

# School Attendance Task Force Meeting Summary

Children's Court

July 10, 2012

## Attendees

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

*Law enforcement:* Lydia Bodin, Steve Zipperman, John Gutierrez

*Legal:* Monica Barajas, Alaina Mooves-Leb, Allison DiNoia

*Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office:* Trish Ploehn

*Los Angeles County Youth Departments:* Hellen Carter, Patty Armani

*Schools:* Tom Steele, Hector Garcia, Tiffany Brown, Debra Duardo, Teresa Garcia, Lorena Martinez, Belinda Walker, Jennifer Gomeztrejo, Ed Velasquez

*Community/Advocacy:* Zoë Rawson, Barbara Lott-Holland, Josof Sanchez, Julie Matsumoto

*Education Coordinating Council:* Sharon Watson, Evelyn Hughes

## Welcome and Introductions

Judge Michael Nash welcomed everyone and asked for self-introductions.

## Truancy Diversion Alternatives

As task force members are aware, state budget cuts have dictated the dissolution of the Informal Juvenile and Traffic Courts in Los Angeles County as of the beginning of the current fiscal year, July 1. Especially since many recommendations made by the task force in its February report dealt specifically with those courts' responses to school attendance issues, new protocols are being developed to preserve the positive spirit of those recommendations within an altered structure. (A draft flow chart and draft protocols were included in meeting packets.) Encouraging youth to attend school, rather than penalizing them when they do not, continues to be the overarching approach.

Non-traffic citations that would previously have gone to the IJTC are now being funneled to the Probation Department, which will impose a graduated series of consequences depending on the severity of the offense and the youth's compliance with assigned sanctions. The plan is to involve the delinquency court as little as possible for minor infractions, so that its limited resources can primarily address youth committing more serious offenses. Judge Nash encouraged law enforcement, schools and school districts, nonprofit organizations, and communities to work together to develop diversion programs for children and families to keep youth out of the court system.

The IJTC evolved many years ago, Nash explained, from probation and police officers serving as hearing officers for traffic tickets, and a return to that model is planned. Under the authority of Welfare and Institutions Code §255, Jack Furay, chief referee of the IJTC, will serve as chief hearing officer and train a number of hearing officers to be located around the county. They may impose any dispositional remedies allowed by WIC §258, including levying fines, referring youth

to diversion programs, and suspending a drivers license or putting on hold a young person's ability to obtain one. Hearing officers will work in conjunction with Probation and a panoply of responses will be available. "It's what we had before," Nash said, "but with more to it. It will work."

Since IJTC's closure, the Probation Department has received thousands of citations, and responsible youth who want to pay their fines, as well as previous failures-to-appear who wish to clear their records, are encountering some confusion as the new protocols get up and running. Effective April 1, 6,000 citations were entered—some going back to February 2011—about half of which had exceeded the statute of limitations. (Although numbers are still high, Chief Steve Zipperman said, citations have already been reduced by 50 percent.) Starting next week, active citations will be referred to the new hearing-officer program.

Zoë Rawson expressed appreciation to the Los Angeles Unified School District and to Chief Zipperman for their collaboration toward of the goal of preventing youth from entering the system if at all possible. To make a dent, however, cooperation from the Los Angeles Police Department and the Sheriff's Department is also needed. Probation's Hellen Carter is in the process of setting up appointments with the Sheriff's Department and meeting with the Los Angeles Police Chiefs' Association as well as all the chiefs of police, or their designates, in the county. (She also thanked Zipperman for helping to open those doors.) Carter is also meeting with community-based organizations and reaching out to large providers to intensify the diversionary services available. All providers offered to law enforcement as dispositional alternatives will need to be vetted and employee background checks run to ensure that youth are safe when working with them. A directory of programs will eventually be available, broken out by ZIP Code and supervisorial district.

Judge Donna Groman and a group of stakeholders (including school police, the Sheriff's Department, LAPD, LAUSD, Probation, the District Attorney, and defense attorneys) are working to implement a program modeled after Judge Steven Teske's in Clayton County, Georgia, whose team—funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation—will be here in September. The point of the program is to reduce delinquency-court referrals for youngsters charged with misdemeanors or felonies resulting from conduct at school (fights, being disrespectful to teachers, etc.), especially for first-time offenders. LAUSD has instituted positive interventions to address behavioral issues before they become major problems, Groman said, and a subcommittee of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is working on the nationwide implementation of Teske's program.

Thirteen Youth WorkSource Centers—a partnership among the City of Los Angeles, community colleges, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, etc., and jointly funded by LAUSD and Los Angeles's Community Development Department—are currently hiring staff and will open in August. Their hours will be from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and they will be open on Saturdays as well.

Attendance counselors will be stationed at each center to reconnect youth to schools, and nonprofit organizations are contracting with the city to provide job training, mental health, and other services designed both to improve the educational outcomes of household members and to raise family income. The centers will use a non-punitive approach to work with young people ages 16 to 24, and will refer younger children to appropriate resources. Counselors will have electronic access to

student records and will perform assessments to see if students are enrolled in and attending school, discover whether they are on track to graduate, determine their most appropriate educational setting, and help them overcome any barriers they experience to attendance. A handout with a summary of the centers and their locations was included in meeting packets, and a press conference announcing the centers will be scheduled early next month.

Los Angeles School Police staff are figuring out how best to refer truant students to the centers, Zipperman said, and should have administrative ‘citation referrals’—a term he prefers to ‘diversion’—to share with their officers shortly. He hopes that center counselors will be amenable to referrals for youth charged with non-school-related minor offenses such as trespassing and possession of tobacco, and will meet with school officials to identify what is acceptable. Tracking the disposition and follow-up of these citations will be another challenge, but Probation will likely be notified of compliance and non-compliance so that it may keep data.

Carter praised the collaboration already evidenced in this process, reiterating the objective of getting students into appropriate programs if internal school processes are not effective. “Our goal is to have kids done in ninety days,” she said. “Longer than that, and we lose them. Collaboration is key.” Parents are also an important component, Groman added, and addressing their needs—via support from a family preservation agency or with substance abuse or mental health counseling—can improve household functioning. Sundays are often the best opportunity to catch parents at home; many have no idea what resources are available to them or their families, with a lack of knowledge about individualized education plans (IEPs), which many struggling students need, being very prevalent. Tiffany Brown cautioned against promoting the sometimes-misused ‘person with a disability’ categorization that an IEP memorializes in a student’s record, recommending that all other risk factors be vetted out first.

### **PSA/Marketing Campaign Work Group Report**

A letter from Judge Nash announcing September’s “School Attendance Month” and inviting school districts to participate in a countywide Student Recovery Day on September 14 was included in member packets and is being e-mailed to all districts. The county’s Board of Supervisors will consider a resolution on August 21 declaring September as School Attendance Month and Mónica Garcia, chair of the Los Angeles Unified School District board of education, will propose a similar resolution. A press conference is also planned.

Toolkits are available with step-by-step procedures for districts wishing to participate in Student Recovery Day. This will be LAUSD’s fifth year doing so, and Debra Duardo explained the process of recruiting volunteers—from elected officials to parents to participants from local businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations—for a day of visiting the homes of students who have dropped out of school, encouraging them to return. “This is what our school attendance counselors do every day, but it gives other people a chance to understand the value of that work and get a sense of the barriers that kids face in getting to school,” Duardo said. The outreach is a valuable chance to educate parents and families about resources available to them. Also, thousands of students can be removed from drop-out lists on this single day, as volunteers discover that they are enrolled in community college or other educational programs, incarcerated, or, in some cases, deceased.

One important component needed to make Student Recovery Day and similar efforts a success is making sure that schools are prepared to receive returning students warmly and effectively. If the system has initially shortchanged them, interventions, programs, and support are needed so they are not set up to fail again.

### **Data Collection and Sharing Work Group Report**

A draft recommendation was distributed to evaluate San Diego County's Foster Youth Student Information System (FYSIS) for possible use in Los Angeles County, but the group is still looking at various other electronic systems, including those presented to the task force in May. It is not clear yet whether it will recommend using and modifying an existing system or creating one from scratch. Lydia Bodin hopes that FYSIS—used in 22 school districts in San Diego County—can be demonstrated at the September task force meeting. Michelle Lustig from the San Diego County Office of Education will show it to the work group and some additional invitees in August, with a phone line open to others in San Diego who can answer specific questions about FYSIS.

The handout on FYSIS—which tracks students from both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems—included sample screens showing the student's holder of education rights, daily attendance, IEP progress, school and placement history, CAHSEE scores, health and medications, and so on. (Selected screens can be blocked for various participating agencies, if desired.) The advantage of this system is that it requires no human data entry—all information is transferred from computer to computer, consolidating the statewide CWS/CMS child welfare database and school district databases. That resolves the third-party legal issue raised by County Counsel, but all participating agencies would still need to sign a memorandum of understanding on how they will do business together, and the Board of Supervisors would need to approve the system's use. "The people who provide the information and the people who use it are sometimes not the same," said Bodin. Buy-in from all stakeholders who touch the system would be required, as would their willingness to donate staff time for system implementation and maintenance.

### **Free Metro Passes Work Group Report**

Members are examining the practices of other cities that offer free bus passes, and the group's last meeting was canceled because of time-zone conflicts with conference calls. The MTA is putting a measure on the November ballot in Los Angeles to extend Measure R, providing transportation funding for an additional 30 years. "They don't have any money now," said Barbara Lott-Holland, "but we're not letting that stop us."

Part of what the MTA will require to consider free Metro passes for students is proof that they do indeed raise school attendance, and it will likely require the program to be piloted in low-income schools or communities to show a difference there before rolling anything out countywide. Resources from within the task force may be needed to give the MTA the data it needs.

Hellen Carter noted that fare-jumping on the Metro is the largest category of citations for youth, and Judge Nash is in discussion with the Sheriff's Department (whose officers police the Metro) on that subject. Administrative processes exist to deal with fare-jumping adults, but County Counsel has advised against using similar procedures with juveniles; Nash plans to request the

documentation behind that thinking. Lott-Holland mentioned that the MTA is creating its own traffic court, and Zoë Rawson was recently surprised to learn that traffic-court fines are lower for adults than for juveniles.

### **Community/School Connections Work Group Report**

This work group has identified five guiding principles for successful community/school collaborations, and wants to identify and share the stories of schools exemplifying each.

- School leadership with respect to teachers, to parents, and to the community
- School accessibility (schools as centers of communities)
- Building on parents' assets, parent empowerment, and leadership development
- Comprehensive community needs-assessment and mapping
- School/community engagement identified as a standard measures of success

Sharon Watson asked the task force to inform her or work-group members if they know of schools providing good examples of any of these five elements.

### **Other Updates**

As mentioned at the May meeting, Zoë Rawson has volunteered to organize a work group of the task force to address the issue of exclusionary student discipline and 'push-outs,' and asked for those interested to contact her. Josof Sanchez and Julie Matsumoto expressed their interest, and Debra Duardo will assign one of her staff to the group.

### **Next Meeting**

**Tuesday, September 11, 2012**  
12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.  
Children's Court, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room