

# School Attendance Task Force Meeting Notes

Children's Court

May 29, 2014

## Attendees

Judge Michael Nash, Juvenile Court	Ruth Cusick, Public Counsel
Zoe Rawson, Comm. Rights Campaign	Lauren Gase, Public Health Department
Tom Steele, LACOE	Michael Edwards, Probation Department
Jennifer Gomeztrejo, LACOE	Vicente Bravo, LACOE
Gil Espinosa, Advancement Project	Janay McGee, CA Conference for Equality
Laurel Bear, Alhambra Unified School	Zhara Gastelum, LAUSD
Muriel Cormier, DMH	Paige Fern, Alliance for Children's Rights
Alicia Virani, CA Conference for Equality	Katie Butler, Public Health Department
Kristen Byrdsong, City Attorney Office	Sylvia Lewis, Probation Department
Gracie Valenzuela, Public Defenders Office	Jesus Corral, Probation Department
Barbara Lott-Holland, Strategy Center Department	William Horton, Probation Department
Vincent Holmes, County Chief Executive Office	Hellen Carter, Probation Department

## Welcome and Introductions

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

Judge Nash informed the group of a recent fact finding tour by representatives of President Obama's My Brother's Keeper Initiative. Representatives toured the Children's Court and had an opportunity to hear some of the local efforts going on that address the significant contact boys of color have with the juvenile justice system.

## Restorative Justice Overview and Demonstration

Alicia Virani and Janay McGhee provided participants with an overview of Restorative Justice Practices (RJ) and their impacts on school campuses. RJ is used by schools to shift away from zero—tolerance and punitive disciplinary systems to practices that seek to dialogue with those involved in conflict. Students are asked to take responsibility for their actions and to understand its impact on the larger community. This is done in hopes of reducing a reoccurrence of the behavior. Ms. McGhee noted that her experience with RJ was positive because it was done in a non-judgmental fashion and made her feel included in the process.

Participants were then asked to participate in a community building circle demonstration. Community circles are used to engage all members of a group and assist with nurturing and fostering a sense of belonging.

### **County Juvenile Citation Project (Update)**

Hellen Carter updated participants on efforts by the Probation Department to process juvenile citations previously handled by the Informal Juvenile Traffic Court. Eight hearing officers are being hired to assist with those citations that cannot be handled through the largely administrative process. Dr. Carter stated that she would bring statistics on the total number of citations issued in 2013 as well the types and by which law enforcement agency. Dr. Carter did however note that there continues to be a decrease in the number of citations filed by law enforcement agencies.

Dr. Carter also mentioned that the Probation Department is finalizing an agreement with the Superior Court to acquire the Juvenile Traffic Record System (JTRS). This will allow the Probation Department to more expeditiously enter information on juvenile citations and remove DMV holds. Currently, a probation clerk must manually process DMV holds and wait for the Department of Motor Vehicles to take action.

Ruth Cusick mentioned that several of her clients have been unable to clear their juvenile citations and obtain their driver's license. Most of these cases were for citations that were issued prior to the closure of the juvenile traffic courts. Additionally, it was noted that citations appear to have been written for habitually truant students. There was concern regarding the legality of such citations being written by law enforcement agencies.

To review these issues, it was suggested that a meeting be held to discuss both the issue of clearing old citations and the possible issuance of chronic truant citations.

### **Pomona School District/Probation Project**

William Horton provided information on an attendance effort within the Pomona School District created to support student and their attendance issues. Comprised of representatives from the district attorney, probation and school, a team meets as part of the pre-SARB body to identify youth having attendance issues. The team provides resources to the youth and family. In the event the resources are not helpful, the youth and family may be referred on to the DA's Mediation program or to the SARB.

This effort is also coupled with the implementation of the DA's Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) Program at all the Pomona elementary schools. ACT ensures that all elementary school parents are aware of their responsibility in ensuring that their children are in school.

Pomona School District has also implemented the use of truancy sweeps to find youth who may not be known to school officials. Students identified through the sweeps are asked to check in with the probation officers on campus who monitor their ongoing attendance.

It was suggested that some consideration be given to including youth and parents on the committee in the future. Their perspectives might be very useful to the committee as it develops.

Judge Nash also requested that data be provided at the next meeting which detailed the attendance improvements for the first year.

### **Public Health Free Bus Pass Report Addendum**

Lauren briefed participants on the addendum to the Free Bus Pass Report prepared by the Public Health Department. Ms. Gase provided additional information around school transportation costs, voter support for free youth passes and a better cost estimate around the potential cost to MTA for implementing this effort. The key points are noted below:

- Cost to MTA for providing free transportation to youth in school, K12 through college was estimated at \$70M. Figure is reduced to \$24M when only K12 youth are included.
- Collectively, all schools in LA County spend approximately \$273M transporting youth to and from school. Though not fully determined, it is assumed that a significant number of these costs are for mandated transportation as a result of physical and learning disabilities.
- Public Health conducted a survey to determine voter support for free student passes. 90% of respondents supported the idea of free bus passes for youth.

Lauren also noted that the original report as well as the addendum had been shared with representatives from Mayor Eric Garcetti's office.

### **Exclusionary School Discipline Work Group Report**

Zoe Rawson noted the efforts of the group to meet with school districts interested in sharing their alternative to discipline practices or interest in developing restorative justice practices. To date, the work group has met with three school districts regarding their disciplinary practices. The latest school district was El Monte. The administrators at El Monte were very interested in starting a restorative justice program to complement their Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (BPIS) efforts. Staff from the California Conference on Equality will be meeting with El Monte to begin restorative justice efforts.

Tom Steele also noted efforts on the part of LACOE to hire a full-time consultant to provide BPIS training to local school district staff. The consultant should be in place by the beginning of the school year.

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

Kim McGill briefed participants on meetings with several MTA members (Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, Mayor Garcetti and Councilwoman Dubose) prior to May MTA meeting. Each was informed about the issues surrounding fare evasion and the community support around free transportation for youth.

Barbara Lott-Holland noted that her organization completed research on the MTA budget to determine if there were discretionary funds that could be identified to replace lost revenues if free transportation was provided for all youth attending schools. While \$83M was identified,

there was no action taken by MTA to provide free transportation. A limited fare increase was passed by the MTA Board and additional budgetary reviews were requested prior to additional fare increases. Ms. Holland also noted that the MTA Board would be reviewing its diversionary programs to determine how best to use going forward. There are still approximately 10,000 fare evasions citations issued each year.

It was suggested that a letter be forwarded to the MTA Board with recommendations regarding further consideration of the free youth transportation request and how best to resolve the fare evasion process. Judge Nash noted his interest in signing such a letter.

### **Announcements/Updates**

Ruth Cusick and Jennifer Gomeztrejo noted that School Attendance Month was fast approaching and requested a letter be sent out to school highlighting the month and the importance of attendance. Judge Nash mentioned his support of such a letter.

### **Next Meeting**

The date for the next meeting is:

**Thursday, July 24, 2014**  
12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.  
Location: TBD

### **Conclusion and Adjournment**

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