

School Attendance Task Force Meeting Summary

Children's Court

January 15, 2013

Attendees

Courts: Michael Nash, Donna Groman

Law enforcement: Lydia Bodin, John Gutierrez

Legal: Alaina Mooves-Leb, Paige Fern

Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office: Trish Ploehn

Los Angeles County Youth Departments: Hellen Carter, Jennifer Hottenroth

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health: Lauren Gase, Tony Kuo

City of Los Angeles: Michael de la Rocha

Schools: Tom Steele, Jewel Forbes, Emily Hernandez, Teresa Garcia, Laurel Bear, Fatima Castro, Marlen Martinez, Albert Michel

Community/Advocacy: Zoë Rawson, Barbara Lott-Holland, Michelle Newell, Angelica Salazar, Alicia Virani, Caneel Fraser

Education Coordinating Council: Sharon Watson, Evelyn Hughes

Welcome and Introductions

In place of chair Judge Michael Nash, who was delayed by jury duty, Judge Donna Groman welcomed everyone and asked for self-introductions.

- Sharon Watson announced that the Education Coordinating Council meeting previously set for February 14, 2013, has been canceled. It will be rescheduled for sometime in March or early April.
- Evelyn Hughes announced that the ECC's website, educationcoordinatingcouncil.org, will go live today with a major renovation. In large part because of the media coverage and documents generated by the School Attendance Task Force's work, the site needed an organizational restructuring to make its offerings more accessible. The renovation also allows the site to be more easily viewed and navigated with hand-held devices and smartphones.

Exclusionary School Discipline Work Group Report

- Zoë Rawson distributed the draft school discipline resolution—planned for potential adoption by the ECC—that the work group discussed at its meeting yesterday. The first section of the resolution reviews data about suspensions and other forms of exclusionary school discipline and will include a piece on why they are not good for students. The second section explains some alternatives that school districts will be encouraged to implement in lieu of suspension, citing successful examples from Los Angeles County and elsewhere. The third section outlines the position the work group hopes the ECC will take: joining a nation-wide moratorium on school districts' suspending or expelling students except when required by law.

Though he agrees in spirit, Judge Nash believes the resolution may be overly ambitious. He recommended concentrating on the school districts in Los Angeles County to present the problem, the data, some examples of alternatives, and a call to action.

- The work group is also discussing possible topics for its proposed track at the Violence Prevention Coalition Conference in May, including the relationship of schools to the prevention of youth violence and gang association, and effective violence prevention strategies that leverage schools as a resource. Once the group has shaped some draft content, it will bring proposals back to the task force as a whole.

Rawson also circulated *Police in Schools Are Not the Answer to the Newtown Shooting*, a joint issue brief from the Advancement Project, the Alliance for Educational Justice, the Dignity in Schools Campaign, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. The National Council of Juvenile Court Justices, Nash added, has sent a letter to Vice President Biden stating that armed police on school campuses will only promote the school-to-prison pipeline; he will get a copy of that letter to task force members. Michael de la Rocha mentioned the Senate's December congressional hearing on the school-to-prison pipeline, and suggested that the ECC explore arranging a similar hearing in the House of Representatives.

"Kids get killed every day in Los Angeles County," Hellen Carter concluded, "far more than in any school shooting. The difference is, frankly, that they're inner-city kids of color and they don't get a lot of press. We have to get excited about *our* kids getting killed as well."

Technical Manual Overview

Task force members were sent a link last week to an electronic version of the draft technical manual, which is already 200+ pages in length, with an overview and two of four planned modules nearly complete. The manual's aim is to present enough samples of templates, forms, policies, and procedures to allow school districts to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' as they develop or enhance their own programs in attendance, student discipline and positive behavior support, parental involvement, and school-community partnerships.

Laurel Bear reviewed the draft's table of contents, encouraging attendees to review the entire document and send any missing pieces they may have to her at bear_laurel@alhambra.k12.ca.us, or directly to consultant Evelyn Hughes, who is compiling the manual, at PrsPerfect@aol.com.

Community/School Connections Work Group Report

Michelle Newell presented an updated draft of the work group's *A Guide to School-Community Best Practices*, thanking members for their work in fleshing out the document's three sections: community mapping, community schools, and building parent leadership. The goal is to gather website addresses and contact people for various successful examples of each, so that school districts designing or improving their own programs will have someone to call for tips. Newell asked that anyone aware of good examples contact her at mnewell@childrensdefense.org.

When finalized, this report will be incorporated into the technical manual as Module 4, and will also be available as a stand-alone document.

Free Metro Passes for Students Work Group Report

Barbara Lott-Holland reported that this work group has not met since the last task force meeting, and no new updates are available. Once the ECC's spring meeting is rescheduled, a representative from the MTA will be asked to attend and the item will be placed on the ECC agenda.

Data and Information-Sharing Work Group Report

- As a result of the leadership of Congresswoman Karen Bass, the Uninterrupted Scholars Act—modifying the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to allow for the sharing of student education records with child welfare workers—has been passed by both the House and Senate, and was signed by President Obama last night. “When the ECC was founded,” Sharon Watson said, “everyone warned us not to take on FERPA, but we decided that we would live or die on that sword. If that was the biggest barrier to better school achievement for foster kids, as we kept hearing, we were going to take it on. We couldn't be more pleased with this result.” A copy of the Congressional Record with regard to this act was included in meeting materials.
- Following the ECC's passage in October of the task force's resolution calling for the creation of a countywide data-sharing mechanism, Watson has been working with County Schools Superintendent Art Delgado and the Los Angeles County Office of Education to explore options. LACOE uses the EPIC (Educational Programs Information Connection) system, which works well for most purposes but requires input by hand; it cannot download education records from individual school districts. A comprehensive system more like the Foster Youth Information System, or FYSIS, used by San Diego County, will be necessary. LACOE believes, Watson said, that this kind of system and EPIC can be easily connected.

Delgado has asked LACOE deputy superintendent Joe Ybarra to co-chair a policy committee with Carrie Miller of the county's Chief Executive Office to develop an appropriate system with the help of managers and IT people from a number of county agencies, as well as some school districts and advocacy organizations. The group's recommendations will first go to the ECC for approval, and then be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors for adoption.

Jennifer Hottenroth reported on the data-sharing pilot project between the Department of Children and Family Services and the Los Angeles Unified School District that rolled out in December and now shares information about 3,000 DCFS middle and high school students in LAUSD schools. (The number has been limited by the requirement that the appropriate Education Code language appear in the court's minute order for the child. The just-announced FERPA changes now allow the inclusion of all foster children in LAUSD.) Social-worker response has been positive, as the web-based system is easy to navigate. Workers are able to view, print, and add to court reports comprehensive information on students' education history, grades, test scores, attendance, and so on, and school counselors are also authorized to access and upload data. Hottenroth has personally reviewed between 200 and 300 records, anecdotally analyzing patterns in student achievement—or the lack thereof—that will help DCFS develop better strategies for intervention.

Judge Nash also wants the Probation Department to be linked in, so that school, child welfare, and juvenile justice professionals can all access and add to the full picture of a child's life. The next step should be rolling out the pilot to include all LAUSD students who are dependents of the court, then adding Probation youth and bringing the other 80 school districts on board. Most of the larger districts already use one of two main information systems, and those vendors could be asked to make the necessary program modifications.

Besides deciding who the 'givers' and 'receivers' of information should be, Lydia Bodin said, reasonable parameters must be developed for what and how records are shared to remain within the law. What information does a bench officer need to make the best decisions for a child? What data do probation officers and social workers need to make appropriate decisions without the court's involvement? What confidentiality barriers will still exist? Can medical, psychological, and disciplinary records be shared? What will schools get out of participating?

The policy committee co-chaired by LACOE and the CEO's office will address all these issues, and should be setting up its first meeting in February or early March.

Youth WorkSource Centers and Marketing Campaign

- Emily Hernandez announced that work group members would make a presentation at an upcoming county SARB (School Attendance Review Board) meeting to recruit school districts to participate in 2013's School Attendance Month, making pledge forms and survey information available to them.
- The Youth WorkSource Centers have been in operation for six months, and a \$12 million Department of Labor grant—through May 2015—has expanded the number of sites from 13 to 16. As a result of that grant, six WorkSource Centers now offer dropout youth up to age 24 (not enrolled in school) an 18-month program through which they obtain their GED or high school diploma and also receive certification in a career track such as construction, medical technology, 'green' technology, and so on.

Each of the 16 centers has a Los Angeles Unified School District Pupil Services and Attendance (PSA) counselor on the premises, and Hernandez will send the task force a roster of locations, names, and contact information. Centers not offering the DOL's career academy program continue to counsel out-of-school and dropout youth from ages 16 to 21 and refer them to services, and also make some services available for 14- and 15-year-olds. (The catchment area for the DOL sites is all of Los Angeles County, while other sites serve youth from the City of Los Angeles.) Through December 5, a total of about 1,500 youth have been served across these sites, and the next six months are expected to be even busier.

Through the end of December, 195 referrals were received by the centers from the new truancy diversion program, and some capacity may be available in the future for other law enforcement entities to make referrals as well.

Youth Diversion Protocol

Hellen Carter thanked Los Angeles School Police and the Los Angeles Unified School District for their work with the citation diversion program, noting that the formal protocol—included in meeting materials—had been signed by Chief Probation Officer Jerry Powers on January 7. Carter is attempting to expand the number of community service providers the program uses, running background checks and making sure agencies use evidence-based methods and are used to working with youth. A letter is being readied to go to all law enforcement agencies informing them of the new protocol, and funding is being pursued for eight probation officers to assist with the program. The Department of Justice is also on board with the diversion concept.

Carter reviewed a breakdown (also in meeting materials) of the over 17,000 citations diverted from June 22 through October 2012, pointing out the large percentage—nearly a third—representing fare evasion. She noted that the costs of providing free student Metro passes would surely be less than those associated with these numerous citations. Truancy citations are down considerably from the same timeframe in 2011.

From the SARB meetings she attends, Lydia Bodin reported hearing that police officers are unsure whether or not they should be writing tickets, concerned that citations may have no integrity. Judge Nash responded that law enforcement has essentially three options with ‘righteous’ citations (in other words, those more serious than ticketing tardy students who are on their way to school, for example). “Do nothing, send the citation to probation, or figure out something else to do with that kid within their department, their community, or their school district,” Nash said. “It’s not okay for them to plead ignorance.” Bodin agreed, but also raised the disconnect between the parallel citation and SARB processes, the latter of which addresses chronic truancy and behavior problems and usually takes enough time that the student has missed a lot of school by the time a hearing takes place. In addition, while police are waiting to see the new probation protocols, they must still respond to the mandates of local ordinances—rock-throwing and burglary problems, for instance, as well as loitering in high-crime areas.

Nash admitted that the situation is still fluid, having begun in June with minimal notice because of the budget-driven elimination of the Informal Juvenile and Traffic Courts. “We went cold turkey on that whole system,” he said. “All things considered, it’s messy, but not as messy as it might have been.” Ultimately, he wants the benefits of diversion to spread into the delinquency area and reduce the number of less-than-serious cases going to court.

Data-sharing by both the school police and the Probation Department has improved dramatically, Zoë Rawson said, and community groups are finding the information very useful. “These types of tickets aren’t that different from our discussion earlier, about suspensions,” she said. “What comes before this ticket? What is the school district doing to prevent law enforcement interaction with students?” She suggested that the focus be not simply on what the system is doing to respond to citations, but on promoting effective prevention strategies.

The Administrative Office of the Courts issued a report on truancy in November that Bodin will get to Sharon Watson for distribution to task force members. Expulsions in Los Angeles County are very low, but truancy is nearly the highest in the state. Judge Donna Groman sits on the

commission that created that report. Sharon Watson called members' attention to an article in the meeting materials from the *Progressive Journalism for Positive Action* that focuses on Los Angeles efforts to reduce citations and school-based arrests.

Juvenile Re-Entry Council

Judge Groman's 'road show,' which is highlighting the collaboration among schools, courts, and the Probation Department on the re-entry process for students transitioning from juvenile court schools back to community schools, is finishing up this month with outreach to school districts in SPAs 6 and 8. (A flyer with dates and times was included in meeting materials.) Child welfare and attendance staff are attending these sessions, and the word is getting out about re-entry processes. School districts are being asked to participate in the multidisciplinary team meetings that occur prior to a youth's release from custody, whether in person, by conference call, or by video conference, and to make available lists of the resources available in individual communities to serve these returning youth.

Next Meeting

Tuesday, March 5, 2013
12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.
Children's Court, 1st Floor Conference Room

Conclusion and Adjournment

Judge Nash congratulated task force members on their continued good work, and adjourned the meeting at 1:45 p.m.