



## **Education Dialogue with School District Superintendents**

**July 11, 2011**

**10:00 a.m.**

Los Angeles County Office of Education Headquarters  
9300 Imperial Highway, Downey, CA

Present:

- Rob Arias, Rowland Unified School District
- Helen Chavez, ECC
- Jenny Cheng, Alhambra Unified School District
- Jackie Contreras, Department of Children and Family Services
- Arturo Delgado, LACOE
- Ellen Dougherty, Lawndale Elementary School District
- Martin Galindo, Bassett Unified School District
- Terry Gendreau, Bellflower Unified School District
- Paul Gothold, Lynwood Unified School District
- Patricia Jaffe, Culver City Unified School District
- Joanne Kim, Juvenile Court intern
- Kathy Licursi, Burbank Unified School District
- Sandra Lyn, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District
- Pat Mahony, Alhambra Unified School District
- Richard Martinez, Pomona Unified School District
- Eric Marts, Department of Children and Family Services
- Fernando Meza, Pomona Unified School District
- Dave Mitchell, Probation Department
- James Monico, Paramount Unified School District
- Hon. Michael Nash, Presiding Judge, Juvenile Court
- Jeremy Nichols, Probation Department
- Susel Orellana, Juvenile Court
- Trish Ploehn, ECC
- Tom Steele, Burbank Unified School District
- Marv Southard, Department of Mental Health
- Edward Velasquez, Lynwood Unified School District
- Sharon G. Watson, ECC
- Shandelyn Williams, Antelope Valley Union High School District

Newly appointed Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Arturo Delgado welcomed attendees and asked everyone to introduce themselves. Judge Michael Nash then briefly reviewed the three divisions of the county's juvenile court system:

- Dependency court (20 courts), which currently has 25,895 children under its jurisdiction, the majority of them of school age
- Delinquency court (20 courts in 10 locations), which oversees approximately 20,000 youth on probation, all of them of school age
- Informal juvenile and traffic court (13 courts in 11 locations), which handles about 150,000 citations a year, 30 percent for traffic offenses and the rest for violations of other local ordinances, many of which—like breaking curfew, possession of cigarettes, and ‘daytime loitering,’ or truancy—are illegal simply because the offender is under age 18

Three court committees directly address education issues: a dependency committee, chaired by Referee Sherri Sobel; a delinquency committee, chaired by Judge Donna Groman; and the Truancy Task Force—which includes community advocates and representatives of school districts, law enforcement, the courts, and truancy programs—staffed by ECC consultant Sharon Watson.

“Our juvenile court is a busy system,” Nash said, “dealing with close to two hundred thousand kids and families every year. Education crosses all three pieces of the mission of the dependency court—safety, permanency, and well-being—and we have the same concerns on the delinquency side. How are kids doing in school? How can we help to improve things? With the Truancy Task Force, the goal is for us to focus on school attendance issues, identify the kids having those issues, and do what we can within systems to improve attendance. We’ve been meeting for months now, looking at current anti-truancy efforts, and we want to work with school districts and others to see what the best programs are for everyone.”

Because of Delgado’s having served as superintendent in the San Bernardino City School District for the past 12 years, he knew several meeting participants and is familiar with the issues that Nash described. Delgado grew up in East Los Angeles and initially taught in the Rowland and Baldwin Park school districts. “Things have changed in the last decade,” he said. “Attendance is a big issue, along with dropout rates and the No Child Left Behind Act not really getting off the ground. But my pleasure and my advocacy is for the kids—the kids are the same. I also believe in dialogue and that the days of top-down management are long gone. Even in my short time here, I’ve run into the concept of silos, and I really believe we need to break down those silos to talk together and get past the sticking points. A particular focus for me will be the court schools and dealing with the current lawsuits. These are our kids, even in court schools, and I want to see progress. I’m still getting the lay of the land,” he told attendees, “but I’m here to serve what you’re doing, and I hope we can be more effective in the future. I appreciate safety, permanency, and well-being being the overall goals.”

### **Issues and Concerns of Participants**

As with previous dialogues, the issue of **communication** continues to be an overarching concern—and not just with the Probation Department and the school districts, according to Eddie Velasquez, but with law enforcement. “A kid’s arrested over the weekend, and I don’t know anything about it,” he said. “Kids disappear and come back six months later, and we have no information on what courses they’ve been taking [while incarcerated]. If a student gets detained and put in suitable placement at the Optimist group home, for example, who has responsibility for their education? It turns out to be the alternative division of the Los Angeles Unified School

District, but it took me a long time to figure that out. We want to work with everyone so that when kids come back to us, they're on track to graduate."

With regard to truancy, Velasquez mentioned that the ACT program has helped a great deal in the Lynwood district. "Truancy is a behavior, and we shouldn't allow kids to establish poor behavior," he said. "We're starting to cite for daytime curfew violations in Lynwood, and we've hired a deputy to issue those citations. But we want to talk to the court, because some of our families cannot pay those fines. In lieu of a fine, we'd like them to go to parenting classes, with the students getting tutoring on Saturdays. Who do we talk to about that?" Nash suggested speaking to Sharon Watson and participating in the Truancy Task Force.

Nash also pointed out that when youth are adjudicated as wards of the court, protocols require a notice to be sent to the youth's school district. "That generally occurs," Nash said, "but I don't know that the information given with the notice is satisfactory. When kids are arrested, detained, or placed—on the dependency side or the delinquency side—there should be lots of communication with the social worker or the probation officer. We need to understand what the young person's educational status is so we can develop an appropriate plan."

Jenny Cheng raised the issue of districts receiving no records with entering students. "We don't know who their social workers are," she said, "or if they're on probation, or who their holders of education rights or CASAs [court-appointed special advocates] are. If they're in special education, that's an even greater concern, since if we find out later that they have an IEP [individualized education program], we get dinged if we haven't been providing appropriate special education services right away."

Attendees agreed that this situation was common, and Nash acknowledged that the information gap needed to be filled. "I've heard about kids without records having problems getting enrolled in school—that's been a concern in the past," he said. "But even when kids are not being turned away, there still needs to be a process for the transfer of records. It's shocking that doesn't occur."

According to Susel Orellana, an attorney on Nash's staff, no process exists for the courts to be involved in handing over records to school districts; it's left to the probation officer, the social worker, and the districts to exchange records among themselves. "Some kids move so much," Orellana said, "even the sending district doesn't have all the necessary information." Nash agreed that the juvenile courts bear oversight responsibility for this issue, and that both the Department of Children and Family Services and the Probation Department are focusing on reducing placement changes that cause school transfers. "This is definitely on the agenda," he said.

Richard Martinez related the history of the close relationship the Pomona district has forged over the past few years with DCFS and Probation, including joint cross-trainings so county staff understand how school transfers operate. "Unfortunately," Martinez said, "with the economy and layoffs, the training is not ongoing and many of those we trained have made a shift. We used to know who to call. The DCFS form 1399 used to provide at a glance all the information we needed to enroll a student, but now not everyone knows what to ask for. The dialogue our district has with the DCFS Pomona office is really important. The processes we have in place usually work pretty smoothly, but if they don't, those relationships help us know who to call."

In the probation camps, Dave Mitchell said, a multidisciplinary team—including staff from Probation, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Department of Mental Health, and the school district where the student will be enrolled—convenes 30 days after a youth arrives in camp and 60 days prior to his or her release. “Kids are in camp usually four to six months, and we should have full transcripts ready to go with them when they leave,” Mitchell said. The Probation Department contracts with 55 providers and deals with 40 school districts, and although youth re-placements have been reduced dramatically over the past three or four years, probation youngsters do tend to move frequently, and the frustration can go both ways. “Kids come into group homes, particularly, without a complete picture,” he said. “How do providers know what school district the youth goes to when they leave? Were they suspended from there? Do they have an active IEP? When a probation officer is developing a case plan, we need a complete transcript for good school transitions, and we’re working with [LACOE’s] Foster Youth Services to get those. But school districts need to be willing to take the more difficult kids, too—give them a chance in a comprehensive high school, work with them in your community. The Probation Department has 90 school-based officers who work with schools and can help get information, but we have a long way to go. The transition element is crucial.”

“We’re not seeing transcripts for kids coming out of camps,” Pat Mahony stated. “We want to graduate kids, but if we meet with them and see that they’re sixteen or seventeen years old and have freshman credits, a comprehensive high school won’t help. They need an alternative education setting to catch up, and then transition back. We don’t want to delay making those kinds of decisions. Also, the education code requires that we inform our teachers if the student has done something violent. When can we ask the probation officer if there’s anything we need to know?”

One of the major projects within the Probation Department, Jeremy Nichols said, is setting up an efficient student information system. Right now, students in the LACOE system receive transcripts only at graduation or when they have earned 180 credits. Otherwise, credits are scanned in but transcripts are never updated. Some confidentiality and access issues are being resolved, but once the electronic system is purchased—the department is waiting for the Board of Supervisors to allocate the funds—the goal is for probation staff to view a student’s enrollment history and be able to backtrack to an updated transcript.

Nash promised to speak with DCFS, Probation, and others with regard to communication. “It appears that the movement of kids remains an issue in both systems,” he said, “and that there are significant gaps in the process, one of which we’ve identified today. Thank you.”

Another topic that a juvenile court committee is addressing is that of **psychotropic medications** for system youth. As Nash explained, the court has a legal obligation to approve such medications for youth under its jurisdiction prior to their being prescribed, and a process involving medical personnel is in place to issue those approvals. Once medication is begun, however, a second process must monitor its effects. “And that’s an issue that’s increasingly related to the movement issue,” Nash said. “We can really screw up when we do something that interrupts the administration of those kinds of medications. If you don’t take them regularly, all hell breaks loose, and there have been too many scenarios when that has occurred. Even when kids are moved between juvenile halls, their meds don’t catch up to them. There’s no process, for example, when a kid is awakened early to go to court, to ensure that he or she takes his meds. And then we wonder why kids are wacky in court. It’s just criminal that there are these breaks in medication.”

The courts have recently spent six months working with Probation to design a process to maintain the continuity of youths' medication when they leave juvenile hall for home. "And as we did that," Nash continued, "we realized that no regular discharge process exists at all for kids leaving the halls—for getting their property back, for maintaining their meds, for making sure their education, health, and mental health records are communicated to each stop along the way. Significant gaps exist in all those areas, and it should be a high priority for us to address those issues. This will be a major focus, and I appreciate hearing about the education piece from you."

The Request for Service process for **Mental Health Services Act prevention** funds is scheduled to begin soon, Marv Southard announced, and school districts and other agencies will be able to bid for these contracts within the next couple of months. "These will all be evidence-based practices," he said, "and almost all dedicated to the prevention of mental illness in children and youth, along with some after-care planning from DCFS and Probation."

Southard also raised the upcoming challenges involved in shifting responsibility for providing **AB 3632** mental health service from the county's Department of Mental Health to school districts. "The transition year will be a steep learning curve for everyone," he said, "and we need to be in constant contact so that changes don't disrupt the care that kids need. DMH is committed to as much communication as possible for a smooth transition."

When AB 3632 was enacted about ten years ago, Los Angeles County created a full-time delinquency mental health court designed to deal with youngsters having significant mental health issues. An informal evaluation of that court began around the first of this year, and discussions have uncovered an issue related to AB 3632. "For kids in the juvenile halls, LACOE is the education provider," Nash explained. "Some kids have a 3632 plan—they've gone through the process with IEPs, assessments, and so on, and both LACOE and their school of origin agree with the plan. However, a number of school districts have an issue with regard to the funding of the placement. Some say LACOE is responsible, and LACOE says the school district is responsible. While they're arguing, the kid is sitting in juvvie for longer than necessary. Even if LACOE agrees to fund the placement for the first six months, more fencing takes place then about whether or not the district will take over, and this puts the kid's placement in jeopardy. This is an issue that just came up, and we don't have a solution yet. Does this sound familiar to anyone?"

Cheng agreed that the situation was familiar, particularly for children in foster care when AB 3632 funding takes over. "When the kid moves out of the district and is placed," she said, "there is a tug of war about where the funding started, or where the adoptive parents are." Nash sees the dependency topic as an offshoot of the specific delinquency question, and hopes that an impetus exists to resolve that matter. "I realize that everyone's got funding issues," he said, "and it might benefit you to put off resolving these situations as long as possible. Does that create less motivation to try and fix this?"

The fact that school districts are all in different Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) puts many in a quandary, Patricia Jaffe said. "Right now, the funding we may be getting doesn't cover the residential costs for those students. Should we contract with DMH? Find other ways that might cost less?" Jaffe asked. "We want to make sure our kids' needs are addressed—special education is a huge part of every district, and the transition of AB 3632 is immense. What is the fair thing to do? How can we split the cost so it's done properly, and students get services?" If representatives from the student's school of residence were part of the IEP process, Shandelyn Williams said, the

team could be aware of additional resources and what the school of residence might provide. “The kid is stuck in the middle while we worry about who pays for the right level of care,” she said.

“Everyone’s scrambling for money right now,” Delgado said. “Having come from a K–12 system, I’m on your side of the discussion. How can we encroach on our dwindling general funds? Kids have great needs every year, and we need to tackle those needs together. We need to talk more, maybe with smaller groups of department heads or superintendents coming together at different times to brainstorm ideas. We can get creative, but the student must be the central focus.” Richard Martinez agreed with the suggestion of gathering in ad hoc committees and bringing ideas back to a larger group, noting that 10 percent of the population is generally considered in need of special education services.

SELPA directors meet regularly, and DMH meets with them, but “they’re not all of them in the same place,” Marv Southard reported. “The majority are thinking of this year as a transition year, which will probably be adequately funded on the treatment side. The funding mechanism for residential placement is less clear. The big question is what kind of model we want to have in place for subsequent years? How can relationships be put in place to make that possible? DMH is out of the 3632 business at the end of this fiscal year, and it will take us working together in the best interest of the students to make those decisions.”

“You folks have zillions of issues,” Nash told school district representatives,” and you still do a good job. My concern is that kids affiliated with the courts need to be a priority. They have no one to advocate for them, and without help, they’ll ultimately cost society far more than they’re costing now. Prioritizing is hard, but we try to be the squeaky wheel for kids to get them the services they need.”

“I know LACOE invited all the county’s superintendents to today’s meeting,” Velasquez said, “and I want to thank my colleagues who are here. Until we all set an example that this is important, nothing will get done. It has to come from the top—from superintendents saying to their organizations: *We will receive and take care of all our kids*. The emphasis on high test scores has made us not want to deal with them, but we have to work together. I talk to Probation all the time, telling them, ‘Let me know when kids are coming out of camp—we’ll transition.’ I went to Eastlake [Juvenile Hall] with my board and some faculty members. I’ve talked to LACOE and told them I’ll pick a kid up at home, if necessary. That’s what we need to do. I’m ashamed that the others aren’t here today. We need to make this a priority for our kids. Everyone has funding problems, but we need to marshal our resources and quit duplicating services. These kids are important.”

Jackie Contreras described a similar dynamic within DCFS. “Education is part of well-being, and we’re gaining a real appreciation for how safety, permanency, and well-being are woven together,” she said. “Maryam Fatemi has done incredible work in moving the organization to being more relationship-based. It’s challenging for two or more large bureaucracies to do, and we’re accomplishing it community by community. Pomona is a wonderful model of what we can do to work together effectively. DCFS has the same challenges we’ve heard about today,” Contreras went on. “Workers say school districts won’t give them information, the IEPs aren’t from the originating school, the county has to pay for the placement. But if we work together to improve outcomes for all kids, we will have the commitment to figuring out those pieces.”

Los Angeles County has made *self-sufficiency* its fourth official child outcome, Dave Mitchell said, “and that starts at birth, with kids bonding with their parents, and with child care issues. It ends

when they're 25 and we can see how they're doing as adults. Have they graduated from high school? Do they have stable housing? Are they employed, or in college? Do they have permanent connections with others? The interwoven element is education. We need to have a 'child first' policy, making decisions and policy based on the best interest of the child, not our agencies. The Chief Executive Office and the ECC are spearheading the self-sufficiency initiative, and we'd love to invite school districts to help us move forward on that, defining what self-sufficiency looks like."

In response to a question about **community day school closures** and many students' lack of transportation to travel very far from their local districts, Delgado said that he needed to research the history of the issue and discuss it with his cabinet to address the issue in sufficient depth.

### **Update ECC Strategic Plan 2011–2014: Trish Ploehn**

Trish Ploehn reviewed the handout summarizing the five priority areas in ECC's strategic plan update for 2011–2014, noting that the entire updated plan was available from the ECC office.

- **Early childhood education:** Doing a better job of getting young DCFS children and the children of DCFS and probation youth into high-quality early childhood education programs
- **Youth education and development:** Working more efficiently with school districts on transitions, communication, sharing information, and not losing student credits and support when placement moves occur (a handout on credit recovery was also distributed); also supporting efforts in improving educational outcomes for youth in juvenile camps and halls
- **School/department coordination and support:** Expanding the Gloria Molina Foster Youth Education Program to be the centerpiece of this effort
- **Data- and information-sharing:** Developing an automated system to share records electronically, now that legal issues around confidentiality are being resolved
- **System accountability:** Supporting the courts, which are the glue that holds everything together, and assisting them in holding the social worker, the probation officer, the schools, the caregivers, the parents, and the child accountable for good educational outcomes

Richard Martinez went over the history of the Gloria Molina Foster Youth Education Program, which started with a small grant from the Casey Foundation six years ago and has now expanded into six school districts. Using a one-on-one approach, the program attempts to provide seamless transitions between schools or foster homes, recover credits, and keep students on track for graduation. Results have been dramatic and a Federal grant is in the works to expand the program. "It forced us to talk to people we wouldn't normally talk to," Martinez said, "and now those people are friends that I can call on weekends. But that doesn't take a grant—go have lunch or breakfast with someone and see how you can help each other out. Our thanks go to Casey and to Supervisor Molina, who saw what this could mean for kids. We appreciate their help."

### **Closing**

Trish Ploehn encouraged everyone to invite other superintendents to attend future dialogues, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:43 a.m.