

School Attendance Task Force Meeting Summary

Children's Court

March 5, 2013

Attendees

Courts: Michael Nash, Donna Groman

Law enforcement: Lydia Bodin

Legal: Ruth Cusick, Alaina Mooves-Leb, Kathy Quant

Los Angeles County Youth Departments: Hellen Carter, Jesus Corral, Patty Armani

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

Schools: Tom Steele, Jewel Forbes, Vicente Bravo, Jennifer Gomeztrejo, Erika Torres, Emily Hernandez, Zhaira Gastelum, Teresa Garcia, Laurel Bear, Virginia Ward Roberts, Lorena Martinez-Vargas

Community/Advocacy: Zoë Rawson, Barbara Lott-Holland, Michelle Newell, Angelica Salazar, Caneel Fraser, Josof Sanchez, Julie Matsumoto, Kruti Parelch, Kaile Shilling, Eugenia Wilson, Keith 'Sarge' Gibbs, Verna Paul

Education Coordinating Council: Sharon Watson, Evelyn Hughes

Welcome and Introductions

Judge Michael Nash welcomed everyone and asked for self-introductions. The Los Angeles Unified School District's Debra Duardo has been promoted to Executive Director of Student Health and Human Services; her successor as Director of Pupil Services, Erika Torres, said that Duardo was still very interested in the work of the Task Force and would attend meetings when she could.

Community/School Connections Work Group Report

Revisions to *A Guide to School-Community Best Practices* report are still being made, Michelle Newell said, and she will send a finalized version via e-mail once it is ready. At the Task Force's next meeting, she suggests discussing how members can publicize and distribute the report.

Exclusionary School Discipline Work Group Report

- Zoë Rawson passed out copies of the latest version of the school discipline resolution to be presented for adoption to the full Education Coordinating Council. An earlier section calling for schools districts in Los Angeles County to sign on to a national moratorium on out-of-school suspensions has been removed, and sections on in-school suspensions and assessing and preventing school-based arrests and ticketing have been added. Judge Nash called the resolution "a great piece of work," and will urge the ECC to adopt it and to encourage its consideration by all the school districts in Los Angeles County. The resolution was adopted by acclamation and will go before the ECC at its meeting on April 4.
- Rawson and Jewel Forbes are participating in the advisory committee for planning the Violence Prevention Coalition's Los Angeles Gang Violence Prevention & Intervention Conference to be held May 6 and 7 at The California Endowment. The School Attendance Task

Force will offer a school discipline track at that event, and while its content has been approved in principle, specific sessions are now being decided upon. Rawson hopes to have a panel on how exclusionary discipline pushes out students, as well as how to leverage schools as violence and gang prevention tools.

- The next work group meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 13, at noon at the Salvation Army across from Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center. Also on the agenda will be a discussion of state legislation on “willful defiance” for K–8 students and creating a tiered approach to that issue for high-schoolers.

Free Metro Passes for Students Work Group Report

- In preparation for its April presentation to the ECC, Barbara Lott-Holland announced, the campaign has added two new sections to its report (in meeting packets): work done by the Bus Riders Union in 2001–2006 to help Los Angeles students get Metro passes more easily, and the fact that the city of Oakland recently decided to issue free bus passes, even in the face of budget constraints. (Some of the research involved in that decision, *Free Transit for Low-Income Youth*, was also included in meeting packets.) The impact of students’ not having Metro passes is covered in the inside second column of the report, and Kruti Parelch asked for any help Task Force members might provide in strengthening that language. Lauren Gase suggested that some longer-term research she knows of also be included in the report, including data from UCLA that looks at transportation barriers as contributors to truancy. The comments she submitted on the benefits of free transportation will be interpolated into the report.

The work group’s goal is to push the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to provide free Metro passes to all students from preschool through college. Because of the job, family, and extracurricular responsibilities many students must fulfill, passes would be good not just from 8:00 to 4:00 on school days, but 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. (The highest number of citations given to youth by police agencies in the county is for fare evasion, and that’s what introduces many young people to the criminal justice system.)

If negotiation with the MTA is necessary, a lesser goal might be considered, but work group members feel strongly that 24/7 passes are important. Pilot projects with students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunches, for example, or offering passes only to students attending schools in high-need areas, only serve to emphasize the stigma routinely placed on the poor.

Work group members will meet tomorrow morning with the MTA’s Student Bus Pass Coordinator. If the MTA ultimately agrees to the plan, it is hoped that free Metro passes will be available no later than the next school year.

- Parelch distributed a *Statement by Youth of Color on School Safety and Gun Violence in America in the Aftermath of the Mass Shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School*, developed through by the Youth Justice Coalition’s working with young people of color all over the country. It is a compelling statement, pointing out that school shootings are perpetrated almost exclusively by white students against white students, yet students of color consistently experience a vicious and exclusionary school-to-jail track.

- The work group's next meeting is at 3:30 p.m. on March 14, at The California Endowment.

Technical Manual Overview

A link to an electronic version of the latest full draft of the now 300-plus-page technical manual was sent to Task Force members prior to this meeting, and copies of an updated table of contents and the school-community partnerships module were passed around for comment. Laurel Bear thanked Evelyn Hughes for spearheading the project and organizing the hundreds of pages of raw material sent to her. Kruti Parelch asked about adding a section on transformative justice to the module on providing interventions. If feasible, that will be done, as Sharon Watson pointed out that the manual has always been intended as a work in progress, with other modules being planned for the future.

Utilizing its long-time exemplary partnership with local police, the Alhambra Unified School District will conduct a two-day training in July for local school districts, mental health agencies, and police agencies on integrating mental health services into the school community, plus another session in June with a simulated on-campus shooting. (Training dates will be sent to Task Force members.) Since the inception of Alhambra's *Gateway to Success* program, inquiries about mental health services have increased significantly from students concerned about other students, and the change in school climate has been a profound one. Having the necessary documents to replicate that success all in one place, as in the technical manual, is extremely helpful, but training and forming coalitions for mutual aid are critical. As Bear said, "No one agency or district can do it alone."

Task Force members approved the draft technical manual for distribution, and it will be added to as more information is gathered. "I'm proud to be from L.A.," Judge Donna Groman said with regard to the manual. "We've taken a huge leap. It's nice to be ahead of the curve once in a while."

Data and Information-Sharing Work Group Report

The working group for implementing the countywide information-sharing system will meet on March 12 at the Los Angeles County Office of Education. Stakeholders will discuss a very broad set of questions to be worked out so that, ultimately, courts, schools, and county agencies have access to information about a child's life to aid in good decision-making. "With child welfare issues, of which education is one," Lydia Bodin said, "it's almost never that we share too much, but that we share too little. When everyone involved doesn't know what's going on with a child, things can go wrong." Nevertheless, Kathy Quant cautioned against using shared information against students—citing them for truancy after learning about days out of school, for instance—thus jeopardizing their right to privacy.

Shortly after the Uninterrupted Scholars Act amended the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Los Angeles Unified School District agreed to share current and historic records with the Department of Children and Family Services without waiting for conforming state law to be passed, or requiring individual minute orders. Patty Armani expressed appreciation to Debra Duardo and Erika Torres for making this happen.

Judge Donna Groman wants the Probation Department to work with the Data and Information-Sharing Work Group; Jesus Corral will attend the LACOE working group on March 12.

Youth WorkSource Centers and Marketing Campaign

- Erika Torres explained that Emily Hernandez, former head of the marketing campaign, has moved to a new position heading up the Youth WorkSource Centers. Zhaira Gastelum is now in charge of the committee, and she passed around a sign-up sheet for those who wish to be involved in preparing for *September is Student Attendance Month* activities.
- The Youth WorkSource Centers—a collaboration between the Los Angeles Unified School District and the City of Los Angeles' Community Development Department—recently implemented a \$12 million Workforce Innovation Fund grant from the Department of Labor, which expanded the number of sites from 13 to 16 as of October 1. 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. 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.)

Each of the 16 centers has a LAUSD Pupil Services and Attendance (PSA) counselor on the premises, and Hernandez is compiling a list of the centers, their counselors, and their specialty areas that she will send to Task Force members. Information is also available at the bottom of the page at pupilservices.lausd.net (under City Partnership), although the map there has not yet been updated to show the three new Centers.

Referrals to the Centers are received in two ways: from the truancy diversion program, which accepts referrals only from school police; and by the PSA counselors' working with school-based counselors, the potential drop-out list, and lists of non-graduates who are highly credit-deficient. Through January, a total of 2,369 students met with counselors and received academic assessments, developed education plans, and were referred to services. Of these, 249 students were referred by the truancy diversion program, although wide disparities in referral rates existed for different Centers. Staff are planning 'meet and greets' with local law enforcement to acquaint them with the staff and resources available.

Julie Matsumoto asked about the timeframes of the various education/vocational tracks at the different Centers—having learned that enrollment for one had already closed—and Hernandez admitted that those were not standardized. She suggested working with the PSA counselors at individual Centers and having them make connections with related case managers or program directors. Another LAUSD department works directly with returning probation youth, but Center counselors can assist with enrollments.

- Hernandez will send a flyer regarding a five-week paid summer internship with the Department of Public Works, for high school juniors or seniors living in the City of Los Angeles.

Juvenile Re-Entry Meetings with School Districts

- Judge Groman spent last week training judges from all over California who are new to the delinquency court, encouraging their interaction with school districts, community-based organizations, and others in their areas. As an exercise, she distributed graphs showing each county's truancy and suspension rates, which were "a real eye-opener," as she put it, requiring judges to work with schools to develop plans addressing truancy.
- 'Road show' meetings held over the last few months presented to 60 out of the county's 81 school districts the process for probation youths' transition back into community schools following their release from incarceration. The goal of these meetings was to encourage school districts to adopt written policies for re-entry, to designate a specific re-entry contact within each district, and to enumerate the community programs available locally. Representatives from probation headquarters, probation camps, and school-based probation programs explained the re-entry process, described the education that youth receive in camps, and outlined the problems experienced in getting kids back into community schools. Groman particularly thanked Alaina Mooves-Leb for her personable and non-threatening explanations of the applicable law that started off each presentation. Schools seem excited about being involved early on in multidisciplinary team meetings, Groman said—usually by phone or video conferencing, given the remote location of most probation camps—ideally a minimum of 90 days' prior to a given student's release to their district.

Road-show participants and others will follow up with school districts to ensure that written policies on re-entry are put into place. The list of district contacts will be distributed to Task Force members, and will also be updated regularly by LACOE and available on the pupil services section of the LACOE website. Groman will also send out the materials distributed at the road show presentations. Michelle Newell and Erika Torres will be added to the follow-up group.

Probation Diversion Program Update

Hellen Carter distributed the PowerPoint presentation shown to the Board of Supervisors' justice and budget deputies on February 20, 2013, containing data on the diversion program from June 15 through December 31, 2012. Having processed about 45,000 citations during that time, the program is on track to hit the annual 65,000 number estimated at its inception. Carter commended the Los Angeles Unified School District and its sub-district staff, along with the Los Angeles School Police Department, Chief Zipperman, and his staff, for their efforts in dramatically reducing the 260 citations a day that had been issued the previous year.

The presentation's flow chart shows a complete staff, but the eight probation officers, ten clerks, supervising probation officer, and clerk supervisor are not yet on board; Carter hopes to be fully staffed by June. Until then, three individuals, including Carter, are working every night to vet citations and refer them to diversion services. (If a high number of citations is being written in a particular geographic area, Carter works with the law enforcement agency involved to see how they can be helped.) A few referrals to the District Attorney's office for consistent repeat offenders have been necessary, but only after meeting with the citing police agencies and looking into the individual cases. "We say *enough is enough*," Carter said, "only when we cannot handle that child's needs." Adjudicated youngsters are eligible to receive services, although the goal is to

provide those services before that point. If Department of Children and Family Services youngsters are getting into trouble frequently, another plan may be put in place for that child's alternative home placement or out-of-home care.

Statistics on referring agencies indicate that the Los Angeles Police Department leads, followed by the Sheriff's Department and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The vast majority of referring offenses involve fare evasion. (Providing Metro passes for all students, Carter commented in reference to an earlier discussion, would certainly be cheaper than taking them into diversion.) Incidences of fighting on campus are referred to mediation programs, and youth on probation, rather than going through the defunct Informal Juvenile and Traffic Court, now receive graduated consequences from their probation officers.

With regard to the population served, a low percentage of DCFS youth (2 percent) are coming through the program, with most being cited for possession of tobacco. About 10 percent are on active probation, but 88 percent have no record at all. The fact that diversion participants are not entered into the probation case management system means that no adjudication or conviction goes on record and the citation is considered handled informally. This is particularly helpful for DREAM Act students and those in the military.

Community referrals include teen court, police diversion programs, school-based probation officers, community-based organizations, mediation, and restorative justice. DCFS becomes involved if evidence of neglect is found (a youngster stealing food because none is available at home, for example), and the Department of Mental Health also receives appropriate referrals. With regard to minors whose licenses have been revoked as a result of their citations, Carter said that if they have already gone to court, a hearing officer needs to decide if their licenses can be restored.

Judge Groman thanked Carter for all her efforts in getting young people the help they need without involving the court system.

Other Business

- Sarge Gibbs asked about continuation schools for middle-school students, expressing concerns about schools failing students so early. Zoë Rawson mentioned legislation being worked on with regard to involuntary transfers, a component of which relates to continuation schools. She will report on that bill at the Task Force's next meeting.

In terms of nomenclature, *continuation* schools are those designed to help high school students with credit deficiencies. *Alternative* schools are where students subject to exclusionary discipline are sent. According to Tom Steele of the Los Angeles County Office of Education, students are placed in community day (alternative) schools for a maximum of one year, and then return to a comprehensive site. Middle-school community day schools serve students who have been expelled from a comprehensive site (for bringing a knife or gun to school, selling drugs on campus, etc.) or who have serious disciplinary issues. The curriculum there is identical to comprehensive sites, but with added behavior supports to help students succeed.

Rawson agrees with Gibbs that the underlying concept of the shift in school climate from elementary to middle school, when policing and suspensions increase, is an important one.

She suggested that the Exclusionary School Discipline Work Group discuss the topic more broadly once the Violence Prevention Coalition conference has concluded.

- Task Force member Michael de la Rocha is working with Congressman Tony Cárdenas on a hearing regarding the Boxer bill meant to keep schools safe in the wake of the Newtown shooting. He will let Task Force members know the hearing date once it is set.

Next Meeting

Tuesday, May 14, 2013
12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.
Children's Court, 1st Floor Conference Room

Conclusion and Adjournment

Judge Groman adjourned the meeting at 2:00 p.m.