

School Attendance Task Force Meeting Summary

Children's Court

May 14, 2013

Attendees

Courts: Michael Nash

Law enforcement: Lydia Bodin

Legal: Sonjia White, Patrick Hirsch

Los Angeles County Youth Departments: Jennifer Hottenroth

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

Schools: Tom Steele, Jewel Forbes, Zhaira Gastelum, Teresa Garcia, Laurel Bear, Lorena Martinez-Vargas, Rudy Gutierrez, Arlene Quesenberry

Community/Advocacy: Zoë Rawson, Michelle Newell, Kim McGill, Leslie Mendoza, Daniel Healy, Josef Sanchez, Julie Matsumoto, Eugenia Wilson, Alicia Virani

Education Coordinating Council: Sharon Watson, Evelyn Hughes

Welcome and Introductions

Judge Michael Nash welcomed everyone and asked for self-introductions. Many Task Force members who usually attend are supporting the rally prior to the meeting at Los Angeles Unified this afternoon, urging the school board to vote for the School Discipline Student Bill of Rights on its agenda.

Updates on SATF-Supported Activities

- The Education Coordinating Council adopted two resolutions presented by the School Attendance Task Force at its April meeting—one supporting a reduction in exclusionary discipline in schools, and the other supporting free transit passes for students from pre-kindergarten through college. Judge Nash urged Task Force members to publicize those resolutions and keep them on the agendas of local governments, city councils, school boards, and the Board of Supervisors.
- Task Force members, including Nash, participated in a forum on school safety hosted by Congressman Tony Cárdenas at Van Nuys High School on April 27.
- Task Force members also partnered with the Violence Prevention Coalition in presenting a school discipline track during the Violence Prevention & Intervention Conference last week, and Sharon Watson thanked everyone involved in the plenary session and three breakout groups, plus their planning. Panels were specifically designed to include a “slice of all the stakeholders,” said Zoë Rawson, with the school safety session, for example, including Judge Nash, a parent, the head of the county Department of Public Health, a student, and a principal who had turned around a middle school serving an impoverished, gang-challenged community.

- Judge Nash highlighted the work being done in Los Angeles at a Coalition for Juvenile Justice conference in Washington, D.C., on May 4.
- Rawson presented statistics gathered by the Los Angeles School Police on the drop in citations for “daytime curfew violations”—otherwise known as truancy—since the change in the city’s municipal code advocated for by the Task Force and adopted just over a year ago.

In 2004–2009, approximately 290 citations per month were issued, a number that dropped in the 2012–2013 school year (through March) to 40 per month—a nearly *90 percent decrease*. The number of citations written in the early morning hours has also dropped substantially. Compliance has been high with ticketed students’ diversion to the Los Angeles Unified School District’s WorkSource Centers, where they see a counselor to be assessed and receive services, with 143 students completing the program through March of 2013 and only 26 students being referred to the Probation Department for failing to meet with a counselor.

Rawson thanked LASP Chief Zipperman for his engagement and commitment to this effort, and Nash congratulated everyone involved for these “stunning” results. Even though Nash actively opposed the budget-induced closure of Los Angeles County’s Informal Juvenile and Traffic Courts—which led to the implementation of this diversion program—he acknowledged that sometimes right decisions are made for the wrong reasons. Not having the court as a resource has made schools, communities, and law enforcement look at different and more positive approaches to dealing with young people. Nash hopes that the closure of four delinquency courts last year and another two (including the Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center) next month will lead to similar positive unintended consequences.

Because daytime curfew violations were a high-frequency ticket that was regularly issued for years, many individuals still owe up to thousands of dollars in fines, Rawson said, and therefore cannot receive a drivers license. The only remaining remnant of the IJTC, Nash said, is a judicial officer who is working full-time on clearing those old cases, and it would be helpful if the Probation Department added another couple of positions to take care of the workload, as is being considered. It’s a process designed to help people succeed, he added; fines and community service requirements have been discounted significantly.

Community/School Connections Work Group

Michelle Newell distributed the final version of the work group’s *Guide to School-Community Best Practices*, which highlights three areas: community needs assessment and community mapping, community schools, and building parent leadership. She emphasized that, although this version contains more examples of successful partnerships than earlier drafts did—plus online links and contact information for some models—it is far from exhaustive, and should be considered a starting point for further thought and discussion.

There being no dissent, the School Attendance Task Force adopted the *Guide to School-Community Best Practices* by acclamation. The document will be posted on the SATF section of the Education Coordinating Council’s website and will also be incorporated into the technical manual released in March. If anyone has suggestions for additions to the online version, please contact Newell or Ruth Cusick.

Data and Information-Sharing Work Group Report

Jennifer Hottenroth reported that the county's Chief Executive Office has taken point on data-sharing, and held a meeting in March with several county agencies, community representatives, and school districts to discuss where to 'hub' a central information system to connect schools, child welfare, and probation. Another meeting took place two weeks ago with the Los Angeles County Office of Education to explore whether or not LACOE could build that larger system, expanding on the information-sharing pilot now in operation between the Department of Children and Family Services and the Los Angeles Unified School District. Plans are in motion to bring the more populous school districts in the county—Long Beach, Pomona, Montebello, and others with sufficient IT support—into the pilot system, which allows DCFS social workers to access records of their caseload students' school enrollment, report cards, attendance reports, standardized test scores, and so on.

With regard to its hoped-for participation, the Probation Department has raised the issue of possible limitations to the legislative language allowing data-sharing. Is the 'child welfare' term specific to the foster youth population, or could it include youngsters in the juvenile justice system? Judge Nash mentioned that he had raised the topic with the Chief Probation Officer and with the Education Coordinating Council, encouraging probation's involvement.

Exclusionary School Discipline Work Group Report

Now that the ECC has adopted the exclusionary school discipline resolution, Zoë Rawson wants to follow up with a letter to all school superintendents in Los Angeles County encouraging them to consider the approach for their schools and informing them of available resources. She would also like work group members and others to personally meet with as many superintendents as possible to advocate for implementing the practices highlighted in the resolution. As mentioned, the Los Angeles Unified School District's school board is today considering a Student Bill of Rights for school discipline that includes restorative justice practices, positive behavior interventions and support, the elimination of suspensions for willful defiance, and structuring the role of school police to ensure that students are not criminalized for school behaviors.

The regular twice-yearly meetings with school superintendents sponsored by the ECC have been hampered by the organization's lack of full-time staff, but Sharon Watson will see if LACOE Superintendent Art Delgado might host one, as that would be a perfect venue to share some of this information. Rawson suggested that, if such a meeting is scheduled, School Attendance Task Force members also be invited to provide their perspective.

Free Student Transit Passes Work Group Report

Now that the ECC has also adopted the resolution calling for free transit passes for students from pre-kindergarten through college, Kim McGill said that the next push should be with city council and Board of Supervisors members individually. Representatives from the Youth Justice Coalition and the Children's Defense Fund are meeting with members of the LAUSD school board, and have also met with mayoral candidate Eric Garcetti's campaign office (Garcetti has expressed support.) Mónica Garcia, president of the LAUSD school board—and chair of the

ECC—is interested in presenting a resolution to that body, and MTA staff are also willing to meet with Task Force members.

One critical piece of information being gathered is how much school districts are currently spending on transportation—money that could, in the event of free student transit passes, be used for other badly needed resources. McGill distributed cost surveys to the school district representatives in attendance, asking for that data. Two surveys are also being developed to gain on-the-ground perspective on the obstacles students face in getting to and from school—a short one to be administered quickly at bus and transit stops, and a longer questionnaire to be completed at school sites. Leslie Mendoza handed out and reviewed both instruments.

Youth WorkSource Centers and Marketing Campaign

Teresa Garcia reported that the marketing committee for September’s School Attendance Month has started up again and formed working groups for parent engagement, student engagement, communication, and community engagement. Members are very interested in getting school districts other than LAUSD involved, and have an updated version of the “I’m In” letter ready to be signed by Judge Nash and posted with links to an updated pledge and other materials and information on the ECC website. Student Recovery Day this year is September 6, and LAUSD hopes that numerous other school districts will sign on to be part of that event.

Overview of Key Legislation Related to SATF Areas of Interest

Kim McGill distributed a flyer from the Youth Justice Coalition summarizing the state legislature’s ‘Super Seven’ measures (six bills and one Assembly resolution) that address some of the most serious human rights violations harming California’s youth.

- **SB 458** would require youth and their families to be notified when they are added to a local or statewide gang database.
- **SB 260** would enable youth transferred to an adult court and sentenced to more than ten years to petition to have their sentences reviewed for possible re-sentencing.
- **AB 549** (fact sheet available) would require school districts to have a memorandum of understanding with police departments that operate in their schools, and would further require districts to define the role of law enforcement and other adults on campus.
- **SB 744** (fact sheet available) would severely limit the use of involuntary transfers that force thousands of California youth every year onto the streets or into under-resourced community day and continuation schools.
- **SB 61** would severely limit the use of solitary confinement for youth in county and state custody; the practice has led to increases in suicide, PTSD, mental illness, violence, and recidivism among youth.
- **AB 420** would eliminate the use of willful defiance as a reason for suspending students in elementary schools, and would minimize the ability to suspend middle and high school students for that reason. (In 2012, 56 percent of student suspensions in California were

for willful defiance, a vague and subjective category that usually reflects minor disagreements between youth and staff.)

- **ACR 30** (fact sheet available) calls for the adoption by the state of a Youth and Student Bill of Rights, outlining human rights for all youth in education, justice, employment, health, housing, and environment protection.

All these measures have gone through their respective committees and are now in Appropriations. McGill will e-mail contact information for members of that committee to Sharon Watson, who will disseminate it along with any available fact sheets.

Two bills—AB 549 and SB 420—need letters or calls of support by the end of this week. Zoë Rawson encouraged Task Force members to contact her or McGill for sample letters, and also suggested calling Assemblymember Mike Gatto’s local office in Burbank directly to express support for AB 549.

Rawson announced that she is working with Boys and Men of Color to plan a June policy briefing in Sacramento on school climate and safety, and associated legislation. Anyone wishing to participate is encouraged to contact her.

Next Meeting

Tuesday, July 9, 2013
12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.
Children’s Court, 1st Floor Conference Room

Conclusion and Adjournment

Judge Nash adjourned the meeting at 1:08 p.m.