

**Truancy Task Force Meeting Summary**  
Children's Court  
August 9, 2011

**Attendees:**

*Courts:* Michael Nash, Donna Groman, Jack Furay, Sherri Sobel

*Law Enforcement:* Steve Zipperman, Don Graham, Lydia Bodin, Kristen Byrdsong,  
Eddie Goodman

*Legal:* Laura Faer, Lisa Greer, David Sapp, Deb Cromer, Katherine Anderson, Brenda  
Armienta

*LA County Chief Executive Office:* Trish Ploehn

*LA County Youth Departments:* Michael Gray, Jennifer Hottenroth, Angel Rodriguez,  
Patty Armani, Elvia Mendez, Arlene Barrios

*City of Los Angeles:* Michael de la Rocha

*Schools:* Ed Velasquez, Elmer Roldan, Debra Duardo, Maria Espinoza, Arlene  
Quesenberry

*Community/Advocacy:* Miller Sylvan, Keith Gibbs, Kim Brettschneider, Belinda Walker,  
James Huettig, Eugenia Wilson, Manuel Criollo, Barbara Lott-Holland, Lissett Lazo,  
Ezinne Nwankwo, Kimberly Rios, Robert Hernandez

*Education Coordinating Council:* Sharon Watson

*Guests:* Sue Fothergill, Hedy Chang, Alicia Maldonado

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Chair Judge Nash welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for self-introductions.

**Comprehensive, Collaborative Approaches to Improving School Attendance:**

Attendance Works: Attendance Works is a national and state level initiative that promotes the important role of school attendance in achieving academic success and focuses, in particular, on reducing chronic absence (missing 10% or more of school in an academic year, whether absences are excused or not). Director Hedy Chang pointed out that students who are chronically absent in Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade are much less likely to read proficiently in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and this is especially true for low-income children. In the Oakland Unified School District, over 14% of students (nearly 1 out of 7) are chronically absent. Although data is needed to identify programmatic solutions, it is not being used effectively. Recording attendance is done routinely and, in most districts, it is done electronically, but chronic absence is not typically calculated or monitored, even though that data exists. Further, California is one of only 5 states that does not even have attendance in its longitudinal student database. Hedy identified the major characteristics of successful attendance initiatives and gave examples of some of these efforts in Baltimore, Grand Rapids, and New York City. She concluded her presentation by listing

some of the things that school districts can provide to improve attendance and what, specifically, the TTF could target or promote.

Baltimore Student Attendance Campaign: For the first year of its campaign, the key components of Baltimore’s attendance strategy included: examining the data, spreading the word through forums, getting leaders on board and identifying partners. A broad-based work group of over 100 representatives was established, which developed a set of recommendations to dramatically increase student attendance. These recommendations included: instituting a text messaging transportation campaign to gather data about student experiences getting to and from school; increasing the use of and institutionalizing best practices through a change in direction from a student-focused lens to a school-focused lens; leveraging the impact of after-school and community schools on attendance; making attendance a “must-respond-to” indicator for youth-serving agencies; improving the identification of and responsiveness to homeless youth; and changing student and parental attitudes about attendance. As a result, chronic absence in middle grades decreased by 15% and there were more than 16,000 fewer suspensions in Baltimore City public schools. Key policy changes included: ensuring that schools are places where older students would want to be; ensuring that students have a voice; holding schools and youth-serving agencies accountable for student attendance, as well as students and their families; providing many more incentives than punitive responses; and offering students meaningful choices and alternatives that address why students are absent, such as work-to-learning opportunities, academic options, and social/emotional supports. To reduce the number of school transitions, the Baltimore City School District decided to close or phase out most of its stand-alone middle schools and, instead, open pre-K –8<sup>th</sup> grade and 6 – 12<sup>th</sup> grade transformation schools.

The second year focused on: maintaining the momentum by strengthening universal approaches, deepening the work with special populations, implementing a coordinated campaign, targeting chronically absent students going into sensitive transition grades (K, 6 and 9), and revising/improving the use of attendance data. Director Sue Fothergill presented a list of initiatives the school district is currently engaged in to improve attendance and highlighted the partnership between the City Schools and the City Department of Social Services. She then stressed the importance of attendance data in improving school attendance and gave examples of how Baltimore utilizes this data. Wrapping things up, Sue noted the lessons learned by the Campaign so far.

#### Q & A Summary:

- In response to a question about whether schools have been changed to make them more interesting so that students want to attend, Sue pointed out that every teacher in every classroom has to believe in engaging students. Elementary schools do this best, but even they need to provide more “play” time so that children learn how to collaborate and problem-solve. Some very innovative charter schools now have 9<sup>th</sup> grade ADA rates of 98%. Also, in Baltimore, all high schools are “open

choice,” so students can attend any high school in the district they want (through a ranked-preference lottery system).

- In response to Judge Nash’s question as to the role of law enforcement in the Baltimore Campaign, only the City school police were involved and, through training, have recently moved from a violation/citation approach to one that is more about relationship-building and culture-changing. As to Judge Nash’s follow-up question about the role of the courts, Sue reported that they have been involved from the beginning through the presence of a research person who is tracking what’s working and what’s not and incorporating best practices.

**Next Meeting:** The next TTF meeting is scheduled for: **Tuesday, August 23** at 1 pm at the Japanese American Cultural Center, 244 S. San Pedro Street, LA 90012. This will be an opportunity for youth to let the task force know about their experiences with truancy tickets, school suspensions, etc., and offer potential alternatives and solutions. Manuel Criollo of the Community Rights Campaign, introduced four youth who urged task force members to come on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to hear what they have to say.

The next regular meeting of the TTF is on **Tuesday, September 13** at the usual time (from noon-2 pm) in the Judges Conference Room at the Children’s Court.