

# School Attendance Task Force Meeting Summary

Children's Court

July 9, 2013

## Attendees

*Courts:* Michael Nash, Donna Groman

*Law enforcement:* Lydia Bodin

*Legal:* Ruth Cusick, Alaina Moonves-Leb, Natasha Khamashta

*Los Angeles County Youth Departments:* Steve Sturm, Hellen Carter

*Los Angeles County Department of Public Health:* Amelia Defosset

*Schools:* Jewel Forbes, Zhaira Gastelum, Teresa Garcia, Belinda Walker, Virginia Ward Roberts

*Community/Advocacy:* Zoë Rawson, Kim McGill, Kaile Shilling, Karen Roque, Daniel Healy,

Jenna Arzinger, Josof Sanchez, Julie Matsumoto, Keith 'Sarge' Gibbs

*Education Coordinating Council:* Sharon Watson, Evelyn Hughes

## Welcome and Introductions

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

## Exclusionary School Discipline Work Group Report

- Work group members plan to disseminate the ECC resolution on school discipline (adopted in April) to all school superintendents in Los Angeles County. They are finalizing accompanying materials that should be ready by September.
- In May, the Los Angeles Unified School District's board of education passed a school climate bill of rights that consists of five components:
  - ✓ Addressing exclusionary discipline by emphasizing other means of correction—through an intervention matrix—prior to suspensions and expulsions (LAUSD is also no longer suspending students for 'willful defiance')
  - ✓ Fully implementing the practice of restorative justice throughout the district by 2020, with a phase-in that includes 'training triggers' for schools with high numbers of suspensions
  - ✓ Data collection and sharing around discipline, tickets, and arrests
  - ✓ Reinforcing the discipline policy passed in 2007 around positive support
  - ✓ More explicitly defining the role of school police and other adults on campus, and establishing clear guidelines

Zoë Rawson will send an electronic copy of an overview of the bill of rights to Sharon Watson, who will distribute it with this meeting summary.

Outgoing board president Mónica Garcia was a strong proponent of the school climate resolution, and the election of Richard Vladovic—who was initially hesitant but ended up voting

to support—could change the school board’s dynamic. Rawson suggested circulating media articles on changes in the board to other Task Force members.

In response to a question from Lydia Bodin, Kim McGill explained the process of restorative justice, which can be used for conflicts between teachers or staff and students or between students themselves to resolve gang-related, territorial, and other issues as well as improper language or lack of adherence to a school dress code, for example. The parties to the conflict are brought into a circle with a trained facilitator to address the initial harm, with the goal of coming to a sense of justice. Although school districts must follow the penal code, lesser behaviors are better dealt with at the school level, with consequences tailored to the specific incident. “It’s possible to figure out what’s going on in a safe, structured way when harm has been done,” Rawson said, thereby infusing trust into the culture of the school.

Transformative justice, on the other hand, looks at the roots leading to the conflict and attempts to repair historic harm. This involves social change within the community. “It’s hard to restore something you’ve never had,” McGill said. “Transformative justice looks to transform personal lives, not just address an isolated incident.”

Implementing restorative and transformative justice practices is a step back from the ‘zero tolerance’ stance adopted (wrongly, in Judge Nash’s opinion) by so many schools these days. Graduated sanctions focus on restoring victims to their original positions while at the same time developing the competency of all involved in the incident. A well-developed diversion system must include restitution in a moral sense, Bodin added, since victims are excluded from the juvenile justice system and students needn’t face those they’ve hurt. Particular populations—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning, for instance—need to be protected. McGill agreed, noting that when LGBTQ students are bullied, they, not the bullies, are the ones most often punished because of discrimination at the school level. Transformative and restorative justice practices produce far better outcomes.

Ruth Cusick urged all those with experience in restorative/transformative justice to contact LAUSD’s board of education and its superintendent, as it is crucial for them to see the positive potential of these practices as this piece of the school climate bill of rights phases in.

- The Department of Public Health plans an evaluation of Garfield High School’s positive behavioral interventions and supports program as a model for other schools. Lauren Gase is formulating the evaluation’s structure and will likely ask for input at the next Task Force meeting.
- AB 549, authored by South Los Angeles Assemblymember Reggie Jones-Sawyer, initially required school districts to spell out in their school safety plans the role of adults on campus (school police, counselors, and community intervention workers) with an eye to establishing the primary function of school police as ensuring the physical safety of students and staff, not being involved in minor discipline issues. Over time, however, the bill has been gutted by the Assembly Appropriations Committee, and now only *encourages* school districts to create guidelines—an ‘intent’ bill rather than a mandate, which was felt to be too expensive. Fiscal constraints were only part of the story, though, as strong pushback was experienced from lobbyists for law enforcement, school administrators, and school districts (although teachers unions remained an ally).

- AB 420, which would have eliminated suspensions for willful defiance in elementary grades throughout California, and limited them in junior high and high school, has likewise been scaled back. It now phases in, eliminating those suspensions for kindergarten through third grade in year one, adding fourth grade in year two, and adding fifth grade in year three. Willful defiance suspensions would continue in grades six and up. (Governor Jerry Brown is a key player here, as he is very much in support of local control on these kinds of issues.)
- Other legislation about solitary confinement, gang database notifications, and new sentencing opportunities is faring better, McGill reported. She suggested that Task Force members begin in September to think about what bills they should draft themselves.

### **Free Student Transit Passes Work Group Report**

The work group hopes to administer and collect at least 600 each of two student surveys on transportation experiences by this fall. Kim McGill distributed the survey instruments, saying that the shorter version was meant as a ‘bus stop’ poll of students in sixth grade through college, while the second, longer survey will be administered in classrooms in the school districts that are part of the Education Coordinating Council. (Probation camp classrooms are also welcome to use it.) According to Hellen Carter, fare evasion accounted for 12,978—or 27.6 percent—of the 46,890 citations written to young people from July 15, 2012, through June 15, 2013. The youngest individual cited was seven years of age. McGill has been having trouble getting data from the Sheriff’s Department, and Carter promised to provide whatever information she had available.

Work group members are developing a form for agencies, directors, faith-based institutions, and others to sign on with their endorsement of the free-pass idea, and are meeting with the transportation and education deputies to the Board of Supervisors to get their buy-in as well. A full public campaign will be launched in September, possibly at the Partnership Conference scheduled for September 12 at Cal State University, where 800 people are expected to attend.

The work group is also collecting data on transportation costs for school districts and other child-related agencies (Probation and the Department of Children and Family Services, for example) to see what savings those systems could glean from students’ being provided free transit passes. Belinda Walker mentioned that charter schools in LAUSD do not receive funding for transportation, and must raise that money privately. Her attempt at asking Metro for free passes for New Village students was denied, but she suggested that the association of charter schools be recruited for a larger voice in the process.

McGill urged everyone, including charter schools, to respond to the cost questionnaire online at SurveyMonkey.com prior to its August 31 deadline. She will send the electronic link to Task Force members. The campaign’s e-mail address is [FreeLANow@yahoo.com](mailto:FreeLANow@yahoo.com).

### **Youth WorkSource Centers**

A temporary coordinator for the Youth WorkSource Centers will serve during July and August, Teresa Garcia reported, with the position to be permanently filled by August 12. A total of 395 students participated in the truancy diversion program at the centers from August 2012 through June 2013.

## **September is School Attendance Month Campaign**

Prior to leaving for summer vacation with the rest of LAUSD, Zhaira Gastelum sent links for the online pledge and School Attendance Month materials to 191 organizations, individuals, school districts, and others. Personalized phone calls were also made, and 12 school districts besides LAUSD have pledged so far to be part of the campaign. Gastelum plans to re-send the e-mail invitation again soon.

A countywide press kick-off event for the campaign is being planned for Tuesday, September 3, and Ruth Cusick solicited suggestions about highlighting specific outreach or reform programs that are improving attendance. She invited everyone to view the resources available at [http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org/SATF\\_SchAttMo.html](http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org/SATF_SchAttMo.html), and hopes that the final total of participating districts this year will be close to 30. She asked Task Force members to be part of the effort to reach out to child welfare and attendance personnel and superintendents in the various school districts that have not yet signed the pledge.

LAUSD's sixth annual Student Recovery Day is scheduled for September 6, and other districts are encouraged to replicate that event as part of School Attendance Month.

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

The *Guide to School-Community Best Practices* adopted by the Task Force in May will be presented at one of the Los Angeles County Office of Education's regional meetings, where some individuals highlighted in the guide will be invited to speak. The *Guide* will also be featured at the Partnership Conference. Ruth Cusick solicited Task Force members' ideas about further dissemination and updating.

## **Data and Information-Sharing Work Group Report**

Steve Sturm reported that the Student Information Tracking System (SITS) is fully functional for Department of Children and Family Services students attending Los Angeles Unified School District middle and high schools. When information on school attendance, grades, and standardized test scores appears in court reports as part of the child's health and education passport, that data comes from SITS. (At Judge Nash's request, Sturm will ask DCFS's information technology section to automatically identify cut-and-pasted material from SITS by the date it was accessed.) As final grades arrive this month, Sturm expects an uptick in the number of social workers using the system. If Task Force members encounter social workers not familiar with SITS, he encouraged attendees to let them know that the link is on the LAKIDS website, on the first page.

With regard to Probation's joining the system to share data on its students, Sturm said that department's legal counsel was being consulted because of the specific mention of "child welfare" in the Uninterrupted Scholars Act. Judge Nash believes probation access is limited to a preadjudication context, and will research that question.

Except for Individualized Education Plans and some other specialized programs, SITS can now be used as the primary electronic education-data aggregator for DCFS youth, reducing the need for paper record transfers almost completely. Once social workers globally access the system,

about 50,000 staff hours per year should be saved. Time-savings estimates for school districts can reach as high as 150,000 hours per year.

The long-range plan is for SITS to become the repository for information on students in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems enrolled in all school districts in Los Angeles County. (Even now, SITS contains some information from districts other than LAUSD where students have previously attended.) Sturm hopes that the majority of larger districts—including Pomona, Montebello, Pasadena, Compton, and Long Beach—will be on board by the end of this coming school year, and that within two years, all or most of the county's districts will join in. LACOE has offered technical support for smaller districts that may not be electronically sophisticated.

Two similar systems are in use elsewhere, and SITS is modeled on the Foster Youth Student Information System used in San Diego. In that county, information from school districts goes to social workers, the courts, and parents; multidisciplinary teams will also have access once that right is established. Welfare and Institutions Code section 827 requires DCFS to maintain data on its children and youth confidentially, and once other agencies become involved in the SITS roll-out, written guidelines for access and for using the information in the best interests of the young person will be formalized.

### **Announcements/Updates**

- Sharon Watson will contact LACOE superintendent Art Delgado with regard to convening another School Superintendents Dialogue in the fall, and Judge Nash will make sure department heads from Children and Family Services, Mental Health, and Probation are invited. On the agenda will be:
  - ✓ The ECC resolution on school discipline
  - ✓ The ECC resolution promoting free transit passes for all students
  - ✓ The countywide rollout of the Student Information Tracking System
  - ✓ The *Guide to School-Community Best Practices*
- The Children's Defense Fund, the Youth Justice Coalition, and the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice offer a three-day 'Respect' training for those wishing to learn more about transformative justice, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and the development of school safety plans. Kim McGill urged anyone interested to contact her for more information.
- Summer is prime time for enrollment in early childhood education programs, Steve Sturm said, and social workers are being encouraged to refer youngsters to Head Start to take advantage of available openings.
- To follow up on a training done for the Violence Prevention Coalition, a training on developing a model school code will take place on August 1 starting at 9:30 a.m., involving role-playing in transformative justice and positive behavioral interventions and supports scenarios. An announcement will be sent to all Task Force members.

- Lydia Bodin and Hellen Carter recently ran a training for school-based probation officers on education-related issues and effective truancy intervention, which was attended by about 200 police officers, probation officers, and school and SARB staff. Virtually none of the school-based probation officers had any training in laws relating to education. “It was a myth-busting day,” as Bodin put it, and they plan to do it again.
- As mentioned, Hellen Carter reported that from July 15, 2012, through June 15, 2013, nearly 47,000 non-traffic citations were written to young people that would previously have been handled by the now-defunct Informal Juvenile and Traffic Court—an average of about 1,200 citations per week. By contrast, Judge Nash mentioned, during the IJTC’s last year, it dealt with 65,000 non-traffic citations; the reduction is significant.

Los Angeles School Police have substantially cut down on citations for truancy and daytime loitering, Carter explained, although littering, marijuana possession, on-campus fighting, petty theft, alcohol, graffiti, and disturbing the peace still occur. Fare evasion accounted for more than 25 percent of citations, and daytime curfew violations for 4.5 percent. Ticket recipients are overwhelmingly ages 15 through 17, with very few younger children being cited except for fare evasion.

Diversion cases are being referred to community-based organizations, and the program’s lone hearing officer expects to hear 1,600 cases. Once Carter’s section is fully staffed (at present, she is by herself), she expects the process will become more efficient.

Zoë Rawson expressed thanks to Los Angeles School Police Chief Steve Zipperman for his efforts in lowering the number of citations written. She warned, however, of a phenomenon that can occur under these circumstances, when decreasing the number of citations actually increases racial disparities in those cited. Kim McGill also wants data collected on ‘stop and frisk’ situations when some police officers stop young people suspected of larger infractions but fail to find any evidence, then issue nuisance-level tickets in retaliation. Hellen Carter is collecting this kind of data and meeting with police departments to educate officers around citations. Rawson recommended including youth and community organizers in those sessions as well.

### **Next Meeting**

**Tuesday, September 10, 2013**  
12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.  
Children’s Court, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room

### **Conclusion and Adjournment**

Judge Nash adjourned the meeting at 1:49 p.m.