

## **Truancy Task Force Meeting Summary**

Children's Court

April 4, 2011

### **Attendees:**

*Courts:* Michael Nash, Margaret Henry, Jack Furay, Sherri Sobel, Terri Johnson,  
Lilia Alvarez Romo

*Law Enforcement:* Jorge Villegas, Christine Chally, Lydia Bodin, Kristen Byrdsong

*Legal:* Carol Richardson, Nancy Theberge, Judy Verduzco

*LA County Chief Executive Office:* Trish Ploehn, Vincent Holmes

*LA County Youth Departments:* Michael Gray, Jennifer Hottenroth, Teresa Rupel,  
Jeremy Nichols, Stan Ricketts

*City of LA:* Michael de la Rocha

*Schools:* Debra Duardo, Rick Tebbano, Ray Vincent, Laurel Bear

*Community/Advocacy:* Miller Sylvan, Michelle Newell, Keith Gibbs, James Huettig,  
Zoe Rawson, Barbara Lott-Holland, Andrew Glazier

*Education Coordinating Council:* Sharon Watson, Helen Chavez

### **Welcome and Opening Remarks:**

Chair Judge Nash welcomed Task Force members to the meeting and reported receiving the promised LAPD internal directive, signed by Chief Charlie Beck, revising the guidelines for enforcement of the City's daytime curfew ordinance. These new guidelines, developed by several members of the Task Force, instruct officers to consider the *spirit* of the ordinance rather than just strict enforcement of it. Among other procedures, officers must: 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.

Michael de la Rocha, Legislative Deputy to City Councilman Tony Cardenas, invited Task Force members to the City's Public Safety Committee Meeting on Truancy which will be held on April 18<sup>th</sup> at 9 am at City Hall. Judge Nash will be testifying on behalf of the TTF, and several other members will also be speaking. For further information, or to arrange parking, members should call Michael at: 213-216-9874.

### **Community-Based Approach:**

- City Year Los Angeles: Chief of Staff Andrew Glazier explained that City Year was founded in 1988 as an affiliate of Americorps and has been operating in Los Angeles for the past 4 years. City Year Corps members are between the ages of 17-24 and receive an education award as well as a \$13,000 stipend for a year of

full-time service. 95% of Corps members in Los Angeles act as in-class tutors and mentors for youth at-risk of dropping out of LAUSD schools, using a “whole school, whole child” framework. They also participate in the HEROES academically-oriented afterschool program as well as a weekend program, which are both open to all students. Most importantly, Corps members serve as consistent, caring, “near peer” adult role models in all of their interactions with students, a proven contributor to dropout prevention. Using LAUSD’s 3-Tier Model (reported on at the February TTF meeting), City Year does some work with Tier 1 students, but primarily concentrates on those in Tier 2. City Year uses three data indicators to select students for program participation— Attendance (less than 90%), Behavior (“unsatisfactory” mark for behavior in at least one class) and Course Performance (final grade of “F” in Math or English). By the end of the last school year (2009-10), 50% of City Year middle school students moved on track in English and 48% in Math. Even with all the program cuts LAUSD is currently making, Debra Duardo reported that they are continuing their partnership with City Year because of the very positive impact it is making with District students in (now) 14 schools.

- Department of Children and Family Services: Jennifer Hottenroth, Director of Education and Mentoring, reported that there are currently 23,698 school-aged children under the supervision of DCFS— 11,410 in elementary school, 3,110 in middle school and 8,551 in high school. 30% of these youth function below grade level; 50% are held back at least once; 46% do not complete high school; and only 15% enroll in college. Early identification of youth with truancy issues is the key to changing these statistics and, as there are numerous and complex reasons for youth truancy, DCFS is employing a variety of strategies for increasing school attendance, including intensive work with school districts. The Gloria Molina Foster Youth Education Program, for example, is a very successful partnership with 5 school districts that out-stations social workers on high school campuses to spearhead the development and implementation of individual education plans through building strong relationships with schools, families and foster students.

The dependency courts would like to assist DCFS in its efforts to reduce foster youth truancy and raise academic achievement but, in order to do so, they need much more detailed information about what’s happening with youth than is now typically shared by the department—e.g., when was the first truancy noticed, what did the social worker do in response, and what happened as a result? To get this kind of information, social workers must conduct the required monthly visits with their caseload youth and ask education-related questions such as those included in the court’s Education Checklist. Judge Nash also expressed his concern that the chain of events that are supposed to occur to help caseload youth with truancy issues aren’t occurring, and agreed that monthly visits are absolutely fundamental to the process. Debra Duardo pointed out that schools have some of this needed information, but that everyone needs to work together more effectively and communicate better so that data can be shared. Jennifer agreed and explained that

the biggest barrier to this needed communication is that schools don't know who their foster students are.

Teresa Rupel, Program Manager for the Skid Row Assessment Team, reported that truancy is no longer the problem it was on Skid Row in the early 2000's. Since the Skid Row Project was initiated in 2006, the number of homeless people on the streets at night has dropped from 2000 to about 600 and services to new families have dropped by 50%. No families with children are now living on Skid Row streets, as two nonprofit organizations—one focused on serving poor and homeless families in the area and the other on providing shelter and services to Skid Row children—are effectively meeting their needs. On any given night, however, between 30 and 80 homeless families are sleeping in missions. Project staff and their partners thoroughly understand and continually communicate the message that all children, after a couple of days of homelessness, are expected to be in school. In response to a question from Lydia Bodin of the District Attorney's Office, Teresa stated that the two best resources for serving homeless children and their families are the 211 information line and DPSS eligibility workers. School district task force members suggested also using the McKinney-Vento (Homeless Children and Youth) Coordinators that have been assigned in each school district.

**Next Meeting Agenda:**

The May 2 meeting of the task force will focus on the national Big Picture Learning model and its implementation in San Francisco and LA, as well as what the Probation Department is doing to address truancy with the youth they supervise.