MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Violet Varona-Lukens, Executive Officer
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
Los Angeles, California 90012

Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Chief Probation Officer
Director of Children and Family Services
Director of Mental Health
Superintendent of Schools

At its meeting held February 14, 2006, the Board took the following action:

S-1

Jose Huizar, Chair of the Education Coordinating Council (ECC) and Councilmember for the City of Los Angeles, Michael Nash, Vice Chair of the ECC and Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles Superior Court, Juvenile Division, Berisha Black, Vice Chair of the ECC and Emancipation Ombudsman and former foster youth, and Sharon G. Watson, Ph.D., Lead Consultant for the ECC, presented the attached report entitled, "Expecting More: A Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster Youth and Probation Youth."

After discussion, the following statement was entered into the record for Supervisors Antonovich and Yaroslavsky:

> "On November 3, 2004, the Board authorized the creation of the Education Coordinating Council (ECC) to improve educational outcomes for youth in the foster care and probation systems. They charged the Council with developing a blueprint for raising their educational attainment. Since then, the ECC has built awareness of the achievement gap for these youth within the communities of Los Angeles County and strategic partnerships for addressing it, took a series of actions that helped connect youth to available programs and services and engaged hundreds of individuals and organizations in developing the 'Expecting More: A Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster and Probation Youth' (Blueprint).

(Continued on Page 2)

S-1 (Continued)

"This Blueprint identifies 7 basic agreements that need to be adopted by agencies, organizations, and constituent groups responsible for the educational achievement of foster and probation youth. It also identifies 12 program and accountability recommendations to improve the educational success of these youth. The Blueprint's basic tenet is that the responsibility for changing the unacceptably low educational performance of the children and youth under Los Angeles County's supervision is shared, and the Blueprint outlines the role and responsibilities of key individuals, groups and agencies for making a positive difference."

Therefore, Supervisors Antonovich and Yaroslavsky made a recommendation that the Board take the following actions:

1. Adopt the Education Coordinating Council's (ECC) Blueprint, including its 7 basic agreements for those responsible for the educational success of foster and probation youth, and the 12 program and accountability recommendations for improving the educational achievement of these youth;

2. Direct the ECC, in collaboration with the Superintendent of Schools, to convene a meeting of all school district Superintendents in the County in order to provide a briefing of the Blueprint and create strategies for implementing the recommendations pertinent to the school districts; and

3. Direct the ECC to report back to the Board every six months on the progress made in implementing the recommendations identified in the Blueprint.

Supervisor Knabe made a suggestion that Supervisors Antonovich and Yaroslavsky's aforementioned recommendation be amended to direct the Director of Children and Family Services and Chief Probation Officer to report to the Board on how they can respond to Recommendation No. 2, page 11, of the attached report, as it relates to caregivers. Supervisors Antonovich and Yaroslavsky accepted Supervisor Knabe's amendment.

After further discussion, Supervisor Molina made the following statement:

"I would like to make a proposal in order to advance the goals of the Education Coordinating Council's 'Expecting More: A Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster Youth and Probation Youth.'"

(Continued on Page 3)

S-1 (Continued)

Therefore, Supervisor Molina made a suggestion to further amend Supervisors Antonovich and Yaroslavsky's recommendation to direct the following departments take the actions as detailed below and report back to the Board by April 4, 2006:

1. Direct the Director of Children and Family Services, Chief Probation Officer, Director of Mental Health, and the Superintendent of Schools, to report with a specific plan to implement the ECC Blueprint;

2. Direct the Director of Children and Family Services to report on whether they have begun requesting individual orders in each child's Juvenile Dependency case enabling the Department of Children and Family Services to obtain educational information from the school districts, and if not, why not;

3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer, County Counsel, Director of Children and Family Services and Chief Probation Officer to draft a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors on a proposed legislative amendment to improve social workers' access to educational information under the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act; and

4. Direct the Director of Children and Family Services and Chief Probation Officer to report back to the Board of Supervisors with a proposal to make the ECC's proposed Educational Case Plan process meaningful, detailing how the departments will ensure that each child's plan is implemented.

Supervisors Antonovich and Yaroslavsky accepted Supervisor Molina's amendment.

On motion of Supervisor Antonovich, seconded by Supervisor Yaroslavsky, unanimously carried, the Board took the following actions:

1. Adopted the Education Coordinating Council's (ECC) Blueprint, including its 7 basic agreements for those responsible for the educational success of foster and probation youth, and the 12 program and accountability recommendations for improving the educational achievement of these youth;

(Continued on Page 4)

2. Directed the ECC, in collaboration with the Superintendent of Schools, to convene a meeting of all school district Superintendents in the County in order to provide a briefing of the Blueprint and create strategies for implementing the recommendations pertinent to the school districts;

3. Directed the ECC to report back to the Board every six months on the progress made in implementing the recommendations identified in the Blueprint;

4. Directed the Director of Children and Family Services and Chief Probation Officer to report to the Board on how they can respond to Recommendation No. 2, page 11, of the attached report, as it relates to caregivers; and

5. Directed the following departments take the actions as detailed below and report back to the Board by April 4, 2006:

   - Directed the Director of Children and Family Services, Chief Probation Officer, Director of Mental Health, and the Superintendent of Schools, to report with a specific plan to implement the ECC Blueprint;

   - Directed the Director of Children and Family Services to report on whether they have begun requesting individual orders in each child's Juvenile Dependency case enabling the Department of Children and Family Services to obtain educational information from the school districts, and if not, why not;

   - Directed the Chief Administrative Officer, County Counsel, Director of Children and Family Services and Chief Probation Officer to draft a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors on a proposed legislative amendment to improve social workers' access to educational information under the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act; and

(Continued on Page 5)

S-1 (Continued)

- Directed the Director of Children and Family Services and Chief Probation Officer to report back to the Board of Supervisors with a proposal to make the ECC's proposed Educational Case Plan process meaningful, detailing how the departments will ensure that each child's plan is implemented.

08021406_S-1

Attachment

Copies distributed:
Each Supervisor

Letter sent to:
Lead Consultant, Education Coordinating Council

Expecting More

A Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster and Probation Youth

January 2006

Los Angeles County
Education Coordinating Council
500 West Temple Street, Room 745
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 974-4530
http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org

Table of Contents

Table of Contents i

The Challenge 1

What We Know 3

What We Want 4

Our Approach 5

What Youth Are Saying 7

Seven Basic Agreements 8

Some Short-Term Practical Solutions 9
- Early Childhood Education 9
- Youth Development 11
- Data and Information-Sharing 15
- School-based Support 17

What It Will Take To Do Better 19
- Roles and Responsibilities 19
  - Youth 19
  - Parents 20
  - Caregivers 21
  - Holders of education rights 22
  - Children's Social Workers and Deputy Probation Officers 22
  - School teachers/administrators/personnel 23
  - Legal advocates/attorneys 24
  - County departments 25
  - School districts 25
  - Judiciary 26
- Accountability 27
- The ECC's Role 28

Next Steps 29

Conclusion 30

Acknowledgements 31

Bibliography 35

References 36

The Challenge

A good education is vital to adult success. Few Los Angeles County residents would argue with that, and most would agree that parents, schools, government agencies, and communities are jointly responsible for making sure that every child gets one. In fact, the area of education "was perhaps the most universal and frequently cited issue" by the 2,115 participants in the 64 community forums convened by the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council in 2005.

For children and youth in the care of the county's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation Department*, a solid education is even more important. Many of these youth don't have families to support them, emotionally or financially, or anyone else to fall back on. For them, a solid education provides a unique opportunity for accomplishment and may be their only ticket to the world of work and self-sufficiency.

Although foster and probation youth are as able as other youth, those responsible for their care and development have not seen to it that they are as successful academically. Youth who have been removed from their families often feel they've been 'stranded in the system' and that no one is paying attention to what's happening to them.

"We know when people don't believe in us, and, sooner or later, we start believing it, too."

—Jennifer Rodriguez, J.D., Legislative and Policy Coordinator, California Youth Connection, and former foster youth

Part of the problem is that, by and large, we don't expect them to succeed. Foster parents and professionals working with these youth seldom urge them to make college a goal or help them work toward it[1].

Of all youth, these are perhaps most at risk for and most damaged by educational failure. Clearly, the adults and systems responsible for them could do a *much* better job of stepping up to the plate on their behalf, working together more effectively to give them the support and opportunities they need (and want), and encouraging them to strive. Los Angeles has an urgent need for a coordinated focus on their readiness for school and their strong academic performance throughout their school years. We must raise the bar with respect to their aspirations and put them in a position to attain them.

"I just got all A's. Where are those people who said I wasn't smart?"

—Pierre, foster youth

Most of these youth are from low-income families and communities of color, have parents and/or caretakers with limited educations, and attend the kinds of low-performing public schools that Kozol (2005) has accused of providing "apartheid education."[2] In these ways, they are similar to

* The children and youth who are the subject of this Blueprint are those under the supervision of Los Angeles County's DCFS and Probation Department. They are referred to in several ways throughout this report—as dependent and delinquent youth, as foster and probation youth, and as system youth. These terms are used interchangeably, even though some differences exist. These children and youth range in age from newborn to 21 years.

other at-risk youth. This reality makes the task of the Education Coordinating Council even more challenging, but it also makes its opportunities even more important. If we can find ways to help foster and probation youth succeed educationally, many of the lessons learned can be used to help tens of thousands of other youth in schools and communities throughout Los Angeles County.

What We Know

Most children and youth in the child welfare and probation systems fall far behind other youth academically.

- Nationally, about one-third to one-half of foster and probation youth perform below grade level.[3, 4, 5]
- Nationally, nearly half of foster youth fail to complete high school, and fewer than 5 percent ever earn a bachelor's degree.[6, 7, 8]
- Almost a third of foster and probation youth in Los Angeles County receive special education services.[9, 10, 11]
- The average reading level of Los Angeles County probation youth in grades nine through twelve is below grade five.[12]

"More students have retention problems due to social and emotional well-being issues than they do from academic problems."

—Sid Gardner, President, Children and Family Futures

Part of this achievement gap is a result of the abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, poverty, inadequate early care, and poor preparation for school that many of these youth experience before entering the dependency or delinquency systems. Another part results from isolation, the trauma of being separated from their families, frequent placement changes, and, often, stigma and lowered expectations. The rest can largely be explained by administrative problems these youth encounter once in the system—disruptive delays in transfers between schools, lost or misplaced records, absences for service-related needs, a lack of standard procedures across school districts for awarding credits, and difficulties enrolling in the classes required for graduation in overburdened school systems.

Once they leave the dependency or delinquency systems at about age 18, studies have shown that half of these youth are unemployed, one-third are dependent on public assistance, a quarter are incarcerated, and over a fifth are homeless.[13] These are unacceptable outcomes!

Given the interactive and complex nature of the problems involved, as well as the size and diversity of Los Angeles County, no single group, sector, or organization alone can accomplish the ambitious task of improving this situation. Only by working together can we create a better future for the approximately 60,000 children and youth in Los Angeles County now in the care of the departments of Children and Family Services and Probation, and for the thousands of children who may need that help and care in years to come.

What We Want

Foster and probation youth—and their children—should be at least as successful educationally as other youth. This means, for example, that:

- Foster youth, the children of foster and probation youth, and those at risk of entering the child welfare system are adequately prepared for kindergarten, elementary school, and middle school, and that both foster and probation youth are adequately prepared for high school, higher education, and employment
- Significantly more foster and probation youth perform academically at grade level
- A majority of foster and probation youth graduate from high school
- A much larger percentage of these youth attend four-year colleges, earn bachelor's degrees, and are prepared for graduate programs in the disciplines of their choice
- After completing educational or career-preparation programs, most foster and probation youth obtain and maintain employment that provides them with a living wage and possibilities for career growth

Clearly, to achieve these results, foster and probation youth and their children must be given the same educational opportunities as other students. However, to help close the current dramatic achievement gap, many will need extra help and attention.

> **"It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to achieve in life, if he is denied the opportunity of an education."**
>
> ***—Brown v. Board of Education (1954)***

Our Approach

Acknowledging the significant educational achievement gap for foster and probation youth, two education summits were convened in 2003 and 2004 by the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, county departments, schools, and advocacy organizations. The primary recommendation of these summits was the establishment of a countywide collaborative body that would provide oversight and accountability for the education of system youth. In November 2004, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors authorized the creation of the Education Coordinating Council (ECC) and asked the ECC, during its first year, to develop a Blueprint for raising the educational achievement of foster and probation youth.

For the first time, the major stakeholders responsible for the educational performance of foster and probation youth come together in the ECC. Its 23 members include the leadership of school districts with significant numbers of foster and probation youth, county departments, the juvenile court, city and county children's commissions, advocacy and planning groups, community agencies, and youth and their caregivers[†].

The ECC's basic assumption is that **the responsibility for changing the unacceptably low educational performance of the children and youth under Los Angeles County's supervision is *shared*.** It lies with a host of public and private agencies, organizations, communities, family members, and the youth themselves, who must all work together strategically—in new ways and with great energy—to accelerate, expand, and unify efforts to achieve better results. No single group, sector, or organization can accomplish these goals alone. Only by joining forces can we create the positive future these youth deserve.

Luckily, Los Angeles County has a great deal to build on—a rich history of key accomplishments, effective partnerships, and highly successful program models run by schools, community-based groups, and public and private agencies that are providing some solutions. Further, the current goals of county departments and school districts for these children and youth provide a starting place for alignment—for example, the county's goal of permanency for all system youth, and district goals that all students complete the A-G courses required for admission to California universities.

The job of the ECC, then, is to coordinate efforts across organizations and jurisdictions, encouraging networks of people to work together to expand best practices and fill the gaps in communities where little help or support for families is available, so that none of our children are left behind.

The Education Coordinating Council considers this Blueprint to be a working document—a way to begin. As such, it lays out the basic agreements needed among the agencies, organizations, and constituent groups responsible for the educational achievement of foster and probation

[†] Throughout this document, the term 'caregivers' is used inclusively to refer to biological and adoptive parents, legal guardians, relative caregivers, non-relative extended family member caregivers, foster parents, resource families, and foster family agency and group home staff and administrators.

youth. It also recommends some practical, short-term solutions that require concerted action by ECC members and their partners, plus some specific actions to accomplish them.

This Blueprint is designed for all Los Angeles County foster and probation youth, as a group. It does not include specific recommendations for subgroups of these youth who have unique, additional needs, such as gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer/questioning youth, children of incarcerated parents, youth in special education, youth with mental health and/or alcohol or drug issues, crossover youth (between the dependency and delinquency systems), homeless youth, children with disabilities, teen parents, immigrant and/or undocumented youth, etc. Subsequent efforts must address the specific needs of these populations and will require the involvement of additional systems and organizations in the design of proposed solutions. This document is broadly construed, with the understanding that the needs of each child and youth in the system must be met through individualized case and education plans.

At its first meeting in January 2005, the ECC decided that the Blueprint would focus on four priority areas—two highlighting children and youth, and two addressing major implementation strategies:

- Early childhood education
- Youth development
- Data and information-sharing
- School-based support (education liaisons)

What Youth Are Saying

Because the voices of system youth were the most important ones for developing this Blueprint, twelve focus groups involving 145 current and former foster and probation youth were held during the fall of 2005, so their ideas on how to best raise educational achievement could be heard. The full report of those meetings, *Through Their Eyes: Results of Youth and Adult Caregiver Focus Groups on the Education of Youth in the Foster Care and Probation Systems*, is available on the ECC website, http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org.

What youth say they want most of all is someone who cares about them, who supports and encourages them, and who pushes them to do better. The ideal way to achieve this is through county departments' accomplishing their permanency goal of connecting every child and youth to a family through reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship, ensuring that they leave the system with strong and enduring ties to one or more nurturing adults. Family members, court-appointed special advocates (CASAs), mentors, tutors, coaches, school counselors, and program staff can all help youth by believing in them and attending to their educational needs.

"We know when we're being written off."
—James, probation youth

Youth also want:

- Teachers who push them to learn but provide assistance when necessary
- Adults who keep their word and understand what youth are experiencing
- Help with 'the basics' (tutoring and assistance with schoolwork, exams, and applications for financial support)
- School counselors who understand the dependency and probation systems and have a desire to help youth
- Better prepared foster parents

"College is my way out."
—Precious, foster youth

- To remain in one school—if it is a good school
- Accessible and timely paperwork for class enrollment and school transfers
- More information about available resources and programs, preferably from posters in public places, flyers, bulletin boards, other students, or teachers
- Transportation to and from school and programs

Seven Basic Agreements

Those responsible for the educational attainment of foster and probation youth must agree to at least seven things if we are to achieve the results we want.

1. Everyone must understand the ***central importance of education*** for the current well-being and future prospects of children and youth, expressing that value clearly and consistently in every aspect of their work.

"If we can master the system, we can master college."

—Berisha Black, Los Angeles County Emancipation Ombudsman and former foster youth

2. Everyone needs to adopt and maintain ***high expectations for the children and youth*** involved in these systems, believing in their ability to succeed educationally and demanding improvements in school attendance and achievement.

3. A ***strong investment in prevention***, assuring that children are enrolled in high-quality early care and education programs, is fundamental. Current research demonstrating the power of high-quality child care, preschool, family support, and family literacy programs in preventing maltreatment—and the long-term benefits of such services—makes it vital for us to assure that vulnerable children have priority access to such programs.

4. Everyone must ***pay attention to and address early on any factor affecting educational success***, including the social, developmental, health, mental health, and learning challenges of youth.

5. ***School stability*** must be strongly considered when making residential and educational placement decisions, except when a school does not adequately meet the needs of the child or youth. School stability, in the right school for that youth, is the basis for building positive attachments and educational continuity, and is essential to raising academic achievement. When a change in schools is unavoidable, or is found to be in the child's best interest, records should be transferred quickly and youth enrolled immediately in the new school.

6. ***Parents and caregivers should be involved*** in all aspects of their children's education.

7. A ***shared understanding of educational responsibility*** must be achieved among all partners and groups who help to care for these youth, so that roles and responsibilities can be clarified and each group held accountable.

Some Short-Term Practical Solutions

Early Childhood Education

It is becoming increasingly clear that the readiness of young children (pre-kindergarten and below) for school has a strong impact on their healthy growth and development and their future educational achievement. School readiness has been defined by the National Education Goals Panel as:

- **Children's readiness for school** (they are prepared to fully participate)
- **Schools' readiness for children** (they are ready to meet the needs of all the children they will serve)
- **Family and community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness for school success** (households and community environments support learning)

In its 2003 *Shaping the Future* report, First 5 LA adopted this definition—as well as Los Angeles County's desired outcomes for children and families (good health, safety and survival, economic well-being, social and emotional well-being, and education/workforce readiness)—to establish a set of goals and strategies for improving school readiness countywide. Several of the First 5 goals and suggested actions have been incorporated into this Blueprint.

The importance of early childhood education in getting children ready for school, especially when combined with family support, cannot be overstated. Research has shown that low-income students who attended a school-based preschool that emphasized parent involvement and the development of literacy skills had a 29 percent higher rate of high school completion than their peers who did not attend, 33 percent fewer juvenile arrests, 42 percent fewer arrests for a violent offense, 41 percent fewer special education placements, 40 percent fewer grade retentions, and 51 percent fewer incidences of child maltreatment.[14]

"Put them in a position to succeed."

—Charlie Appelstein, M.S.W., President, Appelstein Training Resources, author of "No Such Thing as a Bad Kid" and "The Gus Chronicles: Reflections from an Abused Kid"

Further, identifying barriers to education early on can dramatically improve a child's health, learning, and social/emotional development in ways that are often impossible just a few years later. As the National Academy of Sciences reported in *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, "Compensating for missed opportunities, such as the failure to detect early difficulties or the lack of exposure to environments rich in language, often requires extensive intervention, if not heroic efforts, later in life."[15]

High-quality early education is particularly important for young children under the supervision of the child welfare system, 25 percent of whom are under the age of five, and the children of foster and probation youth. At a minimum, it has proven helpful in countering some of the traumatic and neglectful life experiences these children have endured. Perhaps even more important,

it is a powerful tool for preventing further maltreatment and for ensuring positive, long-term benefits that include future academic and personal success.

The full report of the Early Childhood Education Work Group is available on the ECC's website, http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org.

The Education Coordinating Council recommends that:

1. **Higher numbers of children in the care of DCFS, and the children of foster and probation youth, should be enrolled in high-quality early intervention, care, and education programs that are culturally and linguistically responsive.**

   Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

   - Educate caregivers about the numerous benefits of high-quality early intervention, care, and education for their children, the types of programs available, and the importance of being a full partner in their child's growth and development.
   - Make high-quality developmental assessments and proper interventions available to foster youth and the children of foster and probation youth, particularly for those ages birth to 36 months.
   - Develop a process for local child care resource and referral agencies to provide enhanced referrals to caregivers of foster children and the children of foster and probation youth to help them locate high-quality programs that meet their specific needs.
   - Work with the Los Angeles County Office of Child Care and the Child Care Resource Center to pilot implementation of the quality rating instruments for child care programs developed by the Policy Roundtable for Child Care. These tools, adopted by the ECC at its July 2005 meeting, will help families (particularly those using county services) make informed decisions when selecting child development options.
   - Fill available openings in State Preschool, Early Head Start, Head Start, and Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) programs with foster children and the children of foster and probation youth. A successful pilot is now underway that has identified DCFS and Probation liaisons to match children with these spots. It is already generating positive results.
   - Dedicate bridge funding that ensures enrollment in high-quality early care and education programs until children can be connected to the larger subsidy system and before their families exit the child welfare or probation systems.

2. **Community organizations and county departments should offer increased support and resources to parents, relative caregivers, and foster parents to help them be good nurturers and provide the positive learning environments that will ensure that their children are ready for school.**

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- Assist caregivers to link with support networks in their communities, such as LA Connect (888-First-5-LA), those being developed through First 5 LA's Family Literacy and School Readiness Initiatives, the City of Los Angeles's Family Development Networks, Children's Institute Inc.'s Powerful Families Program, St. Anne's Learning Center, and home visiting programs like Early Head Start and Children Uniting Nations' Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY).

- Facilitate enrollment in early intervention programs such as those provided by Regional Centers, school districts, and First 5 LA. First 5 LA's new 'Prenatal through Three Focus Area' programs and its Early Developmental Screening and Intervention Initiative are being designed to help families take care of their urgent needs as well as to assess young children early for possible behavioral or developmental concerns so that children are more ready to learn by the time they reach preschool.

- Connect families to community-based programs that promote literacy and reading awareness, such as Reading Is Fundamental of Southern California, the county library's Family Place, library preschool story times, Little-By-Little, and Begin at the Beginning with Books, as well as the Los Angeles City library's Grandparents & Books (GABS) program.

- Expand training opportunities for parents, relative caregivers, and foster parents in early child development, strengthening parent and child relationships, health and nutrition, and ways of promoting positive behavior in their children.

- Encourage relative caregivers to participate in the Community College Foundation's Kinship Education, Preparation and Support program (KEPS), Kinship In Action (KIA), Grandma's Angels, and DCFS' Kinship Resource Centers.

Youth Development

All school-aged children and adolescents, in all economic and social circumstances, need generous amounts of help, instruction, discipline, support, and caring as they make their way toward adulthood.[16] Such assistance comes from many sources: loving and supportive families, good schools, safe neighborhoods, and a surrounding culture that emphasizes constructive lives and respectful relationships. Without such support—and especially if they are exposed to negative life events, dangerous

"There are no bad kids . . . just bad luck and bad choices."

—Charlie Appelstein, M.S.W., President, Appelstein Training Resources, author of "No Such Thing as a Bad Kid" and "The Gus Chronicles: Reflections from an Abused Kid"

settings, and inadequate schooling—children will not thrive. Rather, they are likely to enter adulthood ill-prepared to reach their full emotional, interpersonal, social, and economic potential.

A strength-based approach is particularly important in thinking about youth in the care of Los Angeles County's child welfare and probation systems. Many experience multiple placements while under the care of the county and are therefore denied the building blocks for successful development:

- The ability to develop meaningful, trusting, and lasting relationships with nurturing adults
- Continuity in educational instruction and academic achievement
- Opportunities to 'give back' through civic engagement, the arts, and community service
- Connections to supportive adults and services that help youth develop into healthy, happy, and productive adults.

A continual exposure to positive experiences, settings, and people, including opportunities to gain and refine a range of life skills, is absolutely essential for foster and probation youth.

The Education Coordinating Council recommends that:

3. Higher numbers of DCFS and Probation youth should be enrolled in skill-building and enrichment programs that include non-system students and provide opportunities for positive and enduring connections to nurturing adults.

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- Promote the participation of these youth in after-school, off-track, and summer academic and enrichment activities, including tutoring, homework help programs, arts and culture, recreation, sports and athletics, community service/civic engagement, leadership development, internships/work experience, and life skills/emancipation preparation.
- Work with the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN), Children Uniting Nations, the Los Angeles County Bar Association's Bridges to the Future program, the Community College Foundation's Campus Peer Mentoring program, the Los Angeles Mentoring Partnership, e-mentoring programs, and others to connect foster and probation youth who want them with peer or adult mentors who will encourage their social and academic development.
- Work with organizations such as city and county recreation and parks departments, public libraries, the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association, L.A.'s BEST, Beyond the Bell, Rowell Foster Children's Positive Plan, the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, and others to expand programming for foster and probation youth and/or give them priority access.

- Partner with Healthy City to electronically map program resources for foster and probation youth by school attendance area, beginning with schools having the largest numbers of these youth.

4. **Youth should be systematically engaged and meaningfully involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating the programs, activities, and events in which they will participate.**

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- Promote the addition of current and former foster and probation youth to the city, county, school, and community boards, committees, and planning groups responsible for developing and managing academic and enrichment programs for youth.
- Develop materials describing how ECC member organizations involve and engage youth in decision-making, what they are planning to do beyond their current efforts, and how other organizations can adopt similar principles.
- Coordinate with others—such as the City of Los Angeles's Workforce Investment Board Youth Council, the SPA 1 (Antelope Valley) Youth Task Force, the SPA 3 (San Gabriel Valley) Youth Action Network, the SPA 8 (South Bay/Harbor) Youth Advisory Committee and its Youth Neighborhood Action Council Network, the American Indian Children's Council's United Native Youth LA (UNYLA), the California Youth Connection (CYC), and the Constitutional Rights Foundation—to facilitate training and leadership development opportunities that help youth become active and able decision-makers as members of boards, committees, or other work groups.

5. **Families, caregivers, and agency staff should pay greater attention to preparing DCFS and Probation children and youth for transitions to preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, adult education, vocational school, college, and employment, and for transfers between schools.**

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- Support the implementation of and access to successful family literacy and school readiness programs such as those developed by First 5 LA and others.
- Encourage the expansion of community-wide school readiness events such as West Hollywood's 'Saturday in the Park' program, SPA 1's school readiness and parent empowerment education fairs, SPA 8's annual 'School Readiness is Everybody's Business' conferences, and UNYLA's American Indian/Alaska Native back-to-school nights that promote culturally relevant school readiness.

- Support programs that help prepare middle school youth for secondary education, such as the Children, Youth and Family Collaborative and United Friends of the Children's college readiness program.

- Work with the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, created by Congress, to include language on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to make it easier for foster youth to self-identify, automatically link FAFSA to the Chafee grant application for online users, and make financial aid available to youth in relative care or guardianship.

- Collaborate with the Emancipation Program Partnership (EPP), the California Youth Connection, the Children's Law Center, United Friends of the Children, the Foster Youth Education Task Force, and others to seek state legislation that would provide free tuition, fees, and books for former foster and probation youth at state colleges and universities.

- Expand to additional Los Angeles college and university campuses such postsecondary education support programs for former foster youth as Guardian Scholars, Renaissance Scholars, and the Community College Foundation's Campus Peer Mentoring program, and work with existing Education Opportunities Programs (EOP) to provide additional support to foster and probation youth on their campuses.

"The biggest mistake of most of the adults we deal with—they don't provide the support we need to succeed. If we had some support, maybe we would be a little better off. I know I would be."

—Fez, foster youth

- Facilitate enrollment and participation in programs that prepare foster and probation youth for the workforce—such as the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce's LA Youth At Work (LAYAW) program, the City of Los Angeles's CLASS Parks Youth Employment Internship Program, and Los Angeles County's Internal Services Department's Youth Career Development program and Community and Senior Services' Independent Living Skills Enhancement program—and support the implementation of LAYAW's Work Readiness Certification Initiative for youth.

6. **The ECC should participate in and work to align local efforts to create safer schools (including passages to and from), particularly within and among the seven school districts represented on the ECC—the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the Lancaster School District, the Pasadena Unified School District, the Compton Unified School District, the Long Beach Unified School District, the Pomona Unified School District, and the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE).**

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- Continue the ECC's involvement with LAUSD's Working Group for Safer School Communities, the Los Angeles Mayor's Council of Education Advisors, and the City of

Los Angeles's Child Safety Taskforce, and assist them in developing integrated solutions such as creating citywide safe haven networks, rethinking bus stop locations, and improving street lighting.

- Through partnerships with city, county, and school-district human relations commissions, dispute resolution programs, and community organizations, expand school-based mediation programs to increase mutual understanding, reduce tension, and prevent violence using students, parents, and teachers trained in conflict resolution.

Data and Information-Sharing

The sharing of key educational information among county agencies, schools, and caregivers has been repeatedly identified by many stakeholders as the ***biggest systems barrier*** to achieving the ECC's goal. Without ongoing, effective communication, without information that clearly identifies foster and probation youth and what schools they attend, and without the continual tracking of their educational progress, there is little hope of connecting them to the services and supports they need to succeed. Currently, confidentiality barriers at the federal, state, and local levels make it very difficult to obtain and share this basic information. Further, there are strong disagreements among legal experts about what these laws permit. All of these barriers must be minimized or eliminated, while demonstrating great sensitivity to and respect for these youth and their privacy concerns.

"The hardest part of working with youth is the adults."

—Charlie Appelstein, M.S.W., President, Appelstein Training Resources, author of "No Such Thing as a Bad Kid" and "The Gus Chronicles: Reflections from an Abused Kid"

The Education Coordinating Council recommends that:

7. **The enhanced sharing of information among school districts, county departments, the juvenile courts, and counsel for children who appear in those courts should be assured by concurrently working to:**

   - **Resolve differing views about what federal law and California law allow, especially regarding federal confidentiality regulations, so that placing agencies (such as DCFS and Probation) and counsel for the child can access school records without a court order or authorization from a parent/guardian/holder of education rights, thereby enabling them to carry out their responsibility to meet the educational needs of children in their care**

   - **Establish a clear and consistent understanding of federal and state confidentiality laws among school districts, DCFS, Probation, and children's counsel so that information necessary for school success is routinely shared in a timely and effective manner**

   - **Pursue amendments to the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), if needed, to clarify that child welfare agencies and legal representatives are able to**

independently access, share, and receive educational information with and from all school districts

- **Advocate for school districts in Los Angeles County to include child welfare personnel among those designated as eligible to receive 'directory information' on enrolled students. (School districts currently include juvenile justice personnel, but those provisions have not been interpreted in Los Angeles County as including DCFS employees.)** 'Directory information' includes the pupil's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, major field of study, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height (for members of athletic teams), dates of attendance, degrees and awards received, and the most recent previous public or private school attended by the pupil. Parents have the right to opt out of sharing this information with any entity on the school district's eligibility list.

- **Draft a court order that would permit county departments and the youth's attorneys, while a youth is under the Juvenile Court's jurisdiction, to access pupil records, grades, transcripts, special education assessments, individual education plans, and current attendance records**

- **With foster and probation youth, develop guidelines for information-sharing that do not violate their need for privacy and confidentiality**

Once these confidentiality issues are addressed, the most pressing need is for a secure Internet-based electronic education record for each child and youth in the child welfare or probation system. This record would provide immediate and continual access to basic educational information for county staff, school personnel, service providers, and caregivers. The paper-and-pencil passport approach used in recent years is not working; it is cumbersome, inadequate, not current, and, therefore, infrequently used. And the Los Angeles County's proposed HELIX system (Health & Education Local Information eXchange), designed to provide a means for sharing electronically based educational information on these children and youth, has not yet become a reality.

The Education Coordinating Council recommends that:

8. **The ECC should work with the Chief Administrative Office, other county departments, school districts, and placement provider agencies to ensure the development of an electronically based information system that includes the individual educational records of DCFS and probation youth.**

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- Convene the leadership of school districts and county departments such as DCFS, Probation, Health Services, Mental Health, the Chief Information Office, the Chief Administrative Office, and the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) to review the status of current efforts and the results achieved by alternative systems, and determine how best to move forward. A Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) already exists

between these county departments, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and LACOE to assist in the design and implementation of such a system, and the Board of Supervisors has set aside funding to support its development. A strong foundation has already been laid.

- Partner with Los Angeles-based agencies and organizations that are pursuing similar projects, so that we can combine efforts and forge a unified approach.

School-based Support

School-based staff (teachers, counselors, education liaisons, front-office workers, administrators, etc.) who provide resources for all students are especially important for foster and probation youth who may need individual assistance with educational records, academic guidance, supportive tutoring, and other services. Over the years, DCFS and Probation have partnered with school districts to develop several successful education liaison programs in which county staff outstationed at school campuses provide some of this support.

With the passage of AB 490 in 2004, an additional (but unfunded) support mechanism was created through the mandated designation of an 'educational liaison for foster youth' within each school district. These liaisons are responsible for ensuring proper school placement, for assisting with enrollment in and checkout from school, and for helping with the transfer of grades, credits, and records when youth change schools. Because most of these liaisons have other assigned responsibilities as well, they need additional assistance to carry out their AB 490 responsibilities.

"When you're a foster youth and you're in school, that's the only base you have."

—Tony, foster youth

The Education Coordinating Council recommends that:

9. **Educational liaisons and school-based staff should be provided with the information they are requesting about who these youth are, the names of those responsible for their education (holders of educational rights, caregivers, caseworkers, attorneys, etc.), how best to contact them, and what services and supports are available for these youth.**

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- The ECC should convene school district and county department leaders and their legal advisors to develop standard protocols for sharing information relevant to school success for foster and probation youth. Each school district operates differently, and school staff may have different assumptions about the urgency of this problem, while county departments need to assure timely, accurate responses to the information needs of all 80 school districts.
- Several of the recommendations found elsewhere in this Blueprint (particularly in the Data and Information-Sharing and Youth Development sections), when achieved, will also help implement this recommendation.

10. School-based staff should be trained regarding the educational and emotional needs of foster and probation youth and ways to meet those needs.

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- Hold regular training sessions, workshops, and conferences for school-based staff at which experts in the fields of early care and education, K–12 and higher education, youth development, child welfare, etc., share information on enhancing educational outcomes for foster and probation youth. These trainings should include topics such as improving the attendance and academic achievement of at-risk youth, strength-based programming, understanding the needs and perceptions of these youth, motivational strategies, and the need for both teachers and front-office staff to exercise sensitivity with respect to youth's rights to confidentiality.
- Provide information to education liaisons on how to connect and work effectively with each child's educational team (teacher, holder of educational rights, parent, caseworker, caregiver, etc.). Help liaisons facilitate the training of other school personnel on the needs of foster and probation youth, as well as facilitate trainings for caregivers, caseworkers, and outside agencies on how best to navigate the school system.
- Assemble 'toolkits' for school personnel that include a summary of relevant education legislation, local health and human services resource guides, system navigation tips, etc.
- Assist educational liaisons and school-based staff to create and maintain a network within and across school districts to regularly share information and provide support to each other.

What It Will Take To Do Better

Doing better will require continuing efforts to develop strong relationships, improve communication, and share information among all of the various groups that are important to dependent and delinquent youth—judges, lawyers, teachers, social workers, probation officers, police, child care providers, caregivers, and many others. Even more important, doing better will require regular communication among families, caregivers, youth, and the professionals who make many of the critical decisions that affect their lives. Enhanced and continuous training and cross-training will be essential, and it may also be necessary to pilot-test more effective ways to help families navigate the complicated educational, legal, and social service systems of Los Angeles County.

Two important topics to address in this effort are the roles and responsibilities of key players and their respective accountabilities.

Roles and Responsibilities

In September 2005, a representative group of stakeholders who play a role in the educational lives of youth[‡] in the child welfare and probation systems—including youth, biological and foster parents, holders of educational rights, caseworkers, CASAs, legal experts, and school personnel—participated in a work session to clarify their respective roles and responsibilities. They agreed that individuals entrusted with raising the educational attainment of foster and probation youth have both collective and individual responsibilities. **The collective responsibility of all groups is to adhere to and live by the Seven Basic Agreements spelled out on page 8.**

Individual responsibilities are:

Youth

- ✓ Actively participate in planning for their education and their future.
- ✓ Regularly attend school and educational and enrichment programs.
- ✓ Complete homework and other school assignments.
- ✓ Ask for help when needed.
- ✓ Seek out interests/hobbies and ways to participate in them.
- ✓ Advocate for what they think they need to further their education.

Major challenges cited by youth:

- They are usually not included in their educational planning.
- Transcripts and records are often delayed, and youth are not listened to about what classes they have completed and what credits they have earned.

[‡] The children and youth who are the subject of this Blueprint are those under the supervision of Los Angeles County's DCFS and Probation Department. They are referred to in several ways throughout this report—as dependent and delinquent youth, as foster and probation youth, and as system youth. These terms are used interchangeably, even though some differences exist. These children and youth range in age from newborn to 21 years.

- Frequently, no one ensures their attendance at school or that adequate transportation is available.
- They do not have the information they need about what resources exist, what post–high school options are available, what courses they need for higher education, how to apply for financial aid, etc.

"Everyone is worried about politics and personal issues between partners, but no one is worrying about the kids."

—Machelle Wolf, former foster and probation youth

- Fellow students often work in school offices where they may be privy to confidential information or overhear conversations about foster and probation youth.

Parents

- ✓ Provide a home structure that supports the education of the youth (when the youth is at home).
- ✓ Maintain a strong attachment with the youth.
- ✓ Encourage stability in their child's enrollment in early care and development programs, and in school.
- ✓ Advocate for the youth (regarding school enrollment, classes needed, etc.) and seek out other advocates when necessary (for translation services, for example).
- ✓ Request their child's enrollment in after-school, off-track, and summer programs and services.
- ✓ Link with teachers, review teacher reports, and attend school conferences.
- ✓ Participate in school functions, activities, and events whenever possible.
- ✓ See that the youth has school supplies, access to technology, adequate transportation, etc.
- ✓ Partner with caregivers around the youth's needs.
- ✓ Link with the youth's social worker/probation officer on all issues.

Major challenges cited by parents:

- The system cuts parents out of the process and does not support their role.
- They often don't have access to the information they need to fulfill their responsibilities.
- Parents may not be the holders of education rights.
- Family members don't always get permission to contact a youth in foster care.

Caregivers

Caregivers have most of the same responsibilities as parents do. In addition, they must:

- ✓ Enroll the child in early care/child development programs and in school.
- ✓ Be knowledgeable about the youth's social/emotional, developmental, and educational needs.
- ✓ Maintain the day-to-day responsibility of supporting the youth's education and related needs (nutrition, for example, and social, physical, and emotional well-being).
- ✓ Make certain that the youth completes assigned schoolwork.
- ✓ Communicate with the youth and his or her parents.
- ✓ Keep caseworkers and others informed about the youth, and raise issues when necessary.
- ✓ Provide transportation and items needed for school (pencils, paper, etc.).
- ✓ Encourage and support the youth's participation in after-school, off-track, and summer academic and enrichment programs and activities.
- ✓ Be familiar with higher education requirements (classes, financial aid opportunities and requirements, etc.).
- ✓ Gather information about the youth's educational status, ongoing progress, and any developing problems, to make recommendations to and help inform the social worker/probation officer and the court.
- ✓ Collect the information needed for the youth's health and education passport and ensure that the passport accompanies the youth if his or her placement changes.
- ✓ Attend the youth's IFSP (Individualized Family Support Plan) and IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings.
- ✓ Be informed of the youth's problems and advocate for the youth to receive the services needed to meet his or her educational needs.
- ✓ Minimize the number of appointments scheduled for youth during school hours.

Major challenges cited by caregivers:

- They often do not have up-to-date contact information for parents.
- Despite AB 490, schools are not cooperating with caregivers to ensure the timely enrollment of youth.
- When caregivers are located some distance from a youth's school, they often do not have the time or financial resources to provide transportation to and from school. Given the size of Los Angeles County, this is a particularly difficult challenge to solve.
- Because of community safety issues, current policies prevent caregivers from allowing probation youth to participate in unsupervised after-school activities.
- Educational information about the youth is rarely provided at the time of placement.

- Academic progress is disrupted when the youth is released home shortly before the end of the semester.
- Caseworkers are not always available to participate in placement provider treatment planning meetings.

Holders of education rights (court-assigned 'responsible adults')

- ✓ Assert the youth's educational rights with the school.
- ✓ Know the educational needs of the youth and how to find available services.
- ✓ Ensure that the youth is properly enrolled in educational programs and school, and that he or she is attending regularly.
- ✓ Request psycho-educational assessments for youth who may need special education services, and attend IFSP and IEP meetings to advocate for the youth's needs.
- ✓ Monitor the implementation of prescribed services and make sure they are delivered.
- ✓ Ensure the stability of the youth in school or early care/child development programs.
- ✓ Communicate regularly with the youth's teacher and other school staff.
- ✓ Collect the required documentation and track the youth's educational progress.

Major challenges cited by holders of education rights:

- Who decides if a given program is the best fit?
- Getting information is difficult; schools do not know who these youth are nor where educational information should be sent.
- Districts may not conform with federal IEP guidelines.
- System barriers make it unnecessarily difficult for youth to access non-public school services.

Children's Social Workers and Deputy Probation Officers (county department case managers)

- ✓ Ensure that educational plans—including Transitional Independent Living Plans (TILPs)—are developed for youth as part of the case planning process.
- ✓ Give strong consideration to school stability and whether a youth is succeeding in his or her current school when making placement decisions.
- ✓ Be knowledgeable about locating education resources, and help families and youth access them.
- ✓ Encourage youth and their families to be accountable for their educational achievement, and keep parents involved when possible.
- ✓ Provide caregivers with current educational information when the youth is placed.
- ✓ Ensure and assist youth in transitions between schools.
- ✓ When a youth transfers to another school, notify that school and request that the student be checked out.

- ✓ Make certain that transportation plans are developed when the distance to school is a barrier.
- ✓ Help build bridges among parents, caregivers, and schools.
- ✓ Discuss the youth's educational progress with parents and youth regularly.
- ✓ Understand child/youth development and help refer youth, caregivers, and families to appropriate services.
- ✓ Be informed of the youth's problems and advocate for the youth to get services that meet his or her educational needs.
- ✓ Inform the school and the caregiver about who holds the youth's education rights.
- ✓ Intervene when there is a problem at the school.
- ✓ Attend the youth's IFSP and IEP meetings.
- ✓ Refer young children for mandated CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act) and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) screenings.
- ✓ Gather information about the youth's educational status, ongoing progress, and any developing problems, to make recommendations to and help inform the court.
- ✓ Regularly update the educational information in information systems and case files.
- ✓ Make every effort to meet with youth during non-classroom time.

Major challenges cited by case managers:

- No point person exists at the school to communicate with and get information about how the youth is doing.
- Delays often occur in identifying holders of education rights.
- Some schools are reluctant to enroll youth who are returning from probation halls and camps.
- Youth are often directed to non-mainstream schools and are thus denied access to the full range of program options and resources available to others.
- Courts place restrictions on the types of placements to be used, making it difficult to keep youth in the same school district.

School teachers/administrators/personnel (public, non-public and charter)

- ✓ Understand and meet the unique educational needs of foster and probation youth.
- ✓ Communicate the youth's educational progress and concerns with all responsible adults involved with the youth.
- ✓ Educate the youth in the most appropriate setting for his or her needs.
- ✓ Be sensitive to the unique circumstances of foster and probation youth when developing curricular assignments that address family ties.
- ✓ Assist with the immediate enrollment of the youth.
- ✓ Designate one person in the school as a 'point of contact' for the youth, to help with enrollment and checkout, troubleshoot, mediate disputes, and connect the youth to resources.

- ✓ Transfer records in a timely fashion.
- ✓ Identify available school resources.
- ✓ Provide a private space on the school grounds for youth to meet with caseworkers, to help maintain confidentiality.
- ✓ Assist in the youth's educational planning with the parent or caregiver, including academic assessments, how to resolve deficiencies, and the courses needed for graduation and entrance into post-secondary institutions.
- ✓ Develop policies and procedures and provide services for special-needs children.
- ✓ Understand the rights of the youth and family.

Major challenges cited by school personnel:

- Schools do not know who the case manager is and are often told that they cannot get the name of this person because of confidentiality issues.
- Key personnel within the school to assist are not identified.
- Calls into the school are usually handled by clerks whose employment turns over frequently.
- Private space for meetings is at a premium in many public schools.

Legal advocates/attorneys

- ✓ Be educated about and advocate for the youth's rights.
- ✓ Help educate parents and caregivers about the youth's rights.
- ✓ Be aware of the educational process and the youth's progress in it.
- ✓ Understand child development and the system of available services, especially with regard to young children.
- ✓ Advocate to meet the youth's individual needs in all areas.
- ✓ Know how to access specialists.
- ✓ Build relationships on all levels that affect the youth.
- ✓ Assist in empowering youth and caregivers to advocate for their needs in the future.
- ✓ Use the court process when necessary to ensure the youth's rights.
- ✓ Make every effort to minimize the amount of school time the youth has to miss for appointments and court hearings.

Major challenges cited by attorneys:

- Access is limited to school personnel, educational records, and information about the youth's progress.
- A lack of parity of representation exists for youth in the delinquency system because of differences in standards among the Los Angeles County Public Defender, the Alternate Public Defender, and panel attorneys.
- The panel structure for delinquency attorneys doesn't lend itself to continuity and a focus on long-term issues such as education.

County departments

- ✓ Ensure that educational planning is part of all case planning (in team decision-making, case conferences, etc.).
- ✓ Address educational considerations when developing permanency and placement plans.
- ✓ Routinely include educational planning and progress in court reports.
- ✓ Encourage departmental staff to be knowledgeable about and connect youth to the range of program supports and services available.
- ✓ Help families and communities provide environments that support learning.
- ✓ Outstation liaisons in schools to help link youth to services and to troubleshoot.
- ✓ Partner with community agencies to expand resources for youth.
- ✓ Promote the stability of casework staff assigned to youth.

"Train foster parents to help them manage common problems and reduce failed placements."

—Richard Kadison, M.D., Chief of the Mental Health Service at Harvard University, author of "College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What to Do About It"

School districts

- ✓ Set a positive tone for students and create a welcoming environment.
- ✓ Provide safe school campuses, including passages to and from.
- ✓ Train school personnel about the unique educational needs of foster and probation youth.
- ✓ Make sure that AB 490 education liaisons work with and support school-site–designated point persons for foster and probation youth.
- ✓ Ensure the timeliness of educational planning and implementation.
- ✓ Provide programs and resources that help youth achieve.
- ✓ Establish policies that help youth succeed, and hold staff accountable for following them.
- ✓ Ensure that surrogate parents appointed for children eligible for special education services are trained in and fulfill their mandated duties.
- ✓ Establish agreements across school districts to assist students in completing partially satisfied course requirements in a timely manner.
- ✓ Maintain confidentiality regarding students' status as wards of the court.

Judiciary

- ✓ Hold all parts of the system—including child welfare workers, probation officers, attorneys, caregivers, and school personnel (to the extent possible)—responsible for the youth's educational achievement, issuing orders as needed and monitoring progress.
- ✓ At least every six months, make inquiries of the youth, the family, advocates, and agency personnel about the youth's developmental and educational progress; intervene when there is a need, and recognize achievement.
- ✓ Ensure that every youth has an effective holder of education rights and that this person's identity is quickly communicated to CSWs, DPOs, caregivers, and school personnel.
- ✓ Understand the roles of those involved with the youth's educational achievement.
- ✓ Educate hearing officers about the educational needs of foster and probation youth, who is responsible for meeting those needs, and the types of resources available to meet them.

The Education Coordinating Council recommends that:

11. **County departments, school districts, and the judiciary should cross-train the stakeholder groups listed above on their collective and individual responsibilities for ensuring that foster and probation youth receive a solid education.**

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- Ensure that all stakeholder groups understand the Seven Basic Agreements and how to operationalize them.
- Regularly convene group members to share information about each others' systems and break down existing barriers and challenges through shared understandings and strategies.
- Hold cross-trainings on such topics as:
  - The additional needs of unique subgroups of foster and probation youth (see page 6 for examples)
  - The impact of early neglect on academic performance
  - The use of effective screening tools
  - Making certain that special education placements are appropriate for those enrolled
  - The high rate of expulsions for preschool children and disproportionately frequent disciplinary actions for school-aged youth
  - The identification of high-quality care and education/enrichment programs
  - Preparation for the California high school exit exam and SAT
  - Postsecondary supports

Accountability

A significant barrier to raising the educational achievement of foster and probation youth has been a lack of agreement among county departments and school systems as to who is ultimately accountable for ensuring their educational success.[17, 18, 19] In actuality, no one system is wholly responsible. Each entity accountable for the welfare of these youth is partially responsible for making sure that clear educational goals are included in overall case plans, and for ensuring that each child receives the services and supports needed to reach his or her individual goals.

The Education Coordinating Council recommends that:

12. **DCFS/Probation caseworkers, caregivers, and the courts should each be accountable for the educational success of foster and probation youth through a three-pronged approach:**
    - **DCFS and Probation caseworkers shall ensure, by using multidisciplinary team decision-making and case conferences, that academic expectations are established for these youth and that educational plans are developed which outline the activities youth should participate in to meet those expectations. These team meetings should include, at a minimum, youth, parents, caregivers, and school representatives.**
    - **Caregivers and others identified in the plan shall implement these educational plans by facilitating the child's involvement in the agreed-upon programs and activities.**
    - **Courts shall monitor the creation of these plans and the progress made in achieving them, and hold the involved parties accountable for their implementation.**

Examples of actions that would help achieve this recommendation:

- An Educational Case Plan should be developed for all foster and probation youth as part of their basic case plan. An outline of such a plan has been developed that details how to address each child's individual education needs, and specifies those responsible for the actions listed. That sample plan, drafted by the Youth Development Work Group, is available on the ECC's website, http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org.
- Under the leadership of the Juvenile Court, cross-training sessions should be convened with all parties involved in developing and implementing the Educational Case Plan—judges, attorneys, CSWs/DPOs, school representatives, and caregivers—to ensure all understand their respective responsibilities.

"[When I was] growing up in foster care, no one ever asked me what I wanted to do with my life."

—Jennifer Rodriguez, J.D., Legislative and Policy Coordinator, California Youth Connection, and former foster youth

- DCFS and Probation should hold caregivers responsible for implementing the decisions and agreements in this plan and should consider, as part of current and future placement decisions, whether to place youth with agencies, licensed/certified foster homes, or relative caregivers that do not follow the Educational Case Plans.

The ECC's Role

As a body, the ECC will champion the Seven Basic Agreements outlined in this Blueprint, promote partnerships, develop and coordinate ideas for raising educational achievement, track indicators of success, monitor and report progress, and intervene and problem-solve.

One critical beginning need is to gather baseline data on foster and probation youth school attendance and academic achievement so that we can set numerical goals. During 2006, the ECC will conduct a series of data matches between DCFS and Probation and the seven school districts participating on the ECC, comparing these students to others within the districts. Future data matches will then track progress toward our joint goals and monitor the improvement of educational outcomes over time.

Clearly, a further step is to determine the appropriate levels of accountability among participating school districts and agencies, including how progress will be measured.

The Education Coordinating Council commits to the communities of Los Angeles County, and to its children and youth, to hold its own members accountable for achieving the vision and goals set out in this Blueprint.

Next Steps

Once this Blueprint is adopted and there is shared commitment across systems and stakeholders to the Seven Basic Agreements, the ten programmatic recommendations, and the two recommendations for moving forward administratively, the stage will be set for meeting the challenge of raising foster and probation youth's educational achievement.

Under the ECC's leadership, a series of strategies for addressing the recommendations and suggested actions outlined in this Blueprint will be developed through strong partnerships with public, private, and community agencies and organizations, tailored planning sessions, and continuous teamwork.

Together, we must design appropriate approaches for different age groups of children and youth, determine what opportunities make the most sense for initial action, develop work plans that capitalize on those opportunities, and invite others to join in. Concurrently, public awareness must be raised about the special importance of education for youth who are in the care of the child welfare and probation systems, and some of the promising ideas for closing their achievement gap.

Ongoing public and private funding must be secured to support the full implementation of the recommendations and actions contained in this Blueprint.

Conclusion

Making certain that all youth under the supervision of DCFS and the Probation Department—and their children—have a high-quality education that prepares them for adult success is the vision of the Education Coordinating Council. It is one of the most valuable things we can do to ensure that these particularly vulnerable young people not only survive, but thrive. To accomplish this vision, we must first of all believe that it is possible. Then we must ***expect more*** of youth, ourselves, and each other.

"It's not a resources problem, it's a partnership problem."

—Sid Gardner, President, Children and Family Futures

Each of us must take the Seven Basic Agreements seriously and decide how best—both individually and collectively—to honor and implement the recommendations and suggested actions contained in this Blueprint. To do this, we must be clear about our roles and must hold one another responsible for carrying them out. We must also share resources and work together more effectively than we have in the past.

This document is intended to be not 'just another report,' but a real blueprint for action. It outlines what is needed to build a strong educational foundation that will ensure the kind of future we all want for these youth. Ultimately, we are each accountable to the children and youth who find themselves under the supervision of the juvenile court, and we must commit to whatever it takes to do right by them.

Acknowledgements

The ECC thanks the following individuals and organizations for their help in developing this Blueprint, and for their tireless efforts on behalf of children, youth, and families in Los Angeles County. In addition to ECC meetings, individuals have participated on the Planning Group, Blueprint Drafting Group, and priority-area work groups, and in a series of focus groups. We also thank participants in the 2003 and 2004 education summits for their pertinent recommendations, as well as individuals who made suggestions for and reviewed drafts of this document.

Education Coordinating Council

Chair: Jose Huizar, *Councilmember, City of Los Angeles*
Vice-Chairs: Michael Nash, *Presiding Judge, Los Angeles Superior Court, Juvenile Division*
Berisha Black, *Emancipation Ombudsman and former foster youth*

Yolie Flores Aguilar, *Executive Director, Children's Planning Council*
Gwen Bartholomew, *Co-Founder, Grandma's Angels*
Carol Clem, *Head Deputy, Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office*
Kathleen Duba, *Deputy Superintendent, Pasadena Unified School District*
Steve Gocke, *Superintendent, Lancaster School District*
Jesse Gonzales, *Superintendent, Compton Unified School District*
Paul Higa, *Chief Probation Officer, Probation Department*
Helen Kleinberg, *Chair, Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families*
Miriam Aroni Krinsky, *Executive Director, Children's Law Center of Los Angeles*
Patrick Leier, *Superintendent, Pomona Unified School District*
Aubrey Manuel, *President, Los Angeles County Resource Families Coordinating Council*
Evelyn Martinez, *Executive Director, First 5 LA*
Darline Robles, *Superintendent, Los Angeles County Office of Education*
Roy Romer, *Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District*
Bruce Saltzer, *Executive Director, Association of Community Human Service Agencies*
David Sanders, *Director, Department of Children and Family Services*
Christopher Steinhauser, *Superintendent, Long Beach Unified School District*
Marvin Southard, *Director, Department of Mental Health*
Beatriz Olvera Stotzer, *President, City of L.A. Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families*
Machelle Wolf, *former foster and probation youth*
Susan Abagnale, *Director, Los Angeles Office, Casey Family Programs (ex officio)*

Work Group Co-Chairs

Early Childhood Education	Terri Chew Nishimura, Policy Roundtable for Child Care Michele Sartell, Los Angeles County Office of Child Care
Youth Development	Sherri Sobel, Los Angeles Superior Court, Juvenile Division Vinny D'Averso, Community College Foundation
Data and Information-Sharing	Andrea Zetlin, California State University, Los Angeles Jacquelyn McCroskey, University of Southern California
School Liaisons	Norma Sturgis, Los Angeles Unified School District Pat Levinson, Los Angeles County Office of Education

Individuals

Wendy Aron
Diquitha Aubrey
Gary Baer
Nancy Ballantyne
Kelly Barnes
Peggy Belcher-Dixon
Rosemarie Belda
Dana Blackwell
Andrea Bobbitt
Sally Bolus
Martha Borunda
Bryan Borys
Lyssa Brashier-Marsh
Erik Butler
Marva Butler
Elizabeth Calciano
Martha Calderon
Hania Cardenas
Priscilla Charles Carter
Flor Chaidez
Sam Chan
Helen Chavez
Mary Chester
Miryam Choca
Antonia Clark
Cindy Clay
Laura Cohen
Richard Cohen
Jana Cooley
Michael Cooper
Zelma Cooper
Zoe Corwin
David Crippens
Cecilia Custodio
Haydee Adelita Cuza
Brenda Dabney
Sara DeLaney
Dora Delgado
Terry Deloria
Tedji Dessalegn
Carole Donahue
Margaret Dunkle
Brenda Echols
Jullie Eutsler
Marsha Evers
Jeff Farber
Maryam Fatemi
Margaret Faye
L. Ernestine Fields
Maura Flaherty
Denise Fong
Kimberly Foster
Todd Franke
Sid Gardner
Alicia Garoupa-Bollinger
Tyese Givens
Cynthia Glasser
Nicki Gorham
Paulette Graham
Merritt Gregory
Michael Guillemet
Rosie Guzman
Rita Hadjimanoukian
Madeline Hall
Sandy Hamilton
Sharon Harada
Theresa Hays
Cynthia Heard
Leslie Heimov
Rose Hernandez
Lucy Hudson
Ayanna Hudson Higgins
Sai-Yuk Ho-Liang
Stephen Hooper
Kathy House
Gene Howard
Loretta Huang
Brandy Ilby
Nick Ippolito
Heather Jacobson
Harvey Kawasaki
Ann Keyes
John Kim
Michelle King
Kelli King-Jackson
Michele Kipke
Sacha M. Klein
Ines Kuperschmit
Robert LaFarge
Laura Shiozaki Lee
Pamela Lewis
Spencer Lewis
Kathy Licursi
John Liechty
Cynthia Lim
Teresa Luna
Cynthia Machorro
Hector Madrigal
Bulmaro Magallon
Kathy Malaske-Samu
Gloria Mamokhin
Penny Markey
Patty Matesic
Odesiree May
Greg McCovey
Gail McFarlane-Sosa
Jason Mendez
Jed Minoff
David Mitchell
Kashara Moore
Lisa Campbell Motton
Peter Ngo
Terry Ogawa
Michael Olenick
Cindy Oser
Lisa Parrish
Cindy Phan-Hy
Shawnee Pickney
Paisley Pijuan
Julian Pijuan
Calvin Powell
Gary Puckett
Ana Quintero
Jean Raghib
Bettye Randle
Vivian Rescalvo
Carol Reynolds
Maria Rivas
Shirley Robertson
Terri Roy
Rita Saenz
Pam Schmidt
Fabricio Segovia
Nancy Shea
Brenda Shockley
Peter Sibbison
Eduardo Silva
Judi Ann Simmons
Miriam Simmons
William Stelzner
Cynthia Stokes
Jessica Tachiba
Rick Tebbano
Gail Tierney
Tina Towns
Sydney Tucker
Koji Uesugi
Aviana Uribe
Lisa Valle
Cristina Varela
Sarah Vesecky
Scott Wallach
Harriette Williams
Robert Wiltse
Sik Woo
Daphna Ziman

Organizations, Agencies, and Groups

In addition to those groups listed, there was also representation from former foster youth, former probation youth, biological parents, foster parents, and holders of education rights.

A Better LA
Alhambra Unified School District
Arcadia Unified School District
Association of Community Human Service Agencies
Beyond The Bell
Burbank Unified School District
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, Renaissance Scholars and College Bound
California State University, Los Angeles
California Youth Connection
CASA of Los Angeles
Casey Family Programs
Child Care Resource Center
Children and Family Futures
Children Uniting Nations
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Law Center of Los Angeles
Children's Planning Council
Childrens Hospital Los Angeles
City of Los Angeles Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families
City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks
City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board Youth Council
Community Build
Community College Foundation
Compton Unified School District
County Counsel
County of Los Angeles Public Library
Covina-Valley Unified School District
Department of Children and Family Services
Department of Mental Health
Early Identification and Intervention Group
El Rancho Unified School District
Faith Communities for Families and Children
Garvey School District
Glendale Unified School District
Hawthorne School District
Healthy City Project
Inglewood Unified School District
Lancaster School District
Long Beach Unified School District
Los Angeles County Arts Commission
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, First, Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Districts
Los Angeles County Chief Administrative Office, Service Integration Branch
Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families
Los Angeles County Education Foundation
Los Angeles County Office of Child Care
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office
Los Angeles Superior Court, Juvenile Division
Los Angeles Unified School District
Los Angeles Universal Preschool
Los Nietos School District
Loyola Law School Youth Program
Mental Health Advocacy Services
Mexican American Opportunity Foundation
Montebello Unified School District
New Directions
New Ways To Work
Orangewood Children's Foundation
Policy Roundtable for Child Care
Probation Department
Public Counsel
Rancho San Antonio
Rowland Unified School District
San Gabriel Unified School District
Sycamores Non-Public School
Temple City Unified School District
University of California, Los Angeles
University of Southern California
Westside Children's Center
William S. Hart Union High School District

Youth Focus Groups

145 current and former foster and probation youth from the following programs:

- 36 emancipated young mothers in transitional housing and teen moms in residence at St. Anne's maternity home in Los Angeles
- 22 middle and high school youth at The Sycamores in Altadena
- 25 youth enrolled in the Rites of Passage Program at the National Family Life & Education Center in South Los Angeles
- 18 youth enrolled in the DCFS independent living program conducted by the Community College Foundation at Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut
- 18 probation youth at Camp Scott (females) and Camp Scudder (males) in Santa Clarita
- 17 youth referred by the Probation Department to Helpline Youth Counseling's learning center in Norwalk and Boys Republic in Chino Hills
- 9 former foster youth, members of the California Youth Connection in Los Angeles

Caregiver Focus Groups

66 adults from the following committees:

- 15 from the SPA 7 Foster Families Committee, which included parents, teachers, program directors, advocates, and professionals within the county departments of Mental Health, Children and Family Services and Public Social Services
- 51 from the Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA) DCFS, Probation, and Foster Family Agency Strategic Planning Policy committees

Consultant Team

Evelyn Hughes
Jacquelyn McCroskey
Cecilia M. Sandoval
Carrie Dunbar Watson
Sharon G. Watson

Available on the ECC's website, http://www.educationcoordinatingcouncil.org:

- *Expecting More: A Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster and Probation Youth* (this document)
- *Through Their Eyes: Results of Youth and Adult Caregiver Focus Groups on the Education of Youth in the Foster Care and Probation Systems*
- Early Childhood Education Work Group Report
- Sample Educational Case Plan (from the Youth Development Work Group)

Bibliography

Brown, C., Rocha, E., & Sharkey, A., Hadley, E., Handley, C., & Kronley, R. (2005). Getting smarter, becoming fairer: A progressive education agenda for a stronger nation. Renewing our schools, securing our future, a national task force on public education. A joint Initiative of the Center for American Progress and the Institute for America's Future.

Children's Law Center of Los Angeles (2004). Closing the education achievement gap for foster and probation youth. 2004 Los Angeles education summit report and recommendations. Los Angeles, CA: Author.

First 5 LA (2003). Shaping the future: Help children in your community get the best possible start in school. Los Angeles, CA: Author.

Lara-Cinisomo, S., Pebley, A., Vaiana, M., Maggio, E. (2004). Are L.A.'s children ready for school? Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Litchfield, M., & Gatowski, S. (2005). Asking the right questions: A judicial checklist to ensure that the educational needs of children and youth in foster care are being addressed. Reno, NV: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

McCroskey, J., & Watson, C. (2005). Research on the educational experiences of dependent and delinquent youth. Los Angeles, CA: Education Coordinating Council.

Sanchez, R., Mosqueda, J., & Rodriguez, J. (2005). One recommendation at a time. 2003/2004 Fall policy conference report. San Francisco, CA: California Youth Connection.

Youth Law Center (2004). Improving educational opportunities for youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems: A report on a meeting held August 12, 2004. San Francisco, CA: Author.

References

[1] Christian, S. (2003). Educating children in foster care. Washington, DC: Children's Policy Initiative, National Conference of State Legislatures.

[2] Kozol, J. (2005). The shame of the nation. The restoration of apartheid schooling in America. New York, NY: The Crown Publishing Group.

[3] Choice, P., D'Andrade, A., Gunther, K., Downes, D., Schaldach, J., Csiszar, C., Austin, M. (2001). Education for foster children: Removing barriers to academic success. Berkeley, CA: Bay Area Social Services Consortium Research Response Team, Center for Social Services Research, School of Social Welfare, University of California at Berkeley.

[4] White, J., Carrington, J., & Freeman, P. (1990). *A study of the educational status of foster children in Oregon: Research and statistics.* Portland, OR: Oregon Department of Human Resources, Children's Services Division.

[5] Meltzer, L.J., Levine, M.D., Karniski, W., Palfrey, J.S., & Clarke, S. (1984). An analysis of the learning styles of adolescent delinquents. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 17*, 600–608.

[6] Blome, W. (1997). What happens to foster kids: Educational experiences of a random sample of foster care youth and a matched group of non-foster care youth. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 14(1), 41–53.

[7] Burley, M. & Halpern, M. (2001). Educational attainment for foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care. Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

[8] Casey Family Programs (2003). The foster care alumni studies. Assessing the effects of foster care: Early results from the Casey National Alumni Study. Seattle, WA: author.

[9] Burley, M. & Halpern, M. *Ibid.*

[10] Choice, et al. *Ibid.*

[11] Robinson, T.R., & Rapport, M.J.K. (1999). Providing special education in the juvenile justice system. *Remedial & Special Education, 20*, 19–26.

[12] Los Angeles County Office of Education (2002). Juvenile court and community schools, school accountability report card, 2001-2002. Downey, CA: author.

[13] Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Terao, S., Ruth, G., & Keller, T. (2005). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago.

[14] Reynolds, A., Temple, J., Robertson, D., & Mann, E. (2001). Age 21 cost-benefit analysis of the Title 1 Chicago child-parent center program. Available: http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/cbaexecsum4.html

[15] National Research Council Institute of Medicine (2000). From neurons to neighborhoods, The science of early childhood development (182–217). Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

[16] National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002). Community programs to promote youth development. Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer A. Gootman, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

[17] Christian, S. (2003). *Ibid.*

[18] Finkelstein, M., Wamsley, M., & Miranda, D. (2002). What keeps children in foster care from succeeding in school: Views of early adolescents and the adults in their lives. New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice.

[19] Smithgall, C., Gladden, R. M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., & Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago.