and Families," the ECC was showcased as a best practice for bringing county departments, schools and other key stakeholders together to reform systems serving children and youth. The summit, co-hosted by SEIU Local 721, the Community Coalition, California Youth Connection and LAUSD, was very well attended, with over 200 participants from the host organizations and other stakeholder groups. Following opening remarks from Congresswoman Karen Bass, Philip Browning, SEIU Los Angeles County Regional Director Michael Green and LAUSD Board President Monica Garcia, a panel that included voices from the front lines, community-based organizations, and foster youth presented the challenges and new directions for leadership and action in DCFS. A second panel then highlighted the ECC as a best practice for DCFS, with ECC Vice-Chair Judge Michael Nash leading off with an overview of some needed changes from the Juvenile Court's perspective and CEO Service Integration Branch Acting Assistant Director Carrie Miller presenting the history and accomplishments of the ECC. Sharon Watson then outlined some effective tools for changing policy to better serve children, and USC Professor Jacquelyn McCroskey presented some information on what child well-being looks like. The summit concluded with some specific recommendations from attendees for DCFS to implement and Philip Browning's response to those proposals.

Priority Area 4: Data and Information Sharing

Outcome #7: Share education information electronically across systems

DCFS has developed the initial piece of an electronic Foster Care-School District Information Sharing System that will make web-based data on foster children and youth accessible to the schools in which they are enrolled. As the system develops, the plan is for schools, in turn, to upload education information--such as student grades, credits, and attendance--into the system so that this data is available to DCFS social workers. The system will be updated every two weeks and should save tens of thousands of work hours annually for department and school district staff. A pilot of this system will begin with LAUSD in the next month or two, and the Pomona, Long Beach and Montebello school districts have expressed interest in participating as well. Ultimately, it is hoped that all 81 school districts in the County will use and contribute to this system.

LACOE has developed educational data-sharing partnerships with several agencies:

- LACOE is providing daily postings on its Educational Programs Information Connection (EPIC) system website, which contains demographic information on court school students. This data is currently accessible to the Los Angeles and Long Beach Unified School Districts, which then upload demographic, assessment, academic, and health data for those students onto the website. An electronic education records request system for these school districts and the Department of Corrections can also be accessed through the EPIC website.
- LACOE is now providing online access to transcript and grade reports to the Probation Department for its court school students, and is working to implement, at the beginning of 2013, a new EPIC module to track DCFS students.
- On May 31, Congresswoman Karen Bass introduced H.R. 5871, the *Uninterrupted Scholars Act*, which will amend the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to permit the direct sharing of education records with a State or local child welfare agency or tribal organization when such agency has responsibility for the student's placement and care. This bill would, once and for all, resolve the perceived confidentiality barrier to the routine sharing of education records between schools and social workers and eliminate much of the current paperwork and wait times in securing these records by DCFS.

Priority Area 5: System Accountability

Outcome #8: Courts regularly track and monitor youth education 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 juvenile court has been very active this past year in using its authority to bring those most responsible for student educational achievement together to address key educational issues.

- The Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court chairs the ECC's School Attendance Task Force, as indicated under Outcome #5, and the supervising judges of the dependency and delinquency courts each chair a broad-based Education Committee. The supervising judge of the delinquency court also chairs the Juvenile Re-Entry Council, as noted under Outcome #4.
- The juvenile court continues to organize 317e panels to ensure that youth under dependency or delinquency court supervision have appropriate legal representation to resolve education issues that are beyond the scope of standard court proceedings. These panels are the result of a unique public-private partnership among the juvenile court, its stakeholders, and individual organizations and advocates with education law experience and expertise. At its annual Education Summit held on April 16, the court reported that the most common referrals are for changes in special education placement/services, eligibility for special education, and school expulsions. 1,299 cases have been filed over the past six years, with 86% of these placed with a panel. 73% of the 787 closed cases have had successful outcomes, and an additional 15% of the cases were resolved.
- In August of 2011, the supervising judge of the delinquency court created the School-Based Arrest Reform Partnership to reduce the number of these arrests coming into the court system. Schools used to internally handle minor infractions on their campuses but, with the proliferation of zero tolerance policies, responsibility for dealing with these offenses has been shifted to the courts. Believing that "education is the key to the rehabilitation of delinquent youth" and cognizant of the research showing that removing youth from their families and schools through incarceration is more harmful than it is beneficial, the supervising judge convened this Partnership. Through a better understanding and analysis of school-based arrest data and the learnings from other jurisdictions that have dramatically reduced these arrests through alternative

approaches that strengthen the way that schools deal with these offenses, the Partnership seeks to develop a meaningful, cooperative agreement among relevant stakeholders on ways to reform current practice in Los Angeles County. With the closure of the IJTC in June, potentially tens of thousands of additional cases may be referred to the delinquency court, making the reduction in the number of these arrests even more urgent.

- In February of 2012, the juvenile court took the unprecedented step of presumptively opening its dependency court hearings to the media (except when a judge finds that it would be harmful to the child involved) to bring greater transparency to the court process and, thereby, improve the court's accountability as well as that of those who appear before it. If this action produces its intended results, it could greatly increase the ability of the court to track and monitor youth education plans and the progress in achieving them.

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 in the coming year.

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.

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