

August 14, 2006

To: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich  
Supervisor Gloria Molina  
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke  
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky  
Supervisor Don Knabe

From: Sharon G. Watson  
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**PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN “*EXPECTING MORE; A BLUEPRINT FOR RAISING THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF FOSTER AND PROBATION YOUTH*”**

At its meeting on February 14, 2006, your Board approved “*Expecting More: A Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster and Probation Youth*,” developed by the Education Coordinating Council (ECC), and instructed the ECC to report its progress in implementing the recommendations in that document to your Board every six months. Your Board also requested that, in collaboration with the Superintendent of the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), the ECC convene a meeting of school district superintendents in the County in order to provide a briefing on the Blueprint and create strategies for implementing the recommendations pertinent to the school districts.

Further, at its meeting on June 13, 2006, on motion of Supervisors Michael D. Antonovich and Zev Yaroslavsky, the ECC was asked to report back to your Board on August 15, 2006 on the development of a public/private partnership to create an electronic-based information system for individual education records of youth under the supervision of the Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation (Recommendation #8 in the Blueprint). The CAO, working with the ECC, is taking the lead on reporting back on this motion, in conjunction with two earlier motions regarding a health passport for foster youth, but some additional information is provided in this report.

**Blueprint Recommendations**

As you will see, the ECC and its members have made significant progress in implementing the recommendations in “Expecting More.” Some of the key actions taken include:

ECC:

- Launched an ECC web site: [www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org](http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org) to serve as a central communication vehicle to provide key information and help agencies coordinate efforts.
- Conducted a data match between the Los Angeles County Office of Education and the Probation Department that provided demographic and academic achievement data on probation youth in juvenile hall schools, camp schools, community day schools, as well as those enrolled in the Cal Safe program for pregnant teens.
- Conducted a data match between the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and those children and youth under the supervision of DCFS and Probation that provided demographic and academic achievement information on these students, both those being served In Home and those Out of Home, in infant/early education programs, elementary, middle and high schools. These almost 11,000 DCFS and Probation youth were compared to LAUSD students overall in such areas as school type, ethnicity, gender, language classification, grade level, eligibility for special education and gifted programs, English proficiency, Mathematics proficiency, and suspension, expulsion and dropout rates.
- Requested that LAUSD perform a follow-up analysis to create a profile of the 203 foster and 89 probation youth identified as gifted and talented. At the ECC's July meeting, following the presentation of this data, an offer was made to place these gifted youth in top Los Angeles area private schools with full scholarships. The ECC is now working to identify these youth and seek the necessary departmental referrals to this community foundation.
- Helped craft and/or support key legislation offering expanded educational opportunities for foster and probation youth, including AB 2489, SB 1777 and the additional school counselors for California schools included in the approved state budget. Also helped shape LAUSD's Access for All Resolution that provides additional staff and services for foster and homeless youth.
- Obtained the signature of the Superintendent of LACOE—and are securing those of the other school superintendents who serve on the ECC—on a letter, drafted by the Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA) and the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles (CLC), outlining AB 490 regulations. Caregivers will be able to use this letter to expedite enrollment of their foster youth in these seven school districts.
- Brokered an agreement with the Beyond The Bell Branch of LAUSD that will allow foster youth who are eligible for their tutoring services, but who are not currently enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program (a requirement for services), to sign up for their programs this coming school year.

- Added two consultants to the ECC team to serve as point people for ensuring the implementation of the recommended actions in the child and youth sections of the Blueprint. Terry Ogawa, former executive director of CCYF, will coordinate efforts in the early childhood education area, and Michelle Koenig, former director of St. Anne's Transitional Housing Program for foster and probation youth, will coordinate efforts around youth development.

#### City of Los Angeles:

- Conducted a first-ever survey of city departments to determine whether they give priority to foster and probation youth in their programs, how many each department serves, which programs are targeted to this population, what caregiver outreach departments conduct, what barriers exist to serving these youth, what additional outreach and services could be provided with additional capacity, and what resources would be needed to expand.
- Adopted a resolution that, with the concurrence of the Mayor, the City of Los Angeles include in its State Legislative Program SUPPORT for AB 2489 (Leno), SB 1576 (Murray), AB 2709 (Maze), and AB 2284 (Jones) to enhance educational, housing, employment, and health opportunities for foster youth.
- With the help of the CLC, recognized – for the first time – Foster Care Awareness Month with a ceremony at a special city council meeting in Van Nuys. Foster Care Heroes were honored and art produced by foster youth was displayed. The city also sponsored a month-long art exhibit of their work at City Hall and held a press conference at which students read their poetry.

#### Juvenile Court:

- Issued a Blanket Order on June 22, 2006, that became effective July 15, 2006, that instructs schools in Los Angeles County to provide basic educational information to DCFS and Probation caseworkers, children's attorneys, and Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). This educational information includes: attendance records, report cards, special education and individualized education plan (IEP) records, test scores, discipline records, behavior plans, progress reports, immunization records, and any other education or pupil records maintained by a school. This order further stipulates that these records shall be released without the requirement of parental consent.

At its July meeting, the ECC agreed to convene those entities included in the Blanket Order, as well as County Counsel, to hammer out an MOU that would create a process for the sharing of these records. LAUSD has offered to host this meeting.

- Held two trainings on the Blueprint for dependency court judicial officers and attorneys, and has planned similar trainings for the delinquency court.

- The successful 317(e) protocol that provides educational advocates for the dependency court is now being revised for the delinquency court.

DCFS:

- Assembling age-appropriate standards for early childhood, school-aged children, high school, special education students, as well youth transitioning to adulthood, for parents, caregivers, and caseworkers. These standards should help clarify the department's academic and enrichment expectations and help identify for CSWs what must be documented in educational records and addressed at case conferences.
- Formed a department team to ensure that case plans include education plans and that team decision-making conferences include educational efforts and issues. Also, to increase accountability, developing management reports that highlight the educational information recorded in CWS/CMS.
- Increasing training to caregivers and CSWs on the importance of educational outcomes for foster youth and raising academic expectations.
- In collaboration with the Los Angeles County Office of Child Care, DCFS is obtaining information from early childhood education providers of available program openings for three and four-year-old children and then notifying its staff of enrollment availability in their communities. This information is also being posted on the department's internal and external websites.
- Partnering with Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) on a pilot program at its Pomona office to increase the awareness and training of preschool providers regarding the needs of children and families under the department's supervision. DCFS is also providing training to that office's CSWs regarding the importance of early childhood education and how to access resources.
- A letter from DCFS' Acting Director Joan Smith is being sent this month to all parents and caregivers of three and four-year-old children under their care to encourage enrollment of their children in early childhood education/preschool programs. Information on how to access these programs and a checklist of kindergarten readiness skills will be included in the mailing.
- Planning is underway to provide increased early intervention services by utilizing the newly-created medical hubs to conduct initial developmental screenings of foster children under the age of three, followed by referrals to a Regional Center when necessary.
- Promoting and facilitating enrollment countywide in free tutoring opportunities and California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) preparatory programs through presentations at: general staff meetings, in-service trainings for caregivers,

kinship community network meetings and support groups, community forums, as well as postings on LA Kids and e-mail notifications to relevant stakeholders.

- Ensuring that social workers, through its information bureau, are prompted to enter the name of the child's school in CWS/CMS so that tutoring, preparatory courses, and other programs can be accessed.
- Collaborated with LAUSD, Children Uniting Nations, and California State University at Northridge to replicate the academic mentoring program established last year at Foshay Middle School to Van Nuys High School.
- Making contractual progress on its plan to secure an educational consultant for each regional office by January 1, 2007. These consultants will further assist the department implement the Blueprint recommendations, navigate school systems and address challenging educational issues faced by its youth.

Probation:

- Referring pregnant and parenting female probationers in need of child care to DCFS's Child Care Assistance program. New Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program participants are now being provided information on State Preschool, Head Start and LAUP early childhood education programs.
- Beginning next month, the Residential Treatment Services Bureau and LACOE will conduct a series of "transition open house" meetings with parents/guardians at camp facilities to provide information on transitioning their children to the appropriate educational setting once they are released from Camp. Camp aftercare staff will facilitate parent/guardian connections with the appropriate school setting, including making initial telephonic contact with the identified school site, expediting enrollment, and easing the youth's transition. Structured monitoring of parents of high-risk/high-need youth released from Camp will assist them with scheduling study-times, sleep-times, and wake-up times to help their children attend school.
- Expanded the Library Card Initiative passed by your Board in December, giving library cards not only to all youth in juvenile halls and camps, but to all youth on probation or at risk of becoming so. This enables them to access free Internet-based tutoring for grades 4 through 12.
- Providing a series of after-school enrichment opportunities that includes: a year-round Youth Employment Program for probation and at-risk youth at various Los Angeles City park sites through the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) program; faith-based mentoring and life skills coaching for males graduating from Camp through the West Angeles Church of God Ten Point Initiative; cognitive-based anger management and effective decision-making programs at two JJCPA Cluster 2 sites in South Los Angeles; and an annual

JJCPA Annual Summer Basketball Camp that includes sessions on health, personal empowerment and scholastic achievement.

- Holding quarterly parent empowerment meetings at several high risk JJCPA School-Based Supervision Program sites that engage, empower and encourage parents/guardians to become more involved in the academic process, including homework, attendance and academic monitoring. Parents/guardians are introduced to evidence-based strategies and interventions that underscore the importance of setting clear, positive standards that provide youth with opportunities to contribute to their families and communities and recognizing them for these contributions. In addition, school officials present participants with information regarding resources and options, and community-based organizations identify available programs that give them an opportunity to spend meaningful time with their children.
- Building school collaborations to ensure safe passages to and from high-risk school sites. Working with the sheriff's department, the county's Human Relations Commission, and several school superintendents and principals to develop contingency plans and establish a team of youth advocates who can intervene in potentially dangerous situations. In addition, Gang Intervention community-based organizations will work to duplicate these safe passage efforts at Continuation and Community Day School settings. Parents and guardians will be engaged to assist with racial tensions and random acts of violence in the areas around these school campuses.
- Exploring the idea of co-locating LACOE, LAUSD and Probation staff (and possibly DCFS) at a dedicated site.
- JJCPA school-based probation officers and multi-systemic and family therapy interventionists are moving toward mid-year and year-end case planning meetings that review short term and long term educational goals with parents/guardians and youth. Additionally, these personnel will help train DPOs on advocacy and how to provide supportive services to parents/guardians.

Department of Mental Health:

- Implementing its Prenatal to Five (P25) Program, established to promote the delivery of effective family-centered and culturally-responsive mental health services and supports for young children and their families, in the County's SPAs. SPA 4's Project ABC (About Building Connections for Young Children & Families), for example, in addition to providing core mental health services, is identifying and coordinating a broad array of community-based services. These include primary care, nutrition, early developmental education and child care services, family support, family mental health, and substance abuse treatment services. Approximately 500 young children and families will be enrolled during the six-year program.

- Trainings have been held countywide and in various SPAs on such topics as: Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Development Disorders of Infant and Early Childhood; Infant Mental Health and Child Welfare Issues: Four Common Problems and their Solutions within the Child Welfare System; Importance of Early Attachment: Relationships and Resilience in the Development of the Brain; Ages and Stages Questionnaire & PEDS Child Development Screening Training; Parent-Child Interaction Therapy and Mental Health, Developmental, Social/Emotional Well-Being, and Prevention and Early Intervention for 0-5 year olds in the Child Welfare System.
- Staff participated in CLC's Foster Youth Mental Health Summit and serve on First 5 LA's Prenatal to Three Focus Policy Roundtable and on CLC's Pregnant and Parenting Teens Workgroup.
- School-based mental health services coordinators in each SPA conducted "case study" reviews for selected mental health providers to identify: 1) clients who are foster or probation youth, 2) their presenting problems/issues, 3) mental health interventions and student/family community support services provided, and 4) specific child/youth and family/caregiver outcomes that contributed to school success. In addition to significant improvements in their socio-emotional problems, the interventions provided to these youth contributed to higher levels of academic achievement, special awards, increased attendance, more successful peer interaction, better socialization skills, greater participation in student government, school-sponsored athletics and social activities, and higher numbers in accelerated learning programs, graduating from high school, and attending college.
- Working to make educational achievement one of the mandatory recorded outcomes for Mental Health Services Act contracts.

LACOE:

- Sponsored AB 1777, a three-county pilot program for 2000 youth who have moved from foster care to the delinquency system that will provide a transition counselor for six months after their release from court schools into permanent placement, thus assuring their connection to a significant adult who will support their education.
- Continuing to work on expediting the transfer of school records for foster and probation youth.
- Asking school districts to give foster and probation youth priority for enrichment programs such as the Homework Hotline, Title I Training and other academic activities.

- In partnership with LAUSD, will convene the school district Education Liaisons next month to update them on recent legislation affecting foster and probation youth, and assist them with the challenges they are facing serving these youth.

ACHSA:

- Compiled a list of free and low-cost tutoring resources for its 80+ member agencies to use for the children and youth they serve.
- Sponsored a training on educational advocacy skills for its member agency staff.
- Worked with DCFS to make certain that caregivers and community-based agency staff are included in its team decision-making meetings.
- Supported the inclusion of a performance measure in group home and FFA contracts that tracks the number of children and youth agencies are able to enroll in school.

Community Agencies:

- St. Anne's is opening its New Village Charter School specifically for young women in the foster care and probation systems. The school will open September 6, 2006 with 80 ninth- and tenth-graders. Eleventh and twelfth grades will be added in subsequent years, with room for more than 200 students in all.
- Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is reaching out to foster and probation youth to involve them in their outpatient services programs, as well as in the inpatient services they offer to transition-aged youth. They are particularly interested in enrolling DCFS children, who are in the process of reunification or adoption, in a program they have for young children experiencing attachment issues. This program could be very helpful in minimizing placement failures.
- The Fulfillment Fund has a college access program for disadvantaged youth that would welcome foster and probation youth. Small learning communities at Crenshaw, Locke, and Manual Arts High Schools have high populations of foster youth, and the Fulfillment Fund would like to partner with the ECC as it explores how best to serve them.
- Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic provides audio textbooks for the K-12 curriculum and, for the past decade, has also been serving the learning-disabled population. As many foster and probation youth would benefit from its programs, RFB&D would like to work with ECC members to expand its services to additional school districts beyond the 22 they are currently serving.

## **Electronic Education Record (Blueprint Recommendation #8)**

As directed by your Board on June 13, 2006, the ECC established a public-private partnership to oversee the development of an electronic education record for foster and probation youth. At its July 27, 2006 meeting, the ECC—itsself a public-private partnership of major school districts, county departments, the juvenile court, city and county children’s commissions, First 5 LA, advocacy organizations, youth and their caregivers—agreed to serve as the oversight body for the development of an education passport. It also created a Resource Partnership to assist in its design. That Partnership includes many of the same groups that sit on the ECC, along with the CAO, Health Services, County Counsel, the CIO, Children’s Action Network (CAN), Violence Prevention Program (VIP) and others. Resource Partnership members will be used to resolve confidentiality barriers, finalize the education data elements, determine the user groups and what information each needs to access and other design issues.

The ECC endorsed several strategies for moving forward:

- Build on past and existing efforts, particularly the recent work by CAN and VIP to make foster youth health and mental health information available electronically to service providers at DCFS’s LAC+USC Hub.
- Begin identifying data elements from the CAO Service Integration Branch’s HELIX project, recent data matches between school districts and county departments, and other such sources that can be legally shared.
- Rather than starting a parallel system, pilot the addition of educational information at the LAC+USC medical Hub, beginning with one or more high schools and their feeder middle schools in that catchment area.

In addition, the ECC is meeting with the vendor that designed the electronic health/mental health record system for VIP and that is also being looked at by CAN for their project, to see if education information could be added to that system server and what the estimated costs would be.

## **Meeting with School Superintendents**

On April 19, 2006, the ECC and LACOE convened a meeting between the county departments represented on the ECC and the superintendents of school districts across the County. Juvenile Court Presiding Judge Michael Nash, DCFS Director David Sanders, Probation Department representative Jitahadi Imara and DMH representative William Arroyo represented the County and, although the meeting date coincided with spring break for about one-third of school districts, representative of 22 school districts participated. This was the first meeting of its kind to be held in the County. Demographic and academic performance information on foster and probation youth was presented, along with the Blueprint recommendations, and each county department summarized the key actions they were taking to implement the Blueprint. A dialogue

with the superintendents identified some of the barriers they are facing with respect to educating these youth and generated some ideas for moving forward. Several agreements were reached, including ways to create a positive school climate for these youth, the use of school facilities for after-school programs and other supervised activities run jointly with other agencies, the need for cross-district agreement on the minimum documentation required for enrollment and for districts to give the records of foster and probation youth priority handling. The Antelope Valley Union High School District and Pomona Unified School District invited DCFS to co-locate staff on their school campuses.

It was also agreed that this type of meeting was very valuable and that they should be held on a semi-annual basis. The next one is scheduled for October 13, 2006, a time when most schools are in session.

In summary, the ECC members are working hard, both individually and jointly, to make the Blueprint a reality, as are a host of community agencies. The ECC looks forward to reporting further progress in its next report. If you should have any questions or require further information, your staff may contact the ECC at (213) 974-4530.

cc: Chief Administrative Officer  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Acting Director, Children and Family Services  
Chief Probation Officer  
Director, Mental Health  
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