



## **Education Coordinating Council**

**December 9, 2020**

**9:30 a.m. | via Zoom**

Present:

Mónica Garcia, ECC Chair (Los Angeles Unified School District)  
Fabricio Segovia, ECC Vice Chair (former foster youth)  
Michelle Alferes, Los Angeles County Office of Education  
Karen Anderson, Pasadena Unified School District  
Tracie Andrews, Department of Mental Health  
Stacy Barron, Department of Children and Family Services  
Jesus Corral, Probation Department  
Art Cunha, Los Angeles County Office of Education  
Lisa Cynkin-Hardy, relative caregivers  
Pia Escudero, Los Angeles Unified School District  
Julie Eustler, representing Superintendent Michele Bowers  
Lilia Fuentes, Pomona Unified School District  
Stefanie Gluckman, ECC Director  
Judge Victor Greenberg, Presiding Judge, Juvenile Court  
Rebeca Hurtado, Department of Mental Health  
Jodi Kurata, Association of Community Human Services Agencies  
Elida Ledesma, Arts for Healing and Justice Network  
Marcy Manker, First 5 LA  
Patricia Mahony, Alhambra Unified School District  
Jeannette Mann, Commission for Children and Families  
Ofelia Medina, First 5 LA  
Celeste Meza, Department of Mental Health  
Felipe Moscoso, Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services  
Mamikon Nalchajyan, Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services  
Judge Michael Nash, Office of Child Protection  
Keri Pesanti, Department of Mental Health  
Mark Rodgers, Bonita Unified School District  
Eric Sahakian, Pasadena Unified School District  
Elisabeth Salazar, Office of Child Protection  
Lisa Schoyer, Department of Mental Health  
Erin Simon, Long Beach Unified School District  
Claudia Sosa-Valderrama, Long Beach Unified School District  
Barbara Spyrou, Office of Child Protection  
Luciana Svidler, Children's Law Center  
Kanchana Tate, Department of Mental Health  
Rachelle Touzard, Los Angeles County Office of Education  
Krystana Walks-Harper, Pomona Unified School District  
Aaron Yoscovitz, Palmdale School District  
Victoria Yurkins

Speakers and  
Guests:

Jahanna Blunt, Arts for Healing and Justice Network  
Kawena Cole, Foster Ed  
Barbara Fant, Arts for Healing and Justice Network  
Denise Grande, Department of Arts and Culture  
Ana Gutierrez, West Covina Unified School District  
La Shona Jenkins, Los Angeles County Office of Education  
Mario Johnson, Office of Equity, Department of Children and Family Services  
Carolyn Kaneko, Department of Mental Health  
Megan Kirkpatrick, Department of Arts and Culture  
Judge Martha Matthews, Los Angeles Superior Court  
Denise Miranda, Los Angeles Unified School District  
Elisabeth Nails, Department of Arts and Culture

Monica Banken, Fifth Supervisorial District  
Maral Karaccusian, Fourth Supervisorial District  
Lisa Pinto, Third Supervisorial District

Chair Mónica Garcia brought the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and welcomed everyone, then introduced Jahanna Blunt from the Arts of Healing and Justice Network, who led a healing-informed rhythm and movement opening exercise.

Chair Garcia then introduced Dr. Stacy Barron—the new acting medical director for the Department of Children and Family Services who will, following Helen Berberian’s retirement, represent DCFS Director Bobby Cagle at ECC meetings—and Victoria Yurkins, a former foster youth who is a part of the Los Angeles County Office of Education’s (LACOE’s) foster youth services coordinating team.

### ECC Accomplishments

Director Stefanie Gluckman outlined the ECC’s major accomplishments during 2020, despite the difficult circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Crafting and obtaining board-of-education approval for Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between DCFS and numerous school districts to provide funding, procedures, and logistics to keep foster youth in their schools of origin—if that is found to be in their best interest—when they are initially removed from their homes or when they change placements. Los Angeles County is one of the few counties in the state with such a robust plan to achieve this particular goal of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. Since 2018, over 100,000 rides have been provided to foster youth throughout the county.
- For youth involved in the child-welfare and juvenile-justice systems, achieved a 68 percent completion rate for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)—a rate higher than that of the general population
- Launched a mobile app to improve children’s social workers’ access to foster-care education data in the field through the Education Passport System created by LACOE
- Strengthened mental-health protective factors and increased adult and student well-being through Creative Wellbeing, an arts education program in schools

### Juvenile Court Update

Judge Martha Matthews presented on the Court Education Committee, which is composed of individuals and agencies involved with foster youth and their education.

“Remote learning [because of the pandemic] has been a challenge for everyone,” she said, “but particularly for foster youth. The agencies on this committee work together to make sure every foster student has an appropriate device, reliable internet access, and adult support. Relative caregivers are called on now to be both teacher and tech support, and they need assistance. High-level placements like STRTPs [short-term residential therapeutic programs] need to do a better job of ensuring that students log in to class every day. Someone needs to notice if these kids are not involved in school and help them overcome whatever barriers they’re experiencing.”

In response to a question about the backlog of cases resulting from the court’s initial COVID-19 shut-down, Matthews stated that the juvenile court is currently running full calendars by virtual means, operating an all-remote hearing system.

The Court Education Committee holds monthly ‘check-ins’ on the first Tuesday of each month from 12:15 to 1:15 p.m. via WebEx; the next scheduled call will be on January 12. Judge Matthews invited anyone interested in participating on these calls to contact her at [mmatthews@lacourt.org](mailto:mmatthews@lacourt.org). All persons and agencies involved in education for foster youth are welcome.

### Prevention Through Healing-Informed Arts Education

The shift to distance learning, Stefanie Gluckman agreed, has accentuated engagement, mental health, and equity challenges for youth in foster care and probation. The lack of in-person connections with peers and educators, along with wildfires, police violence, and discrimination against the Black community, have added to pre-existing stressors for these vulnerable youth.

During the 2019–2020 school year, the Office of Child Protection—in partnership with the Department of Arts and Culture, Department of Mental Health, and the Arts for Healing and Justice Network (formerly the Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network)—developed a program designed to strengthen protective factors and promote well-being through arts instruction at school sites. The Creative Wellbeing project is the first to unite evidence-based mental-health practices with healing-informed arts to increase school engagement and well-being for youth and their families.

The program’s original vision was to create and provide healing-informed arts training to on-campus adults plus services for youth to build social and emotional competence, an important protective factor. When the pandemic began, project partners pivoted to a virtual model and expanded arts instruction to additional adults and youth, including caregivers and youth in STRTPs (which serve youth with the highest mental-health needs). Approximately 150 educators and caregivers received virtual healing-informed arts instruction or professional-development training, and 146 youth received healing-informed arts instruction and art supplies.

Gluckman introduced the project team, and meeting participants then viewed the video that helped Creative Wellbeing win the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors’ *Chair’s Challenge Award* for providing key supports to youth during the pandemic (available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mS2yT5lDbLKrNk-M9bTxrOmvox-nlin/view?usp=sharing>).

Denise Grande from the Department of Arts and Culture noted that current healing-informed arts work builds on nearly two decades of County efforts to ensure that all young people grow up with the arts because of their importance to child development, to the region's economic development, and, more broadly, to overall community development, health, and wellness. In October, the Board of Supervisors recommitted to this work by adopting a new Regional Blueprint for Arts Education whose overall vision is that *Every young person engages in the arts—all year, every year—because the arts are fundamental to human growth and development*. Bringing this to fruition means providing opportunities for young people to engage in the arts in school, after school, and in their communities.

The new Blueprint also prioritizes youth who have been historically excluded—not only Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), but those in the foster system and those involved in or affected by the justice system. It also reinforces the importance of working collaboratively across County agencies with a clear focus on supporting the adults who work with youth.

Through decades of backing for educators and school districts, research, and experience, Grande stated, the Department of Arts and Culture has seen first-hand how the arts provide young people with an opportunity to learn new skills and to express their thoughts or ideas in creative and therapeutic ways. “We know that the arts build community, a sense of belonging, and an understanding that one’s identity and life matters,” Grande said. “We also know that school teachers, staff, and administrators who are trained and equipped to implement arts instruction within a healing-informed approach are better able to support their students’ mental health and well-being. The Creative Wellbeing project was designed to extend into the multiple layers of school systems—from leadership to educators/practitioners to parents and caregivers—as well as to students.”

Harder+Company Community Research conducted a formative evaluation of the project over the past year, finding data to suggest that:

- The Creative Wellbeing training increased educators’ awareness of mental health and provided strategies to support youth well-being.
- Specifically, it increased their knowledge of, and confidence in identifying, both risk and protective factors in youth.
- Educators involved in the project felt equipped to integrate healing-informed arts activities into their work with youth.
- The Creative Wellbeing approach increased youths’ moods, social connections with peers, and self-confidence.

The pivot from in-person to online implementation also helped project participants better understand the value of engaging the broader school community—not just educators, but *all* adults in the ecosystem, from school and district leadership to front-office staff, mental-health service providers, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) case workers, Department of Mental Health (DMH) clinicians, sports coaches, and security officers, and including teaching artists, and other community-based organizations supporting the school.

“We are interested in whether and how the Creative Wellbeing approach might be incorporated into existing trainings or ongoing supports for foster parents across the County,” Grande continued, “and whether this ‘self-care’ space might serve as a preventive mental-health intervention for

them and other caregivers, as well as for front-line DMH clinicians and DCFS social workers. Ultimately, we want to explore whether the Creative Wellbeing professional-development curriculum and trainings might be of value to all County employees who work with young people. It really is more than just a project or a program. It is a way of educating, engaging, and being; about envisioning new approaches to nurture well-being while acknowledging personal strengths and community assets that already exist, especially those ‘hidden in plain sight.’ The process invites participants to bring their lived experiences and their own cultural connections and struggles into the conversation, and it not only validates, but celebrates, these contributions—again, as part of building community, a sense of belonging, and an understanding that one’s identity and one’s life matters.”

Finding the funding for arts education in schools is a battle already 40 years old, Grande said. California’s Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funded much of the Creative Wellbeing program, and the Probation Department has funded similar projects in the past; Gluckman explained that partners were working to piece together County and philanthropic dollars for future efforts. School-district representatives chimed in on the difficulties of juggling instructional time and finding, say, 20 percent of a full-time equivalent (FTE) position to ‘complete’ a music teacher, further acknowledging that state legislative issues are also in play. Karen Anderson from Pasadena Unified commented, “Every single stakeholder needs to understand what Denise is saying—that arts are not an ‘add-on.’ They are an essential need for social/emotional well-being and mental health.”

#### ECC Partner Updates

- DCFS/LACOE Partnership

La Shona Jenkins from the Los Angeles County Office of Education currently co-chairs this partnership with Dr. Stacy Barron from DCFS, who will hand over that department’s leadership to Chief Deputy Director Ginger Pryor and Deborah Silver, head of the Bureau of Clinical Resources, in 2021.

The partnership arose out of the COVID-19 pandemic, when suspected child-abuse reporting dropped drastically because mandated reporters were no longer seeing students in school. One partnership effort was developing a public-awareness campaign about the dangers youth can face with no extra set of eyes on them, for which both DCFS Director Bobby Cagle and Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Debra Duardo recorded public service announcements that have been widely viewed in medical offices and online.

Participating partners include community- and faith-based organizations, youth advocates, minors’ counsel, school districts, LACOE’s foster youth liaisons, and DCFS’s Youth Development Services division. Three committees are active:

- Tech and tutoring—ensuring that students have appropriate devices/internet access (with support from the Board of Supervisors and the nonprofit organization iFoster) plus tutoring assistance
- Caregiver support—determining/providing specific supports caregivers need
- Special education—helping caregivers (plus bio parents in the Voluntary Family Maintenance program) assist special-education students during distance learning, including instructions on Zoom etiquette

Social workers are being encouraged to inquire about how things are going in school during virtual visits with their clients, and a flyer outlining resources available to caregivers is being distributed to families and STRTPs, as well as on the DCFS intranet. Barron will report back to Lisa Pinto, Children's Deputy for the Third Supervisorial District, on data being gathered on electronic devices provided and/or replaced, and the number of students with pending requests.

Chair Garcia encouraged everyone to lift their voices for universal connectivity and regularly updated devices, saying, "The connections made during this pandemic cannot end."

- Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

Pia Escudero, director of LAUSD's School Mental Health unit, outlined that district's switch to virtual learning during the pandemic. "Yes, we need investments in devices," she said, "but other items need the human element." The district has partnered with AmazonConnect to create a hotline—<https://achieve.lausd.net/shhs> or (213) 241-3840, weekdays 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.—for all student health and human service inquiries, has shifted to online school enrollment, and is encouraging immunizations and Medi-Cal enrollment where appropriate. Some school sites have remained open for some activities, but as of December 10, all sites will shut down completely until at least January 11. Only grab-and-go meal services, limited janitorial, and some construction services will remain 'live,' with mental health services, school nurses, and others operating virtually.

Starting January 11, 336 Beyond the Bell LAUSD school sites will provide spaces for kindergartners through twelfth-graders Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., offering wi-fi access and a one-to-twelve staff ratio, and serving breakfast, lunch, and snacks while provide enrichment and learning services during noninstructional hours. Denise Miranda of LAUSD's Student Support Programs reported that 1,164 students have been referred to these sites in the past month—541 foster youth and 523 youth experiencing homelessness.

LAUSD's Homeless Education Office, Miranda added, is hosting its thirteenth annual 'sponsor a family' holiday campaign, which is still accepting sponsors. For further information, please visit [https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/721/pdfs/Sponsor%20A%20Family\\_Flyer\\_110720.pdf](https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/721/pdfs/Sponsor%20A%20Family_Flyer_110720.pdf).

- Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS)

WDACS' Mamikon Nalchajyan agreed that the pandemic has pointed up the need for resources for foster youth, particularly in more isolated parts of the county such as the Antelope Valley. His department partnered with DCFS and America's Job Centers of California (AJCC) in that area to offer a ten-week Youth@Work pilot program preparing foster youth for work at children's services/human services worksites. Eight youth began in early October, five of whom will finish the program, which provides 20 hours of training in 'soft' job skills plus 100 hours of work experience for each youth.

Once youth complete their hours, they will be evaluated and placed in training programs leading to entry-level county careers or jobs with nonprofits or community-based organizations. Nalchajyan said that another pilot will be launched in early 2021, also in the Antelope Valley, and he would like to see the program brought to other parts of the county. When the

project flyer is finalized, he will make it available to the ECC. In the meantime, if anyone is aware of further resources or ideas, please contact him at [MNalchajyan@wdacs.lacounty.gov](mailto:MNalchajyan@wdacs.lacounty.gov).

- FosterEd

Kawena Cole, program manager for the National Center for Youth Law's FosterEd program, explained its three components:

- Adults serving as 'education champions' to support students' long-term success
- Student-centered engagement using positive youth development principles to build strong connections with every young person
- An 'education team' of engaged adults, including education champions, caregivers, agency staff, and the youth themselves

Working within the Lancaster School District and the Antelope Valley Union High School District, FosterEd has served 175 students during the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years, and plans a proactive approach for 2020–2021, especially given pandemic strictures. To identify who needs support next semester, the program reaches out to each foster youth at least monthly, e-mails older students with Google surveys, and collaborates with counselors at K–8 schools to coordinate phone calls to younger students. Questions asked include what changes have occurred for the student in the past 30 days, if they need help contacting an adult, what technological or other support they need for distance learning, if other academic issues exist (credit recovery, tutoring, or Individualized Education Programs), or if food resources or mental health services would be welcome. Education teams also support high school seniors in applying for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA<sup>®</sup>) and California's Chafee grants, covering senior-year expenses, and obtaining Social Security Numbers if they do not have them.

Cole noted the benefits of focusing only on youth in care, the need to adapt to trends noticed from one semester to another, and the responsibility to be creative with outreach. An external evaluation of the program is underway.

- ECC Updates

Stefanie Gluckman briefly mentioned areas in which the ECC continues its work:

- Advocating for funding from the state for school-of-origin transportation for foster youth under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
- A pilot project giving DCFS's Child Welfare Public Health Nurses unit access to foster-youth records on the Los Angeles Network for Enhanced Services (LANES) community-based health information exchange, allowing more accurate and up-to-date Education Passport System records for school districts

### Closing Exercise

Barbara Fant from the Arts for Healing and Justice Network closed the meeting with a short writing exercise for participants: *What's keeping you alive these days? Write a letter from that person, place, or thing to you.*

Next Meeting

The Education Coordinating Council's next meeting is scheduled for:

**Wednesday, March 24, 2021**  
**9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**  
**via Zoom**

Adjournment

There being no public comment, Chair Garcia adjourned the meeting at 11:34 a.m.