

# School Attendance Task Force Meeting Summary

Children's Court

March 6, 2012

## Attendees

*Courts:* Michael Nash, Jack Furay

*Law enforcement:* Lydia Bodin, John Gutierrez

*Legal:* Ruth Cusick, Lisa Greer, Alaina Mooves-Leb, David Sapp, Krystal Tena

*Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office:* Trish Ploehn

*Los Angeles County Youth Departments:* Hellen Carter, Jennifer Hottenroth, Darlyne Pettinicchio

*City of Los Angeles:* Michael de la Rocha

*Schools:* Laurel Bear, Debra Duardo, Jewel Forbes, Lorena Martinez, Cecilia Ornelas, Elmer Roldan, Tom Steele, Rick Tebbano, Belinda Walker, Sue Williams

*Community/Advocacy:* Barbara Lott-Holland, Kim McGill, Leslie Mendoza, Zoë Rawson, Angelica Salazar, Eugenia Wilson

*Education Coordinating Council:* Sharon Watson, Evelyn Hughes

## Welcome and Introductions

Judge Nash welcomed everyone to the meeting and announced that Trish Ploehn has obtained a grant to fund Sharon Watson's staffing of the task force (with Evelyn Hughes, who will help with meeting minutes and other tasks) through June of 2013.

On a less sanguine note, the superior court yesterday announced significant budget cuts that will dramatically affect the juvenile court. Referees in the delinquency court and the informal juvenile and traffic court will be laid off at the end of the current fiscal year, four delinquency courts will be eliminated, and the number of IJTC courts will be drastically reduced. These changes will increase pressure on those expected to do more with less, but Nash trusts that the court's changed emphasis on school attendance success will deepen and that the new diversion policy will be continued.

## Task Force Report Adoption and Follow-up

In February, the Education Coordinating Council unanimously adopted the task force's report, *A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Student Attendance in Los Angeles County*, and today's meeting packets included copies of media coverage of the event, which was extensive—a dozen or more print articles, interviews on public television and radio, blog posts, and so on. Positive responses have been coming in from all over the country about the report's comprehensiveness and its placing school attendance into a community context. Sharon Watson has shared the report with many interested parties, including Sue Fothergill and Hedy Chang—who presented to the task force last August—and David Kopperud, head of the state School Attendance Review Board, who wants all SARBs to use it as a model. All respondents were extremely complimentary and are posting it on various websites. Nash and Watson reviewed the report at the ECC-sponsored school superintendents' dialogue yesterday, to much interest. Both the full report and the executive summary are available at [http://educationcoordinatingcouncil.org/ECC\\_TTF.html](http://educationcoordinatingcouncil.org/ECC_TTF.html).

With the grant monies previously mentioned, copies of the report's executive summary will soon be printed so that task force members may distribute them. In addition, David Sapp will e-mail a PowerPoint presentation developed by Amber Rivas as a general guide to presenting the report's major points to aid in outreach to potential funders, partners, and other audiences. Watson asked that anyone with suggestions of meetings, forums, or conferences at which presentations could be made contact her with that information.

### **Los Angeles City Council Adoption of Municipal Code Changes Pertaining to Daytime Curfew Violations**

Michael de la Rocha thanked everyone—especially Judge Nash, Mónica Garcia (ECC chair and president of the Los Angeles school board) and her staff, and all the community groups involved—for working with the City of Los Angeles to revise its 'daytime curfew violation' ticketing ordinance. With a rare unanimous vote last month, the city council changed the municipal code to be consistent with juvenile court efforts to encourage students to go to school rather than taking punitive measures when they do not. The ordinance now specifies community service for the first two offenses, with a fine capped at \$20 for the third. The mayor is expected to sign the revised code this week, and it will go into effect 30 to 60 days following that.

About 200 young people from five high schools attended the city council meeting at which the vote was taken, and several task force members reported that being heard on such an important issue was very meaningful and empowering for them. "Judge Nash has become a hero," Barbara Lott-Holland said.

### **Work Group Reports**

All work group leaders were asked to keep Sharon Watson informed of their meetings, as she would like to attend as many as possible, and new participants are always welcome. Meeting schedules should likewise be shared with everyone on the Task Force.

**School/Community Connections** This group identified ten or eleven best practices, Belinda Walker reported, organizing them into three different perspectives to make them more accessible to school districts, individual schools, and the community:

- A universal approach, through which district offices create policy about best practices
- Support for the implementation of these policies at school sites
- A community collaboration approach, through which schools, districts, cities, county agencies, and community-based organizations work together around attendance and safety issues

Work group members heard several examples of direct parent and student action transforming schools, Ruth Cusick said, and want to involve other partners to create tools for the three approaches. They stand ready to coordinate and collaborate with other groups, and welcome anyone who wishes to participate.

**Data Collection and Sharing** This group's next meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. on March 19 at the Lynwood Regional Justice Center, 11701 Alameda Street, Lynwood, in the Compton Municipal Court.

At its February meeting, the work group developed a short questionnaire to help paint a clearer picture of the kinds of data systems that people are familiar with and/or use, what agencies are currently sharing information with each other, what data is needed from each other, what data agencies have that could be useful to others, and barriers to communicating attendance-related data. Lydia Bodin distributed the questionnaires and asked everyone to complete and return them by the end of today's meeting. Some members will also share the surveys within their organizations.

Jennifer Hottenroth reported on a server-based data-sharing system that the Department of Children and Family Services is unveiling today, through which school districts can obtain password-protected access each month to stay current on foster youth attending their schools. (All 81 districts in the county have been notified of this opportunity via e-mail to their AB 490 liaisons.) The second phase of this plan is for districts in turn to upload academic and attendance reports on foster students, starting with those in out-of-home care. Riverside County has adopted this system for its 24 school districts, with daily uploads of foster youth data to the centralized office of education—grades, history, transcripts, holders of education rights, etc.—that can also be accessed by court hearing officers. The sticking point with this kind of 'passthrough' system in Los Angeles County, however, is a potential legal objection to third-party ownership of the servers containing confidential information. Nevertheless, the standardization of attendance systems throughout Los Angeles County should be a priority, since many different types are used.

The Youth Justice Coalition would like to collect data on arrests in and around schools to examine the 'school to jail' track, and also reported that students attending LACOE schools inside lock-up rarely come home with any educational records or transcripts. (That used to be the case for DCFS youth changing placements as well, but that situation is much improved.) Jewel Forbes said that LACOE is working with Judge Donna Groman to streamline the process of credit recovery and transcript availability, and she asked that task force members complete another survey—available at [lacoedu.edu](http://lacoedu.edu)—to aid in that effort. Judge Nash mentioned the formal discharge process recently put into place for youth leaving juvenile halls, which ensures they have all needed records (education, medical, mental health) plus their personal property and their medication or the ability to obtain medication. Transitions for youth being released from probation camps are more successful these days because of the use of multidisciplinary teams, but the issue remains one needing work.

Elsewhere, students earn credit for every three hours spent in class, but no way to track hourly or daily credits seems to be possible here, although that data's inclusion on court minute orders would be ideal. Making sure that foster and probation youth have the entire sheaf of paperwork necessary to enroll in school or apply for a job—birth certificates, Social Security cards, transcripts, proof of address, etc.—should become a priority.

DCFS will arrange for a demonstration of its data system at the task force meeting in May.

**PSA/Marketing Campaign** Debra Duardo distributed notes from her work group's meeting, where members agreed that their initial campaign would center on designating September or

October 2012 “Student Attendance Awareness Month” throughout the cities and county of Los Angeles. This would require extensive political support, but would give school districts the opportunity to opt in to events such as a countywide student recovery day; awareness activities such as contests, certificates, rallies, and incentives; countywide webinars and trainings on the importance of school attendance; and town halls or students forums for cross-district discussions about barriers to attendance. A unified branding message—similar to LAUSD’s *I’m In* logo—would be employed, and both social media and flyers, posters, and other print materials for districts and schools would be used to generate excitement. Outreach would be tailored for school boards, district and school staff, students, parents, community organizations, and law enforcement, with possible celebrity involvement in radio and television spots.

Part of the task force’s overall charge continues to be educating parents early on about the importance of school attendance and teaching good attendance habits, and working with the courts to make sure students who are not in school go to Youth WorkSource Centers for information and support. A draft of a possible diversion form (separate from a citation) was included in the work group’s meeting notes, and John Gutierrez spoke of the balance between the voluntary nature of students’ appearance at the centers and parents’ realizing that serious repercussions may ensue if students fail to go. For many in the community, any whiff of police and court systems raises fears about immigration status and other issues, and representatives from the Youth Justice Coalition recommended making the diversion notice’s language welcoming and supportive rather than punitive-sounding. From law enforcement’s point of view, any new paperwork should be simple, familiar, and quick to use. Gutierrez will send an electronic version of the diversion form to Judge Nash for his review.

Task force members felt the Student Attendance Awareness Month concept was an excellent one, and had these comments:

- The first step toward gaining widespread political support is arranging for the Board of Supervisors to officially designate the month. September is a critical time for students who have not shown up at school yet, and should be the month designated.
- A countywide recovery day would send the message that everyone is on the same page, plus a single-day activity might be easier to coordinate, although it could still be customized for each district’s needs.
- A successful campaign in South Africa for Equal Education involved young people; a video is available at [http://www.equaleducation.org.za/latecomingcampaign\\_overview](http://www.equaleducation.org.za/latecomingcampaign_overview).

### **Informal Juvenile and Traffic Court Reform/Youth and Parental Rights Directive**

Judge Nash continued this presentation until the task force’s May meeting.

### **Plans for Addressing Remaining Actions for 2012**

- The inability to afford bus passes is a key barrier to school attendance, even though student passes are discounted to \$24 from the regular \$80 monthly cost. The Chief Executive Office did a lot of work with the MTA to obtain free bus passes for foster youth, and even though

that is a small, unique population, the program still costs the agency a couple of million dollars every year. Could friends on the MTA board be approached about further reductions for students? Should the philanthropic community be tapped to subsidize this expense? Does data exist on the numbers of student passes currently purchased, on the numbers of students who do not buy them but could use them, or on any correlation between poor attendance and lack of a bus pass? For the foster youth program, the MTA requests data on every single student that shows the difference the free bus pass makes; it would likely require the same level of evidence here, making selling the idea more likely if such a program started in low-income areas where schools are experiencing poor attendance and if data supporting the positive connection between free bus passes and school attendance can be obtained.

Volunteers to discuss the issue further and develop a plan included Kim McGill and Leslie Mendoza from the Youth Justice Coalition, Barbara Lott-Holland from the Community Rights Campaign, Michelle Newell from the Children's Defense Fund, and LAUSD's homeless unit coordinator, who obtains transportation for homeless students.

- David Sapp presented a draft outline of the comprehensive technical guide to assist school districts in implement the task force's report recommendations, which is attached to and made part of this meeting summary. To avoid making the guidebook too cumbersome, it breaks out 'must-have' elements into separate modules that can be mixed and matched depending on individual districts' diverse needs. Each module will have checklists with helpful connections, models to go deeper, links, contact information, and general examples, while the manual as a whole will have appendices containing model board policies, parent letters, and so on.
- Judge Nash brought task force members' attend to an article in today's *Los Angeles Times* citing the disproportionate representation of African-American students in school exclusions (suspensions, expulsions, etc.), noting that page 27 of the task force report specifically mentions that very same issue. He suggested a brainstorming session at the next meeting to solicit suggestions for addressing it.
- Other general comments included observations that creating joint-use agreements so that schools could be used as community centers might be an income-generator for school districts, and that replacing county-employed school intervention workers with people familiar with the surrounding neighborhoods and safe passages, and staffing resource centers with youth and parents, would make them more successful.

### Next Meeting

**Tuesday, May 8, 2012**  
12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.  
Children's Court Judges' Conference Room

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

# Draft Outline for Technical Manual

## Intro Module:

- Outline of three-tier model
  - Extract items from PPT by AUSD or Baltimore
- Overview of the components of comprehensive plan [NOTE: each of these will have its own module]:
  - Attendance program
  - Student discipline/positive behavior support
  - Parent involvement initiatives
  - Anti-bullying programs
  - School safety manual
  - Mental health services & linkages
  - Developing partnerships with other government agencies and community-based and faith-based orgs
  - Pre-K programs (Incredible Years, PIP, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Step, Parent University)
  - Governance structures and integration across categories
- Tools that are important across each component:
  - Needs assessment
    - ⊗ Ch. 5 of *Program Evaluation for Social Workers: Foundations of Evidence-Based Programs* (pp. 97-127) by Grinnell, Gabor, & Unrau
      - Step 1: Focusing the problem
      - Step 2: Developing needs assessment question
      - Step 3: Identifying targets for intervention (unit of analysis)
      - Step 4: Developing a data collection plan
      - Step 5: Analyzing and displaying data
      - Step 6: Disseminating and communicating results
    - ⊗ Include sample from AUSD?
  - Survey examples from AUSD (school climate surveys)

## Attendance Module:

- Detailed intro to three-tier model in attendance plan
  - AUSD PPT
  - Universal preventions & interventions, early interventions, intensive interventions (more detailed explanation of what falls into each category)
- Checklist/inventory of documents every district should have:
  - School board policies
  - Administrative regulations
  - Template letters home
  - Referral forms for SART and/or other process

- Simple visual timeline flowcharts for site staff
- Professional development policies
- More detail on certain elements
  - Documents on positive rewards (LAUSD, AUSD, Baltimore others?)
  - Documents on professional development, including sample schedules and possibly sample training materials (AUSD binder had PD schedule for 2011-12)
  - Sample reports/data formats
    - ⊗ Include information on how regularly generated and how used by central office/site administrators
  - Protocol for action before SARB process initiated (AUSD example from Student Services Handbook)
- Appendix (examples of docs in checklist)