



Education Coordinating Council

January 26, 2006

9:30 a.m.

Hahn Hall of Administration, Room 140
500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles, California

Present: José Huizar, Chair
Berisha Black
Carol Clem
Kathleen Duba, representing Percy Clark
Jullie Eutsler, representing Steve Gocke
Paul Higa
Helen Kleinberg
Miriam Aroni Krinsky
Elizabeth Lem, representing Darline P. Robles
Hector Madrigal, representing Roy Romer
Aubrey Manuel
Evelyn V. Martinez
Judge Michael Nash
Bruce Saltzer
David Sanders
William Stelzner, representing Patrick D. Leier
Beatriz Olvera Stotzer
Rick Tebbano, representing Christopher Steinhauser
Machelle Wolf

Guests: Wendy Aron, Third Supervisorial District
Gail Tierney, Fourth Supervisorial District

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<http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org>

Chair José Huizar brought the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. and asked ECC members and the audience to introduce themselves. He acknowledged the absence of some members as a result of a conflicting state conference for school superintendents and the participation of the Department of Mental Health on a delegation to New York City regarding homelessness.

Huizar congratulated Beatriz Olvera Stotzer on her appointment to the Housing Authority for the City of Los Angeles and thanked her for her service on the ECC during its first year. As she will no longer be a member of the city's Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families, she will not be able to serve as its representative to the ECC. He also announced that, following yesterday's presentation by ECC staff member Carrie Watson and others, the board of the Los Angeles Unified School District voted to support a resolution to better support homeless and foster youth in Los Angeles schools. Huizar had been happy to introduce that resolution prior to leaving the school board, and stressed the importance of publicizing the ECC's Blueprint and educating policy-makers about the issues it raises.

Officers

Although ECC officers were elected for a one-year term, leadership changes seem premature prior to the presentation of the proposed Blueprint to the Board of Supervisors and at least some initial efforts to implement its recommendations and actions. **Helen Kleinberg moved that the terms of the current officers—Chair José Huizar and Vice-Chairs Michael Nash and Berisha Black—be extended for another 12 months. Miriam Krinsky seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**

Annual Report

Vice-Chair Michael Nash presented the ECC's 2005 annual report, which details the achievements of the organization during its first year. Though he acknowledged the cooperation of all participants, "the glue holding everything together is the consultant team and staff," he said, naming program director Carrie Watson, lead consultant Sharon G. Watson, and consultants Cecilia M. Sandoval, Jacquelyn McCroskey, and Evelyn Hughes. Nash also expressed appreciation to the Board of Supervisors and its united approach to supporting the children and families

of Los Angeles County. He further acknowledged Miriam Krinsky and the Children's Law Center for spearheading foster care awareness week, which led to the two education summits that recommended the creation of the Education Coordinating Council. "Collaboration is alive and well in Los Angeles," he said. "We have a lot more to do, but a good foundation has been laid."

Nash then reviewed some of the ECC's accomplishments, including the draft of the Blueprint to be presented later in this meeting, various community outreach activities, the development of a sample educational case plan to provide guidance and consistency for those accountable for system youth, and the court-issued blanket order allowing the child welfare and probation systems to share information with school districts.

Youth and Caregiver Focus Group Report

Vice-Chair Berisha Black presented the printed version of *Through Their Eyes: Results of Youth and Adult Caregiver Focus Groups on the Education of Youth in the Foster Care and Probation System*, a preliminary version of which author Cecilia Sandoval had presented at the ECC's October meeting. Black expressed appreciation to Susan Abagnale and Casey Family Programs for providing the funds for publication, and again thanked the 145 youth and 66 adult caregivers who participated in the focus groups. She urged members to continue to give youth a voice as the Blueprint recommendations are implemented.

Presentation of ECC Blueprint

Since the November 2004 establishment of the Education Coordinating Council by the Board of Supervisors, its main charge has been to create a Blueprint for raising the educational achievement of foster and probation youth. The Blueprint being presented today has gone through multiple drafts, all of which have been distributed widely—to ECC members, its Planning Group, workgroups, and Blueprint Drafting Group; to other volunteers; and to ECC meeting attendees. Since the October meeting, the Planning Group has met twice to discuss it, a separate drafting group was convened, and consultant Sharon Watson met individually with all five Board offices. Presentations were made to the Interagency Operations Group, the Los Angeles County Education Foundation Probation Committee, the Children's Planning Council, the Policy Roundtable

for Child Care, the Emancipation Program Partnership, and the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families.

In all, over 150 individuals, 70 organizations, and 210 focus-group participants participated in shaping the document, and the majority of their suggestions have been incorporated (increasing the page count from 16 in the first draft to its current 36). Considering the number of organizations and differing views involved, Watson said, “The consensus is amazing. We have almost unanimous agreement on what’s in here so far, though we realize that some people want to add more.” The idea behind the Blueprint was to winnow through the hundreds of possible suggestions, keeping the ECC’s recommendations manageable and focused so that implementation will be possible. The Blueprint is a work in progress—a place to start—that is meant to offer some major ideas and suggested actions. Following adoption, operational steps will be developed.

Watson reviewed the introductory sections of the Blueprint:

- The Challenge
- What We Know
- What We Want
- Our Approach (based on the four agreed-upon priority areas of early childhood education, youth development, data and information-sharing, and school-based support)
- What Youth Are Saying (a summary of the *Through Their Eyes* findings)

To achieve the desired results, the ECC believes those responsible for the educational attainment of foster and probation youth must uphold Seven Basic Agreements:

- The central importance of education for the current well-being and future prospects of children and youth
- Maintaining high expectations for system youth
- A strong investment in prevention, assuring that children are enrolled in high-quality early care and education programs

- Early intervention in any factor affecting educational success, including social, developmental, health, and mental health issues
- Promoting school stability
- Biological families and caregivers being involved in their children's education
- A shared understanding of educational responsibility

Watson then reviewed the Blueprint's recommendations (Some Short-Term Practical Solutions), each of which included examples of actions that could be immediately undertaken.

1. Enrolling more system youth (and their children) in high-quality early care and education programs
2. Increasing support and resources for parents, relative caregivers, and foster parents to help them ensure that these children are ready for school
3. Enrolling more system youth in skill-building and enrichment programs that also serve non-system youth
4. Engaging youth in designing, implementing, and evaluating the programs and activities in which they participate
5. Better preparing foster and probation children and youth for transitions to the various stages of school and employment
6. Aligning efforts to create safer schools, including passages to and from
7. Addressing barriers regarding the sharing of information (the largest hurdle on many levels, especially with differences in the interpretation of confidentiality laws)
8. Developing an electronically based information system for the individual educational records of foster and probation youth
9. Providing the information that educational liaisons and other school-based staff need about system youth

10. Training school-based staff about the educational and emotional needs of foster and probation youth

What It Will Take To do Better outlines roles and responsibilities, and the challenges inherent in them, for youth, parents, caregivers, holders of education rights, department case managers, school personnel, attorneys, county departments, school districts, and the judiciary. Recommendation 11 urges cross-training for all those stakeholders. Recommendation 12 addresses accountability, proposing an educational case plan and various means to hold caseworkers, caregivers, and the courts accountable for the educational success of foster and probation youth. As a whole, the ECC further commits to hold its own members accountable for achieving the Blueprint's vision and goals. The document concludes with brief Next Steps and Conclusion sections, along with acknowledgements, a bibliography, and endnote references.

Beatriz Olvera Stotzer moved that the Education Coordinating Council accept the Blueprint; Aubrey Manual seconded the motion, and it went to the floor for discussion.

Many members praised staff for their receptivity and attention to feedback, and their ability to incorporate and finesse sometimes conflicting suggestions. Mabelle Wolf commended the agencies and organizations that come together on the ECC, but cautioned that "all is not well outside these walls." Over the last week and a half, she reported, partnerships have broken down among school districts and county departments in a way that will negatively affect foster and probation youth greatly. "Everyone is worried about politics and personal issues between partners," she said, "but no one is worrying about the kids. They are what matters. The Blueprint is great on paper, but it's not filtering outside of here. It doesn't mean anything without true partnership and collaboration."

Watson concurred, saying that if the ECC takes the Blueprint seriously, its members must build trust and maintain respectful relationships. Though the specific incident to which Wolf referred is a separate issue, it is indicative of the finger-pointing that has taken place in the past. "Let's set the stage and commit to treating each other as partners," Watson counseled, "in an open, trustful way." Though Elizabeth Lem was unaware of the details, she did say that Los Angeles County

Office of Education superintendent Darline Robles and Chief Probation Officer Paul Higa had been working together closely to make things better for children.

Agreeing that creating policy is easier than implementing it, Huizar thanked Wolf for setting a child-centered tone for the Blueprint discussion. Judge Michael Nash said that the whole reason for creating the ECC was to deal with the kinds of things Wolf referred to, and the fact remains that: “We haven’t done a good enough job of meeting the educational needs of our kids. Good things are happening in various places,” he continued, “but we don’t have any cause to pat ourselves on the back. We have a long, long way to go.”

Citing the fact that 25 percent of foster children are under the age of five, Helen Kleinberg expressed her concern that references to that population, while sprinkled through the document, were not clear enough in several places. She suggested several changes, including giving more importance to early identification and intervention, adding a reference to intervention programs provided by the Regional Centers, and clarifying that the age range of youth for this Blueprint is from birth to age 21.

Berisha Black added to Kleinberg’s suggestion, recommending that Regional Centers be invited to sit on the ECC. Hector Madrigal stressed the tremendous amount of work it will take from everyone, on many different levels, to ensure the Blueprint’s implementation in the ECC’s constituent organizations. However, it must be done, he said, to ensure a “more friendly, compassionate, and receptive system for foster and probation youth.” Solutions must be both top-down and bottom-up, said Miriam Krinsky, and proposed adding quotations from more sources throughout the document, including a statement regarding school transfers in the Basic Agreement related to school stability, and adding the juvenile courts and counsel for children and youth in the introduction to Recommendation 7.

Paul Higa suggested more clearly articulating the roles and responsibilities of holders of education rights and of youth themselves, since a narrowed path of accountability is probably not the best approach. He also wanted to make sure that the issue of the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was not lost, since none of the Blueprint’s goals can be achieved without information-sharing. The relationship between the Probation Department and the Los Angeles

County Office of Education is better than it has been for years, Higa said, yet he is still told that copies of individual education plans are confidential and may not be shared with probation camp staff, despite their desire to be more involved in the educational planning and efforts of their charges. “Darline’s interest is not to thwart us, but to help us figure it out,” he said. “Differing applications of FERPA within and across school districts make it difficult.” Probation cannot access transcripts, grades, or attendance records. Thirty percent of camp youth are there because of school violations, but 68 percent of those transferring from camp to other schools go with no transcripts. “We can’t move forward without this,” Higa said.

Judge Nash pledged publicly to resolve the confidentiality issue before the end of the fiscal year, since a peaceable resolution between the entities involved seems unlikely. “This is a very high priority with me,” he said.

In the interest of keeping the Blueprint a living document and not including overly restrictive language, David Sanders suggested that the parenthetical subheading for county departments in the Roles and Responsibilities section be eliminated to make it clear that other departments also have a role to play. He also suggested that schools and school districts be added to the list of those accountable for the educational success of foster and probation youth.

Hector Madrigal advised articulating the accountability role of school districts; the Board of Supervisors has no jurisdiction over them, and he fears that without a comparable level of accountability, they will see the Blueprint as a document primarily aimed at county departments. “School districts must be part of the solution,” he said. José Huizar agreed, but conceded the difficulties districts face in tracking student achievement and identifying measures that make comparisons to other counties or areas meaningful. With the data matches the ECC is performing, Watson said, baseline data is being collected, and periodic repeats should yield indicators that make sense and can be tracked over time.

Beatriz Olvera Stotzer said that, in addition to updating the Blueprint every five years or so, the ECC should mandate a coordinated effort to report regularly on accountability issues. In addition, policies addressing school districts should not forget educational issues for the preschool population of children from birth to age five.

Bruce Saltzer raised the issue of school stability, which he believes should be co-equal with school quality, and the challenges to caregivers of transporting youth. He also maintained that there should be equivalent expectations of children no matter where they live, and agreed with David Sanders and Miriam Krinsky on another suggested change that, under Recommendation 12, adds relative caregivers to those responsible for following the Education Case Plans and softens the language with respect to placement decisions.

Carol Clem detailed the struggles of her office with school districts all over Los Angeles County regarding their bias against foster and probation youth and their frequent misunderstanding of education law. (Numerous districts erroneously believe there is a waiting period, for example, before a child leaving a probation camp can be enrolled in school. When parents request an individual education plan—clearly their right—districts may say they’re not entitled to it.) The Public Defender trains attorneys in special-education rights, mental health issues, etc., but is often forced to bring compliance complaints before the state department of education when districts refuse to provide services. Invariably, these districts are found to be out of compliance, and courts can then address the problem with specific orders. A system-wide change, however, remains elusive. Clem begged the ECC to ask districts to consider their attitude, and to consider legislative changes to give the courts more authority to enforce these laws without advocates having to jump through so many hoops.

With the joint efforts of many people, Nash said, a protocol has recently been created in the dependency court to refer these issues to a pro bono panel of education attorneys and advocates. Two hundred cases have been processed since July, and the success rate is 100 percent. The protocol is now being redrafted for the delinquency system. Though compliance is a long-standing problem, Helen Kleinberg reminded members that the youth participating in focus groups often said that school counselors were the adults who had helped them the most. “Schools are under enormous pressure,” she said, “and taking care of our children is just another problem for them. It’s a national dilemma. The systems don’t understand each other, and that’s one reason the ECC was created.”

Clem requested that the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office be added to one of the items under Legal Advocates/Attorneys in the Roles and Responsibilities section.

Berisha Black proposed a friendly amendment to the motion, moving approval of the Blueprint with the amendments and modifications raised during this discussion, though acknowledging that ways to incorporate school district accountability had not been clarified. Beatriz Olvera Stotzer seconded the motion, and the amended Blueprint was unanimously approved.

José Huizar again thanked everyone involved, and announced that the Stuart Foundation has committed to providing funds to print the final Blueprint.

Making the Blueprint a Reality

The Blueprint will go to the Board of Supervisors in February; the exact date will be e-mailed to members, as will the final Blueprint version submitted to the Board. The ECC's Planning Group has completed its work, but the consultant team will remain the same and two of the work groups will be retained to accomplish specific tasks in their program areas. Additional representation on the ECC from the business community will be sought, as well as from the Los Angeles area Regional Centers.

When the Blueprint is adopted by the Board of Supervisors, it will be the responsibility of ECC members to implement its recommendations within and across their organizations. Starting right away, members should review the document with their constituents, pinpoint where it applies to them, and begin working to implement those pieces. Efforts around the 'collective' recommendations—those involving more than one system—will be discussed and prioritized at the April meeting, and members will report on their individual endeavors.

Once the seven school districts sitting on the ECC have reviewed the Blueprint internally, William Stelzner suggested that LACOE convene another superintendents' meeting to discuss how best to approach the rest of the 80 districts in the county. Helen Kleinberg wants to ensure that the Blueprint remains child-focused, and that youth, not just agencies and organizations,

continue to be involved in the implementation process. She suggested perhaps gathering information from youth on aged-related strategies for raising educational achievement.

Once the Board has adopted the Blueprint, it will be made available to other bodies to provide further countywide buy-in, and Huizar cautioned about the natural push-back that may occur when unrelated entities realize that they, too, are being held accountable for accomplishing these goals. The document should be shared outside the county, as well; Berisha Black will take it to a national body sponsored by Casey Family Programs in which she has been invited to participate.

The ECC's new website went live this week. All reports, appendices, meeting schedules, and other documents are posted there, and it will serve as another vehicle for communication.

Watson thanked Evelyn Hughes and webmaster Eric Baldwin for their help in preparing the site, which can be found at <http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org>.

Public Comment

- ◆ Penny Markey asked members to contact her if they need information on the county library system's 'no-fault' library card for foster youth, or its Internet-based homework help.
- ◆ Heidi Rotheim from the Department of Mental Health urged the ECC to continue its "bottom-up, top-down" dual approach to implementation. Because of limited resources, the rollout of any change is challenging, and small successes do not necessarily trickle out district-wide.

The next meeting of the ECC is scheduled for Thursday, April 27, 2006, at 9:30 a.m. Evelyn Martinez offered to host this meeting at the First 5 LA office at Union Station.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 a.m.