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August 16, 2010

To: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: William T Fujioka
Chief Executive Officer

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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. When the ECC became a part of the Chief Executive Office (CEO), Service Integration Branch (SIB), in July 2009 and adopted a smaller staffing structure, your Board approved the ECC’s Strategic Plan, which focuses on five specific goals drawn from the twelve recommendations in *Expecting More*. The ECC is reporting its progress on this Plan annually. The first Progress Report was delivered to your Board on August 14, 2006; this is now the eighth report.

Some of the key achievements with respect to the five Strategic Plan strategies are:

STRATEGY 1: Ensure that the Dependency Education Pilot Project is successfully completed and introduced Countywide.

Objective: Complete implementation of the pilot project in the Montebello Unified School District (MUSD) and the Pomona Unified School District (PUSD). Glean lessons learned through its evaluation process, and develop strategies for rolling out the model in all Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) regional offices.

Status: Over the past two years, this pilot project, conceived by the First Supervisorial District, has successfully met its goal of demonstrating that, when DCFS and school

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districts collaborate to prioritize education for foster youth, these students have significantly better educational outcomes. MUSD and PUSD enroll more foster students than most districts in the County, and the average Grade Point Average (GPA) for DCFS youth attending their schools was 1.39 at the start of the project. To date, a total of 277 foster students have participated in the pilot program, which has recently been expanded to include the El Monte Union High School District (EMUHSD) and the Hacienda La Puente Unified School District (HLPUSD). Since the start of the project:

- The GPA for DCFS students attending MUSD and PUSD has increased 25 percent
- Over 1,020 course credits have been recovered which has enabled, in some cases, project students to advance a full grade level
- 76 percent of foster students (35 out of 46) have graduated from high school
- 74 percent of those who have graduated (26 out of 35) would not have done so without the intervention of the project
- 77 percent of graduates (27 out of 35) have enrolled in either a two-year or four-year college, compared to the national average of 20 percent for foster youth

A June graduate had this to say about the project: “Before, I didn’t really care about school, and I didn’t think I could go to college; it wasn’t in the plan. My school-based social worker sort of forced me to apply to schools I didn’t think I had a chance to get into, but I got in – UC San Diego, USC, UC Berkeley, UC Davis, Clark Atlanta, and Cal State Long Beach. I call her every day.”

These results are very encouraging, exceeding initial expectations. In recognition of this early success, the project was honored by the State of California during National Foster Care Month in 2009 for *Changing a Lifetime*; it received a Special Merit Award from the Los Angeles County Quality and Productivity Commission in October 2009; and it was a 2010 National Association of Counties Achievement Award Winner.

Given the project’s positive results and the desire to expand it to additional school districts, DCFS decided to develop and test an alternative model that would be less expensive to implement and that would, at the same time, restore one of the basic duties of primary social workers. In this model, instead of utilizing non-case-carrying social workers as the leads for developing educational assessments and plans on school campuses, each youth’s primary social worker would be responsible for these duties. To make this work, social worker caseloads would consist entirely of students attending a particular school district, along with their siblings.

While the original model continues to be used in MUSD and PUSD, the revised model was launched in EMUHSD in November 2009 and in HLPUSD in March 2010, with four primary caseworkers assigned to each school district. As this modified approach

appears to be working effectively, several additional school districts are being considered for participation in this program. Data matches are currently being conducted between DCFS and these prospective school districts to determine which schools have large enough numbers of foster students to warrant the assignment of out-stationed social workers.

A comprehensive user manual has been drafted that lays out the specific program components that have made the project effective, delineates the protocols and procedures for achieving the desired educational results, and includes copies of the assessment and case planning tools created for this project.

Casey Family Programs completed an evaluation of the first phase of the pilot program in October 2009, and is now completing an evaluation of the project's second year, which includes a comparison of the two models. These results should be available in the fall.

In recognition of the pilot project's evolution during the past year, it is now known as the Gloria Molina Foster Youth Education Program.

Last week, the Children Youth and Family Collaborative (CYFC) was awarded a \$3.5 million Federal *Investing in Innovation Fund* grant from the Department of Education to provide, over the next five years, academic remediation services to foster youth participating in the Gloria Molina Foster Youth Education Program in MUSD and PUSD. Leveraging the funds donated by the First Supervisorial District for the operation of this program, CYFC will use some of its grant monies to hire an additional secondary (non-case-carrying) social worker and a school counselor dedicated solely to program students. This grant should go a long way in helping DCFS students in these school districts raise their educational achievement even more significantly.

STRATEGY 2: Work closely with the Probation Department to ensure that the Comprehensive Educational Reform for the Juvenile Halls and Camps is successfully institutionalized.

Objective: Assist the Probation Department in implementing the 35 recommendations outlined in the Comprehensive Educational Reform Report adopted by the Board of Supervisors on October 14, 2008.

Status: Created through a motion by Supervisor Knabe, the Comprehensive Educational Reform Committee (CERC) wrote and is overseeing implementation of the Reform Report. In addition to serving as a member of CERC, the ECC is working with CERC's Camp Scott/Scudder School Committee to develop a unique pilot program that will offer a "charter school-like" alternative to the traditional Los Angeles County Office

of Education (LACOE) academic model. As reported to your Board previously, it has been very difficult to move forward with the CERC recommendation to establish a charter school at one of the juvenile camps due to concerns raised by State and local teachers' unions. Instead, in partnership with the local union and the New Village Charter School, the Probation Department and LACOE have begun to incorporate an innovative educational approach based on the acclaimed Big Picture national model, which believes in educating one student at a time using an individualized, student-centered school culture and a project-oriented curriculum. This approach, which is illustrated through the school's new motto, *Respect for Self, Respect for Others*, is already showing some success and will be fully launched in September 2010.

To ease the transition of Camp Scott/Scudder School students into schools in their home communities when they complete their camp stays, they will be transferred, whenever possible, to schools that share as many characteristics of Big Picture schools as possible, and that would provide a compatible culture and programming. The ECC has arranged a meeting at the end of this month between Camp Scott/Scudder School Committee members and the superintendents of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) eight local school districts to identify the most appropriate schools in their districts for Camp Scott/Scudder students to transfer to, and determine the most effective process for making these transfers successful. A similar meeting has been arranged with Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) staff.

Another key CERC report recommendation that the ECC has been involved with has been the hiring of a Director of School Services for the Probation Department. This individual would oversee the Department's educational programs and initiatives at the juvenile halls and camps and serve as its liaison to LACOE and other school districts (including LAUSD and LBUSD) with high numbers of probation youth. Candidate interviews were initially conducted in late 2009 and resumed this summer following the arrival of the County's new Chief Probation Officer. The ECC participated as a member of the interview panel, and the Chief Probation Officer selected a candidate in July. The new Director, Jeremy Nichols, began his employment on August 2, 2010.

In June, CERC re-established its Steering Committee to review the 35 recommendations for education reform adopted by your Board in 2008, and determine what can be done to spur the implementation of those recommendations not yet completed. The ECC is a member of this committee, which is being chaired by the Department's new Director of School Services.

STRATEGY 3: Partner with the Los Angeles County Office of Child Care (OCC) to significantly increase the number of DCFS children under the age of six, and the children of DCFS and probation youth, who are enrolled in high-quality early care and education programs.

Objective: Work with the OCC, DCFS, and the Probation Department to develop a set of procedures for enrolling DCFS children under the age of six, and the children of DCFS and probation youth, in high-quality early care and education programs.

Status: In October 2009, DCFS began a historic, intensive effort to refer 90 percent of its children under the age of six in high-quality early care and education programs. Since that time, the Department has made considerable progress towards achieving this goal. Many partners have worked with the Department to increase enrollment, including LACOE, Los Angeles Universal Preschool, Policy Roundtable for Child Care, and the Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA). Three formal enrollment projects between DCFS and Head Start/Early Head Start have been developed and tested over the past year: the Long Beach Head Start collaborative; the Pomona and El Monte collaborative with LACOE Head Start; and the East Los Angeles collaborative with LACOE Head Start. As a result, the number of young, dependent children enrolled in early childhood care and education programs in these geographic areas has almost doubled from about 30 percent to between 50 and 60 percent.

Further, ACHSA is encouraging its foster family agencies (FFAs) to enroll the young children placed in their care in high-quality early education programs. Thirty-three FFAs with responsibility for over 1,200 children under the age of five have agreed to participate so far, and a DCFS pilot in Santa Fe Springs is targeting another 560 children. LACOE is also working with the other twenty-one Head Start grantees in the County to make certain that foster and homeless children served by DCFS are given priority enrollment in their programs. In addition, LACOE has secured an agreement with these grantees to funnel all referrals through LACOE, so that it can ensure that caregivers make the proper connection with a Head Start program and successfully enroll the children in their care.

A key issue hampering these collaborative efforts is the incompatibility of electronic databases between partners, preventing DCFS staff from smoothly connecting with other agencies. The progress being made under Strategy 5 of the ECC's Strategic Plan should help resolve this barrier.

The OCC is currently in the process of convening the County department members of the Policy Roundtable for Child Care (DCFS, Probation Department, Department of Mental Health and the Department of Public Social Services) to enroll their youth or the children of their clients in high-quality early care and education programs. Each department will use the same Strengthening Families Framework for this effort to facilitate communication and the integration of services across departments and with community-based organizations.

In the coming months, DCFS will be working closely with the OCC, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, County departments and community networks to develop a strategic plan that will promote the importance of early childhood development for system youth and their enrollment in high quality early care and education programs, and delineate how these services can be utilized by DCFS clients.

Finally, the Juvenile Court has initiated a Court Teams Pilot Project to keep infants under the supervision of the court safe and healthy, achieve a higher rate of permanency for these children, and prevent their re-entry into the foster care system. Young biological families in the Vermont Corridor DCFS Office area are being recruited and will be partnered with a caregiver from the DCFS Fost/Adopt Program or with a relative. These trained caregivers will serve as mentors to parent participants, using a shared parenting approach that will help families successfully reunify with their children. All project parents will be encouraged to enroll their infants and toddlers in Early Head Start or other high-quality child development programs.

STRATEGY 4: Collaborate with youth development programs, County departments, school districts and cities to significantly increase the number of DCFS and probation youth participating in after-school and summer extracurricular and enrichment programs.

Objective: Work with DCFS and the Probation Department to develop a set of procedures for enrolling DCFS and probation youth in after-school and summer extracurricular and enrichment programs.

Status: Since the beginning of 2010, LAUSD's Beyond the Bell after-school enrichment program has been working to connect youth in foster care to summer activities that focus on social, emotional and academic skill-building. Thirty-nine counselors have been stationed at district schools and are, collectively, responsible for between 200 and 300 kindergarten through twelfth grade foster students. Counselors working with high school students are concentrating on credit recovery, enrolling students in summer school, and following up on attendance. For kindergarten through eighth grade students, for whom no summer school is available, they are focusing on enrichment programs at 150 sites in the district, including participation in a week-long camp in the Angeles National Forest for 300 foster students in the fourth through eighth grades that offers academic and social components, as well as traditional outdoor activities.

The Gloria Molina Foster Youth Education Program is continuing to connect its youth to extracurricular and enrichment activities. Progress has been made in identifying on-campus activities that system youth can participate in immediately after-school to reduce transportation barriers and make the best use of limited student free time. As a

result, 70 percent of program students attending MUSD and almost 50 percent of program students attending PUSD are now participating in an extracurricular activity.

A total of 875 foster youth are currently receiving academic remediation services from CYFC, as well as enrichment activities that include fashion clubs, fitness and sports, skateboarding and arts and crafts. Further, 176 youth who have transitioned out of the foster care system are being given the support they need to stay in school or to gain meaningful employment. Another one hundred foster youth participated this past year in academic mentoring programs provided by Children Uniting Nations.

Finally, ACHSA has volunteered to organize an ECC Resource Fair in 2011 for foster and probation youth, their caregivers, and caseworkers, modeled after the very successful first fair held in 2008. To complement this effort, ACHSA has also offered to collect baseline data on the current level of participation in after-school and summer programs and activities of the foster and probation youth in the care of ACHSA member agencies. That way, it will be possible to measure the positive role that the Resource Fair and other such efforts have on increasing after-school participation.

STRATEGY 5: Resolve remaining barriers to allow for the sharing of educational information between County departments and school districts throughout Los Angeles County.

Objective: Create an electronic data transferring process for sharing educational records with Los Angeles County case managers.

Status: As reported in our last Progress Report, ECC members and partners developed a mechanism that, for the first time, allows 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 Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The required minute order language and protocol for sharing educational information has now been finalized, and all dependency court bench officers were trained on this tool in May 2010. This language is now being routinely inserted into the court orders of all foster youth entering the dependency system.

There has been a great deal of interest in this FERPA-compliant solution for sharing educational information between schools, caseworkers, and children's attorneys. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is highlighting it as a "best practice" on its website, and national agencies and organizations including the Administration for Children and Families, the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University, the American Bar Association, and Casey Family Programs have requested

a copy of the minute order language. Several organizations are sharing this language with their constituencies.

In addition, some encouraging progress has been made in the County's quest to enable education records to be electronically shared with our case management system without violating compliance with the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System regulations. The ECC Director has talked with the Commissioner for the Administration for Children and Families to gain his support for our efforts to electronically link educational information with our case management system, and for making probation officers and public health nurses eligible users of this system. Further, they also discussed the potential linking of the Probation Department and Department of Public Health electronic systems to our case management system. The ECC is now discussing these ideas with State officials, and CDSS has asked the ECC to prepare an Advanced Planning Document that proposes linking the California Department of Education and DCFS data systems electronically. CDSS is also interested in having further conversations about electronically linking other data systems within Los Angeles County. The ECC is working with the County's Commission for Children and Families, Chief Information Office, and the Children's Action Network on developing a plan for connecting several of these systems and minimizing the amount of data entry duplication which currently exists.

Finally, DCFS has been awarded a \$150,000 planning grant from the Stuart Foundation for the Los Angeles County component of that Foundation's Ready to Succeed Initiative. In our County, the initiative will study DCFS's Education Consultant Program and track the educational outcomes of the youth served, but will include a focus on the electronic sharing of individual foster youth education records. The Ready to Succeed Initiative is also being conducted in Fresno, Orange, and Sacramento counties, highlighting their electronic education data-sharing systems. The ECC, LACOE's Foster Youth Services (FYS), LAUSD and the Pasadena Unified School District have been asked to serve as partners for this Initiative, along with parent, caregiver, and youth representatives. Mental Health Advocacy Services and California State University, Los Angeles will be conducting the project evaluation.

Current Status of the Strategic Plan

As can be seen by the accomplishments noted above in each area of the ECC's strategic plan, significant progress has been made on each plan objective and, in several instances, a structure is now in place to fully implement them. 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, encouraging networks of people to work together to expand best practices and fill the gaps in communities where little help or support for families is available, so that the County's

children are not left behind. In this vein, DCFS has now ably assumed the lead for Strategy 1; the Probation Department and LACOE for Strategy 2; DCFS, LACOE, and the OCC for Strategy 3; and several community partners are providing the leadership to implement Strategy 4. The ECC, with its positioning within the CEO SIB, will continue to coordinate efforts across County departments and other partners for Strategy 5. The lead organizations for the first four strategies will continue to work on completing these objectives, while the ECC will see that the fifth strategy is achieved. In addition, the ECC will concentrate on coordinating solutions to new, emerging areas of concern, as well as addressing those issues for which there is no other leadership infrastructure.

Listed below are some other examples of the ECC's coordinating activities:

Ensuring School Enrollment

The ECC is currently working with CDSS and DCFS to add language to caregiver contracts that explicitly communicates the expectation that youth in their care be immediately enrolled in and regularly attend school. The Council is also working with the Juvenile Court on ways to ensure compliance.

Promoting School Stability

The lack of school stability is frequently cited as one of the key barriers to improved academic performance of foster and probation students. Some research has even suggested that school stability may be more important than placement stability for student achievement. To address this barrier, the ECC formed a work group in the summer of 2009 to develop strategies that would promote school stability for system youth. In February 2010, the ECC approved a set of seven recommendations that show promise for strengthening school stability. These include the training of social workers, probation officers and caregivers on how to best minimize placement moves; the training of school district front-office staff on AB 490 requirements for the transfer of education records; the inclusion of school stability discussions in all case planning meetings, especially when a placement move is imminent; the establishment of internal controls to ensure that this happens; and the enforcement of State law that requires placing agencies to consider placements within a youth's school-of-origin attendance area, whenever possible, in order to promote educational stability. In May, DCFS's Executive Team adopted these policy recommendations and will work to incorporate them into casework practice in the coming months.

Reducing Truancy

The ECC is assisting the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court in setting up and staffing a task force that will identify and promote effective ways to reduce school truancy within

the County by building on existing efforts. In preparation for the first meeting of the task force, the ECC has completed some research on the approaches being implemented locally by law enforcement and other agencies, as well as across the nation. In addition, the ECC is polling each of the 81 school districts in the County with regard to the approaches and programs they are currently using to reduce truancy and Judge Nash is compiling information on court system efforts.

Of particular note is the LBUSD model (no longer operational due to budget cuts), in which a community-based center provided a full array of Wraparound services for an entire geographical area. Truant students were returned to school and interviewed to find out what they needed in order to attend school regularly. These students and their families were then provided those services (transportation, food, parenting classes, mental health services and whatever else was necessary) through the center. With the help of a \$9 million Safe Schools/Healthy Students Grant received in 2008, LAUSD developed a wellness center for the 12,000 students at its Washington Preparatory School complex (which has the largest number of foster and probation youth of any complex in that school district), as well as those students attending five private schools in the surrounding community. Team decision-making meetings for DCFS students are regularly held at this center, and teachers, counselors, and community service providers all share in providing support for individual students. Schools in this particularly high-poverty, low-performance region have experienced very high numbers of suspensions and truancy. To address this need, a dedicated truancy/alternative suspension center, based on the LBUSD model, will open at the Washington Preparatory school complex in September 2010 to complement its wellness center. Led by the Second Supervisorial District, the ECC was a part of the planning group that secured this Federal grant, and it continues to be a part of the Core Management Team leading the implementation efforts for this grant.

Increasing Self-Sufficiency

In response to a motion by Supervisor Antonovich in March 2010, the ECC is working with the CEO to establish a Countywide Self-Sufficiency Goal for system youth. This goal should significantly improve the ability of system youth to become successful adults by ensuring that their permanency, educational, employment, social and emotional and self-sufficiency needs are met. As a first step, the ECC and CEO led the redesign of DCFS's and the Probation Department's Youth Development Services Division and developed an implementation plan that is now underway. In June, the ECC and CEO convened a broad-based committee, including several County departments and community partners, that is working on the scope and details of establishing this goal, along with realigning departmental revenues and expenditures, centralizing concurrent youth development planning services, integrating youth-

centered, self-sufficiency services across County departments, and creating an evaluation mechanism for measuring its success.

Improving Services

The ECC is serving on the LACOE Foster Youth Services/Juvenile Detention Services Advisory Board and the Board's Strategic Plan Development Team, which is developing a three-year plan and funding proposal for submission to the California Department of Education FYS Program in early 2011. This plan seeks to strengthen the educational services provided to foster and probation students by FYS and restore the funding cuts made by the State to FYS in the last cycle. In May 2010, the Advisory Board approved a major shift in strategy from the general "troubleshooting" approach currently in use to one that will focus on direct service in two key areas: tutoring/academic services (identified by our State legislature and by DCFS and Probation as the top priority for foster youth) and educational case management (e.g., participation in case planning meetings, the securing of educational records, ensuring appropriate and stable school placements). The three-year plan for the State may involve changing the staffing structure at FYS to better implement the new target goals. Further, the plan proposes the addition of a tutoring/resource coordinator who would determine tutoring and academic mentoring needs, gather and maintain information on available resources for system youth, develop partnerships with educational institutions and community-based organizations to generate additional resources, and establish protocols and procedures for access to these resources. A transition plan has been developed for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010-11 that helps FYS move toward the new service priorities.

Further, in response to the motion made by Supervisors Antonovich and Knabe in October 2009, the ECC has been working with LACOE on ways of addressing the Juvenile Court Schools' structural deficit, including both fiscal and legislative strategies, and the implementation of the Auditor-Controller's recommendations. As reported to your Board in the quarterly memo of July 20, 2010, LACOE has reduced this deficit by a projected \$7.03 million for FY 2010-11.

Securing Resources

In May 2010, the ECC co-hosted a convening of several public entities, including the County of Los Angeles, City of Los Angeles, LAUSD Board of Education and First 5 LA, as well as a number of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, to discuss strategies for partnering on possible Promise Neighborhood Grants. Promise Neighborhoods is President Obama's anti-poverty initiative that seeks to create place-based service models, similar to the Harlem Children's Zone, in twenty cities across the country. Among other requirements, the initiative requests that applicants partner with both public and private entities within their areas, including local government, school districts,

and philanthropic foundations. As the Promise Neighborhoods program components closely mirror those in ECC's *Expecting More* blueprint—the promotion of early childhood education, strong schools that are an integral part of their communities, after-school programming and data-sharing among partners—the ECC agreed to co-lead the local planning effort. Due to the high level of interest in this initiative, several follow-up meetings were held to explore both cross-sector and cross-organizational partnerships that might help strengthen potential submissions to the Federal government, thus increasing the chances that Los Angeles County might be awarded at least one of the twenty available planning grants. Demonstrating the County's commitment to the initiative's goals, letters were provided to all ten applicant groups indicating that the CEO would provide support staff, as needed, to each grantee in Los Angeles County.

Expanding Collaboration

The ECC's Director has been asked by the Mayor of the City of Los Angeles to represent County government on the newly created Board of Community and Family Services, which is charged with enhancing and coordinating the City's efforts to serve children, youth and their families; establishing collaborations with the City, County, LAUSD, other educational and governmental entities, parent groups, and community-based organizations; and participating in the design, administration and evaluation of the City's Housing and Community Development Consolidated Plan that serves low-income communities. Being a part of this Board will assist the ECC in building the strong relationship with the City of Los Angeles government necessary to raise the academic achievement of approximately one-third of the County's youth.

As can be seen by the above, ECC members, partners, and community organizations are actively engaged in accomplishing the ECC's Blueprint and Strategic Plan goals and 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 Kathy House, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, at (213) 974-4530 or via e-mail at khouse@ceo.lacounty.gov.

WTF:KH:LB
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