

School Attendance Task Force Meeting Notes

Children's Court

March 20, 2014

Attendees

Judge Michael Nash, Juvenile Court	Ruth Cusick, Public Counsel
Zoe Rawson, Comm. Rights Campaign	Lauren Gase, Public Health Department
Lydia Bodin, District Attorney Office	Valerie Corcoran, LAUSD
Sharee Sanders Gordon, City Attorney Office	Tom Steele, LACOE
Jennifer Gomeztrejo, LACOE	Vicente Bravo, LACOE
Jewel Forbes, LACOE	Martha Matthews, Public Counsel
Alicia Virani, CA Conference for Equality	Katie Butler, Public Health Department
Kristen Byrdsong, City Attorney Office	Angelica Salazar, Children's Defense Fund
Gil Espinosa, Advancement Project	Gracie Valenzuela, Public Defenders Office
Patty Armani, DCFS-Education	Sam Chan, DMH
Elizabeth Fitzgerald, DMH	Christina Bal, Child Welfare Initiative
Barbara Lott-Holland, Strategy Center	Lisa Gross, Fair Curve Films
Vincent Holmes, County Chief Executive Office	

Welcome and Introductions

Judge Michael Nash welcomed Task Force members and allowed participants to introduce themselves.

Judge Nash informed the group of his attendance at a congressional hearing regarding the re-authorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. This federal law provides funds to states that ensure the care and protection of youth in the justice system. The re-authorization bill – Youth Promise Act – would provide continuing funding to address juvenile delinquency and street gang activity. Part of this legislation would also address the practice of housing “status” in locked facilities and would prohibit such activity.

Judge Nash also noted his involvement in an op-ed submitted to the Los Angeles Times in support of SB1296. This bill would prohibit 601 wards from being jailed as a result of violation of a court order or contempt charge as a result of a failure to attend school.

Additionally, Judge Nash forwarded a copy of the report completed by the Department of Public Health on the cost and benefits of providing free public transportation passes to each of the Board of Supervisors offices. He noted one Board office had responded and was interested in additional information.

Judge Nash also reviewed the letter being sent to LAUSD's Progressive School Discipline Committee and stated he would sign today. The letter provides suggestions to the committee regarding subjects it may wish to cover.

Mental Health and School Attendance

Sam Chan provided the group with information on the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and their desire to increase mental health services to youth through school interventions. Mr. Chan noted that in 1999, the DMH launched an initiative to have mental health services at all schools that wanted them.

There are currently 75 providers in use at virtually every school district in the County. Mental health services are also increasing as a result of the development of school-based clinics. There has also been an effort to increase the access to services for youth, birth to five. DMH providers are now required to have the skills and trainings to service this population and their families. This is being helped by the expansion of Medicaid brought on by the start of the Affordable Care Act. The additional funds have increased the opportunities to blend funding streams to not only service youth but entire families with mental health challenges. Mr. Chan also noted that each Service Planning Area (SPA) has a mental health school coordinator to assist schools.

Lydia Bodin and Kristen Byrdson mentioned that DMH is often included on the Student Attendance Review Boards (SARBs). Both also noted their interest in determining how best to access DMH services when services are provided by a contractor. There have been instances where those providers would have been very useful to the SARB process or to the prevention efforts that precede SARB.

Zoe Rawson requested that the DMH staff consider attending the Exclusionary School Discipline Work Group meeting. The relationship between crisis intervention and school discipline is of interest to the work group.

Sam Chan noted the stigma associated with mental health treatment remains a concern and DMH has initiated several campaigns to combat this stigma.

Exclusionary School Discipline Work Group Report

Zoe Rawson provided an update on the efforts of the Exclusionary School Discipline Work Group. She noted that while Judge Nash will be signing and delivering a letter to LAUSD's Progressive School Discipline Committee, the Committee has been examining many of the issues raised in the letter. SATF members were encouraged to attend the Committee which meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month.

Vicente Bravo noted that members of the Work Group attended a LACOE sponsored meeting for school attendance personnel from the school districts. Participants at the meeting were given

copies of the ECC resolution in support of alternatives to suspensions and expulsions, and were encouraged to speak about their district's programs to resolve disciplinary issues. The participants were also given information on restorative justice programs.

Judge Nash requested a status report from the Probation Department on the citation process. There has been a reduction in citation issued by various law enforcement agencies, but the SATF hasn't received an update in some time from Probation.

Free Student Transit Passes Work Group Report

Barbara Lott-Holland informed participants that the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) will be holding a public hearing Saturday, March 29th to discuss potential fare hikes. The proposed hike will include staggered increases through 2021, to be followed by annual hikes based on the consumer price index (CPI). The hearing will be an opportunity for the public to comment on the proposed fare hikes. A letter was also provided to several MTA members to express concern over the proposed fare hikes. Included in the letter was a call for free student bus passes.

Barbara Lott-Holland also noted that there have been conversation with Mayor Eric Garcetti regarding free bus passes and he supports the idea in theory, but wanted to know how the effort would be funded.

Judge Nash noted that he may be meeting soon with Mayor Garcetti and would also mention his support for free bus passes for youth. Participants were asked to send questions or issues related to school attendance they would like Judge Nash to mention.

Lauren Gase updated participants on her efforts related to the Free Bus Pass Project. An addendum is being produced which will update some of the findings in the report by the Department of Public Health (DPH). Additional items to be included in the addendum are County departmental transportation costs, school district transportation costs, and the results from a field poll. Lauren Gase also informed participants that the advisory body formed to assist DPH with its inquiries related to school attendance has met and will be reporting back to the SATF soon.

Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPS)

Martha Matthews provided participants with an overview of new legislation that impacts how educational funds are distributed to school districts and its impact on foster and probation youth. Local Control Funding Formula legislation (LCFF) was enacted to address funding inequities and provide school districts with greater flexibility to manage their local education needs and unique concerns. Along with the per pupil grant received for each student, school districts will receive a grant equal to thirty-five percent (35%) of the per pupil grant specifically for English learners, economically disadvantaged youth or foster youth. Each school district will have to produce a local control and accountability plan (LCAP) that sets out goals and describes how the school district will use the available funds. The LCAPs will have to explicitly describe the funding and programs being developed to enhance educational outcomes for foster care youth. Each district's LCAP will have to be approved by the local county office of education.

To assist the local districts, a coalition of community based organizations and advocates teamed together to support and advocate for essential elements in the LCAPs for the largest school districts – LAUSD, Pasadena, Long Beach, Antelope Valley and Pomona. Each of these districts is within the top ten school districts with foster care populations. The coalition will also assist community and parent groups, ensuring that their issues and concerns are voices as part of the public hearing process.

The coalition was also instrumental in creating a template that can be used by school districts to develop their LCAPs. Included are three goals specifically designed to address educational challenges of foster care youth. The template is located on Public Counsel's website.

Martha Matthews also noted that LAUSD is considering increasing the number of foster care counselors in hopes of creating a ratio of one to one hundred.

Student Attendance Review Boards (SARBs)/District and City Attorney Attendance Efforts

Jennifer Gomeztrejo provided participants with an overview of the SARB process and history. SARBs were created by the state legislature to resolve student attendance issues and to divert youth away from the juvenile justice system. Legislation enacted in 1974 created a state SARB that is responsible for developing and coordinating policy related student attendance issues. The legislation also called for the creation of a county SARB, which is facilitated by the county office of education.

Given the scale of Los Angeles County, LACOE has chartered 59 local SARBs that are responsible for monitoring school attendance issues. The County SARB provides technical assistance and training to those SARBs.

Included in the SARB process is the early identification of attendance issues. Early monitoring allows for school-level interventions such as parent conferencing, service referrals, etc. in hopes of remediating the problem. These pre-SARB interventions have grown increasingly successful as they have reduced significantly the number of cases that are actually referred to the SARB. In 2013, of the 21,103 countywide pre-SARB interventions, 17,497 (83%) were resolved without a SARB referral.

As part of the pre-SARB process, both the District Attorney (DA) and City of Los Angeles Attorney (CA) have developed programs aimed at encouraging school attendance. Both programs use the gravitas of letterhead from a prosecutor's office to impress upon families the importance and legal requirement to ensure youth are in school.

The CA is also in the process of developing teen truancy courts as another pre-SARB intervention. These courts, similar to teen courts, will enlist the peers of youth to judge cases. These efforts will focus on schools located within the City of Los Angeles.

The DA's efforts include the Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) program as well as mediation services. ACT is focused on elementary school children and is aimed at addressing truancy at its earliest identification largely through letters that are sent to a family. In the event this intervention does not work, the DA has mediators who have one-on-one engagements with youth

and families. These meetings often help to get at core issues that might be impeding the youth's ability to get to school.

Both the DA and CA noted a very small number of cases are actually prosecuted by either office annually

When all the various pre-SARB interventions have been tried to no avail, a SARB meeting is called. SARBs are multi-disciplinary meetings where representatives from schools, social services, community, mental health, and the prosecution gather to review the attendance youth and develop a solution in partnership with the family. If an agreement cannot be reached or there is no compliance with the agreement, the CA or DA may choose to prosecute the case.

Jennifer Gomeztrejo also noted that there are several model SARBs located in Los Angeles County. In 2012, those school districts included Alhambra, Bellflower/Paramount, El Segundo, Hermosa, Manhattan, Redondo and Montebello.

The identification of youth with attendance issues remains a challenge in multiple school districts. School budget cuts and the limited number of staff assigned to monitor attendance is a concern. Valerie Corcoran noted that LAUSD has limited pupil services staff as local schools are required to purchase those staff out of their discretionary funds.

Jennifer Gomeztrejo suggested that a letter be sent to school districts encouraging them to add more attendance staff given the additional funding allotted to them as a result of Local Control Funding Formulas. At Judge Nash's request, she will produce a draft for his review.

Announcements/Updates

Copies of pending legislation were distributed to participants. There will be an opportunity to discuss the legislation at the next SATF meeting.

Next Meeting

The date for the next meeting is:

Tuesday, May 20, 2014

12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.

Location: TBD

Conclusion and Adjournment

Judge Nash adjourned the meeting at 2:10 p.m.