



Education Coordinating Council

July 27, 2005

9:30 a.m.

Exposition Park Intergenerational Community Center
3980 South Menlo Avenue, Los Angeles, California

Present: José Huizar, Chair
Yolie Flores Aguilar
Carol Clem
Kathleen Duba, representing Percy Clark
Paul Higa
Michelle King, representing Roy Romer
Miriam Aroni Krinsky
Aubrey Manuel
Judge Michael Nash
Darline P. Robles
Bruce Saltzer
David Sanders
William Stelnzer, representing Patrick Leier
Beatriz Olvera Stotzer
Rick Tebbano, representing Christopher Steinhauser
Harriette Williams
Machelle Wolf

Guests: Michael D. Antonovich, Chair Pro Tem, Board of Supervisors
Miriam Simmons, Second Supervisorial District
Wendy Aron, Third Supervisorial District
Nick Ippolito, Fourth Supervisorial District
Jana Cooley, Fifth Supervisorial District
Susan Abagnale, Casey Family Programs

Chair José Huizar brought the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. and thanked the Los Angeles City Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families for arranging the meeting space and free parking. He announced that ECC member Gwen Bartholomew, a co-founder of Grandma's Angels, has moved to Houston. Bonnie De La Cruz, the organization's other co-founder, has agreed to serve in her place.

Huizar welcomed Supervisor Antonovich and asked that ECC members and the audience introduce themselves. He briefly outlined the action items to be considered at this meeting, emphasizing the importance of coordination and forming partnerships among ECC members to make better use of existing resources.

Remarks: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

Antonovich thanked lead consultant Sharon Watson and members of the residential academy work group for their efforts on that topic, praising Paul Higa, David Sanders, and Judge Michael Nash for being in the forefront of exploring the residential academy option. He also commended Miriam Aroni Krinsky for her ongoing efforts to educate the legal community about the needs of foster and probation youth.

Statistics indicate that a large number of foster and probation youth do not complete high school. Without family support, many will lack opportunities for the rest of their lives. The Federal government now provides stipends for the adoption of older children, and encourages partnerships with faith-based communities to find homes for young people. However, when youth are emancipated out of the system at age 18 without either an education or a supportive family structure, they will not develop into individuals who can provide leadership for the future; they are more likely to end up incarcerated or dead. Residential academies are one way of reaching out to these youth, along with connecting them to loving foster and adoptive parents.

Residential Academies for Foster Youth

At the request of the Board of Supervisors, ECC members agreed in April to form a work group to develop recommendations regarding the residential academy concept. According to David

Sanders, the goal for the approximately 23,500 children currently in out-of-home care is to place them with legal, permanent families—their own, with relatives, or with adoptive parents.

Children's outcomes are improved by the two anchors of family and education, and though the system that exists today works for some kids, it doesn't work for everyone. The proposed residential academy model is not meant to replace that system, but to do more for some youth.

Sharon Watson reported that in December 2004, the Department of Children and Family Services issued a Request for Information/Interest (RFI) that defined a residential academy, identified its target population, and specified desired outcomes. Twenty-eight responses to the RFI were received. These were provided to work group members, who reviewed them closely, visited successful models elsewhere in the country (San Pasqual Academy in San Diego, Preuss Charter School in La Jolla, and SEED Academy in Washington, DC), and discussed approaches that would best meet the needs of Los Angeles youth.

To provide a positive and stable educational experience for some of Los Angeles County's foster youth, the group recommends that two pilot residential academies be established, one in urban South Los Angeles and one in the more rural Antelope Valley. Each should be primarily a school, with the residential component being secondary. They should provide a rigorous college preparatory curriculum for grades 6 through 12, be established as public charter schools, and have an RCL licensing level of 7, 8, or 9. No county funds should be used for capital expenses or for operating costs beyond those required for the Title IV-e match for foster youth in residence.

The student population would be a mix of boarding and day students, all with an interest in pursuing higher education. Students for whom a permanent family situation is found may continue to attend as day students, and siblings will be given preference for admission.

Boarding students, about 100 in number, would be youth currently in nonrelative out-of-home care for whom permanent placement in a family setting is unavailable. They would be accepted from group homes with RCL levels up to 12, if they are ready to step down to a less intensive program, or from other foster care settings. Admission preference would be given to students

with the potential to succeed academically who are not performing up to their ability. They may have an individualized education plan (IEP), but cannot need special education classes.

Day students would be foster youth living with relatives, Kin-Gap youth, former boarding students who have transitioned into a stable family setting, probation youth, and local non-system community students whose families meet Federal poverty guidelines.

Though technically a placement, the residential academy would be a voluntary program. All students would be connected to a family and some, additionally, with mentors. A strong independent living component, a varied array of structured activities, and a comprehensive career/vocational preparation curriculum would be provided through public/private partnerships. Students would live in small residential cottages with full-time house parents, and an alumni housing program would also be available. Student families would be heavily involved, and the residential academy would be an integral part of its community.

The discussion of these recommendations touched on several issues, including the scarcity and cost of land and the challenges of transportation in Los Angeles County. Options to address these issues will need to be explored, and solutions may include shared community facilities and asking the private nonprofit organizations running the academies to raise enough money to support transportation for day students. At Preuss Charter School, for example—where every tenth-through twelfth-grader has completed at least one advanced placement class and daily attendance exceeds 98 percent—vans pick students up every day.

Miriam Krinsky urged ongoing accountability and sustainability for the academies, and recommended creating an advisory panel of educators, former foster youth, and others to serve as a watchdog group that would present regular independent reports to the Board of Supervisors. “We are these kids’ parents,” she said, “and it’s up to us to ensure that what people see as a model has some stopgaps in it.” In addition, she felt that the formal board of directors for an academy should be composed of high-profile community leaders who would be staking their reputations on its success.

Enrichment programs such as sports and the arts are essential, and extensive fundraising from the private sector will be critical.

With regard to the minimal county funding needed, Huizar clarified that the State Department of Education monies that flow to charter schools would otherwise have gone to the districts in which the schools are located. Because of increases in charter-school funding and their greater ability to leverage funds, he believes that structural option is a good one, and Darline Robles commented that a strong accountability emphasis could be incorporated into the charter petition.

Noting the clause allowing students to have IEPs but to have required special education classes only in the past, Yolie Flores Aguilar argued that many foster youth have some level of special education needs that will need attention. While acknowledging that mental health staff will be on-site at the academies, Watson stated that 60 percent of children in out-of-home care do not require special education, and these first residential academies are meant to meet the very real needs of that population. As time goes on, it may be possible to add a special education option.

Regarding the target population, Machel Wolf expressed her concerns, stating that she herself “would not have been one of the kids allowed in” to a residential academy and that the “kids I work with every day, starting at the sixth grade, are already at all Fails” in their school grades. Judge Nash conveyed a similar disquiet with the idea of making an enormous effort and spending millions of dollars to create a “super facility” for a very small number of students. “What does this mean for us as a system,” he asked, “in dealing with the educational needs of all foster youth?” Bruce Saltzer offered some suggestions for clarifying the student description and asked that it be made clear in the model documentation that children should not be removed from a placement that is working for them in order to attend a residential academy.

Aubrey Manuel stressed that the emphasis of the academies is education, not necessarily limiting enrollment. Though the concept is being called a pilot, the two proposed facilities will be long-term in nature, even if others are never established. Watson and the work group see the residential academies as but a single segment in a continuum of services, and the ECC has not stopped work on its blueprint for all children in care. As Wendy Aron explained, the whole idea of the

Board motion was to expand the range of educational opportunities available to foster and probation youth. The boarding school experience in a private academy can benefit children who are doing all right in school but don't have families to push them or advocate for them. "These kids are getting by," Aron said, "and maybe they'll graduate, but they won't go to college. A great academic experience could help them set their sights further." The concept targets a need for the middle population, she added, "between the kids who need intensive services and the kids who'll succeed wherever they go."

Audience members applauded the inclusion of younger students, since many high schoolers have already given up on the educational system, and also favored the idea of the watchdog advisory board to act as a "pushy parent" to supplement the efforts of social workers and caregivers.

David Sanders concluded the discussion by thanking Watson and the work group for doing an exceptional job of putting together a model that has "a strong chance of working" and that is consistent with the direction of the department and the Board motion. "With the ECC," he said, "we have an opportunity to move forward on issues that we haven't ever looked at as a system, and we shouldn't delay making progress." Residential academies are not the answer for all 23,500 children in placement, but not every program has to be appropriate for all.

Miriam Krinsky moved that the ECC approve the proposed recommendations with certain amendments and Bruce Saltzer seconded that motion. The following recommendations were unanimously approved:

- **The Board of Supervisors and the Department of Children and Family Services should move forward to develop two residential academies in Los Angeles County, one in South Los Angeles and one in the Antelope Valley.**
- **The L.A. Residential Academy Model should be the model used for these academies and any proposals should include accountability safeguards, such as an advisory board and yearly reporting to the Board of Supervisors.**

- **As Model D came closest to the desired Los Angeles County Model, responses which reflect this model should be given strong consideration in the selection process.**

Increasing Participation in Academic and Enrichment Programs During Non-School Hours

As explained in the recent ECC Literature Review (prepared by Jacquelyn McCroskey and Carrie Watson and presented at the April meeting), foster and probation youth lose an average of two months of academic achievement over the summer months when compared to other youth, because other youth take part in a variety of summer learning opportunities that foster and probation youth do not. ECC members can take some key actions to close this gap by coordinating their efforts and creating new partnerships to increase the participation of these youth in academic and enrichment programs during the summer months, off-track periods, and after-school hours. To aid the discussion, program director Carrie Watson prepared a handout on the effective characteristics of programs working to close the achievement gap for at-risk youth.

The Los Angeles County Office of Education administers contracts for various programs, and Darline Robles will look at the possibility of giving renewal preference to those that include foster and probation youth in their programs.

Systemic governmental issues must be considered, since communication between and among cities, school districts, and the county is problematic at best. The city of Los Angeles, for instance, sponsors many internship jobs and youth programs, and agreeing on outcomes with schools serving high numbers of foster and probation youth would be helpful. The Los Angeles Unified School District is currently examining its governance and how to work better with the city with respect to the 160 low performing schools, safety, joint use issues and afterschool programs. Its Beyond the Bell branch is working with the Department of Children and Family Services and the L.A. Mentoring Partnership to establish corporate mentoring programs for foster youth.

Because of confidentiality, identifying where foster and probation youth are and working with their schools can be difficult, but a key person at each school site could be assigned to get information about programs out to foster parents, social workers, probation officers, and the courts.

Carol Clem asked if a centralized online database or clearinghouse could be set up, similar to the Call 211 program recently instituted for general social services, since enrichment programs change from semester to semester and school to school, and the flow of information from workers to caregivers is often not reliable. Enhanced case management coordination among departments serving individual children should also be encouraged.

Various workforce investment boards set aside funds for high-risk foster and probation youth, but administrative entanglements are such that a child sometimes has to worry about what side of the street he or she lives on to know which of the WIBs can help, or have to visit all eight of them to get one job. Coordinating the outreach for workforce readiness programs would make a big difference.

A lack of transportation is often at the root of youth's non-involvement in enrichment programs, as are approval issues, despite AB 408 legislation that aimed to reduce the barriers created by caregivers' unwillingness to sign permission slips. Addressing foster and probation youth participation through contractual language, as Robles suggested, is a good step that could be expanded to every part of the system—social worker reports, judge and lawyer checklists, and expectations of caregivers and group homes. Training for caregivers, and social workers' conferencing with them and the youth from the outset, could help persuade young people of the importance of educational activities and keep them on track.

Harriette Williams wants the ECC to establish a work group to look at how children access tutoring programs and how the whole system can apply itself to that issue. Money exists for these programs, and education liaisons are based in each district, but the network needs to be strengthened. For most school districts, the bottom line for tutoring programs is enabling students to pass the high school exit examination, and churches and other informal tutoring organizations can be invited to train in curriculum areas that align with the state's. Students who receive after-school tutoring from qualified teachers want to get academic credit for it, but that is usually not allowed. Even when youth attend community college or other accelerated off-campus classes, many schools do not accept those courses for credits the student needs.

Going directly to youth for input on the relevance of programs is important, since if programs don't meet their needs, youth won't attend. They must be involved in both the design and evaluation of programs. For children in group homes, enrichment activities that are scheduled on weekdays often conflict with program services; more needs to happen on the weekends.

Engaging young people and building relationships may be the most valuable outcomes of enrichment programs, since many youth have no adults other than their classroom teachers who pay any attention to them. Relationships with others lead to a relationship with the larger community, something that is lacking for many foster and probation youth.

Huizar thanked everyone for their comments, and Sharon Watson said that both the newly formed blueprint synthesizing group and the larger Planning Group would discuss these points. Longer-term recommendations would be included in the blueprint, but simpler suggestions may be brought back to ECC members for action before then. She added that, following the data match done with the Los Angeles Unified School District (also presented in April), the ECC is working on similar studies with the Pasadena, Long Beach, Lancaster, and Pomona school districts to find aggregate numbers of foster and probation youth and where they are located.

Early Childhood Education Work Group Report

Kathy Malaske-Samu introduced the work group's new chair, Terri Chew Nishimure, who is a member of the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and the director of program development for the Pediatric Therapy Network in the South Bay. Nishimure thanked work group members and acknowledged its previous chair, Michele Sartell. She then presented the work group's policy statement regarding child development services (included in member packets) and its recommendations to the full ECC. One of the key points of the work group's overall recommendations, Malaske-Samu said, is to enable foster youth and their children to form relationships in high-quality child care settings, giving them a good start not only academically but interpersonally.

Nishimure also briefly reviewed the child care program quality rating scale, which she characterized as a "work in progress" that the group wanted to make the ECC aware of. Jacquelyn McCroskey noted that First 5 L.A. is supporting the rating scale, which she sees as "a huge step"

in getting everyone to agree on the importance of quality. LAUP, First 5's universal preschool spin-off, is working closely on the instrument, and its first set of launch sites are all rated at 3 or above. The scale will help caregivers know what to look for and what questions to ask, and its adoption will bring the ECC in line with First 5 and other large entities so that, as McCroskey put it, "we all stand together on quality."

Beatriz Olvera Stotzer asked that a phrase be added in the work group's recommendations to require coordination with cities that are in the forefront of establishing new child care policies, and Bruce Saltzer offered an amendment to make sure that the individualized needs of each child are considered. David Sanders expressed his department's desire to see the same things for the 11,000 children served by his department in their family homes as for those removed from their families, and suggested expanding the language of two recommendation sections to "youth served by the Department of Children and Family Services and the Probation Department."

Beatriz Olvera Stotzer moved that the Early Childhood Education work group's recommendations be adopted by the ECC as amended:

- 1. The ECC should encourage the utilization of high-quality child development services for children served by the Department of Children and Family Services and the children of DCFS and Probation youth by:**
 - ⊗ **Ensuring that all parents and other caregivers (foster parents, relative caregivers, etc.) served by the Department of Children and Family Services and the Probation Department are introduced to the formal child care sector, including their local child care resources and referral agency, the range of child development programs available, and the Centralized Eligibility List for accessing subsidized care**
 - ⊗ **Ensuring that these parents are provided information on the importance of high-quality care and are informed of those programs that have demonstrated that they are meeting higher standards, including programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the National Association for Family**

Child Care, L.A. Universal Preschool, state-funded child development services, and Early Head Start and Head Start

- ⊗ **Ensuring that youth served by the Department of Children and Family Services and the Probation Department who are teen parents *have accessed* subsidized child care services for their children prior to the teen parent's emancipation and/or leaving the system**
- 2. The ECC should support the continuity of care for children who are enrolled in high-quality child development programs, even if their foster placement changes, based on the individualized needs of each child. Children must be given the opportunity to develop and sustain positive relationships with the adults and children in the program. The quality of these early relationships with teachers has been shown to be an important predictor of the child's future social relationships with peers, their behavior problems, and school satisfaction and achievement.**
- 3. The ECC should coordinate with cities that are in the forefront of establishing new child care policies, and endorse efforts to identify and support child development programs that are providing high-quality child care services, including:**
 - ⊗ **AB 1565, authored by Assembly Member Pavely, which would direct and fund the California Department of Education to conduct a feasibility study of a quality rating system for child development services**
 - ⊗ **The implementation of the child care program quality rating instruments developed by the Policy Roundtable for Child Care to assist families, particularly those using county services, to make informed decisions when selecting child development services**

Harriette Williams seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

E-Mail Discussion Groups: Carrie D. Watson

Carrie Watson reminded everyone of the ongoing e-mail discussion groups around each of the ECC's four work groups (data and information-sharing, early childhood education, education liaisons, and youth development). Information is available from the ECC office on how to join these discussions, which will provide input for the development of the blueprint for educational outcomes that is the ECC's overall charge. Everyone who is interested is welcome to join, and Watson encouraged attendees to spread the word.

Announcements

- ◆ The Children's Law Center is partnering with the Barristers Association to distribute 1,000 free backpacks to students during a back-to-school drive, and they would like to stuff them with materials relating to education, school opportunities, and higher education. Miriam Krinsky asked that anyone with materials to share contact Princess Ramey at the Children's Law Center office at (323) 980-1700. Distribution is planned for the latter part of August.
- ◆ A representative from the county library system brought information on live homework help, a free service available through county libraries.

The next meeting of the ECC is scheduled for October 26, 2005, at 9:30 a.m., at a location to be announced.

There being no further public comment, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.