



Los Angeles County Office of Education

Serving Students ■ Supporting Communities ■ Leading Educators

Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
Superintendent

March 7, 2022

**Los Angeles County
Board of Education**

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Monte E. Perez

Mr. Sean Garcia-Leys
Probation Oversight Commission
500 West Temple Street, Suite 383
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mr. Sean Garcia-Leys:

On December 16, 2021, I provided feedback to your draft report and it is attached. I would like to reaffirm that LACOE is committed to serving our juvenile justice students. As we continuously improve our programs in order to meet their needs, we welcome collaborating with all our community partners. I appreciate all your efforts as we move forward together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra Duardo".

Debra Duardo, M.S.W., Ed.D.
Superintendent

Attachment

cc: Wendelyn Julien
Erica Reynoso



Los Angeles County Office of Education

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December 16, 2021

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Mr. Sean Garcia-Leys,
Probation Oversight Commission
500 West Temple Street, Suite 383
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mr. Garcia-Leys:

I appreciate the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the draft Probation Oversight Commission Education Report. I hope this is the beginning of a great collaboration with the Probation Oversight Commission.

First and foremost, it is critical to understand that we join you in being advocates for our most vulnerable youth. For me personally, this has been my life's work. At the Los Angeles County Office of Education, we place students at the center of all our programmatic decisions. We believe our students' future is interdependent with the economic and social health of our communities. As educators trained to teach and provide basic services to the most vulnerable youth, we recognize the depth of the trauma many of these students have experienced when they arrive at our schools. Given these students are often only with us for brief periods of time, our tasks are even more urgent and challenging. To that end, we work closely with the County Board of Education, which has oversight over LACOE's educational programs in the juvenile court schools. The County Board of Education adopts the LCAP, and oversees spending plans. We provide the Board with monthly reports and data to ensure that our students are receiving the best services daily.

We appreciate that in your executive summary the POC recognized students in custody as a top priority. And although we appreciate the opportunity to partner with you as advocates for our youth, we hope that your intention is to release a research-based report that accurately reflects our students' experiences. As such, we have read your report carefully and identified the following concerns:

COVID-19 Pandemic

- The report fails to recognize the context of the pandemic, which significantly affected schools across the entire country. The entire educational system was forced to alter its strategies. One of our strategies involved the addition of secured Internet networking to the living units, so that students had access to virtual teachers and were not as isolated. In fact, it was not until LACOE created Internet connection rooms that students were able to virtually connect with their families. The return to in person school has been gradual, with fits and starts attributed to quarantine rules and other effects of the pandemic.
- The report stated that during the pandemic “remote learning period classrooms were staffed in person by probation department officers.” While that is true, there were also para-educators in the classrooms supporting students, as well as administrative staff.
- Based on our information, your visits began on March 31, 2021, one day after our return to in person instruction. While we are proud of the work our staff did to return to in-person instruction, it was certainly not an ordinary day to observe our schools.

Research Methodology

- The report is written as a research paper stating methods and findings even though there was no formal research completed.
- The report is evaluative but does not reflect a clear methodology for data collection during the visits.
- The report repeatedly suggests what teachers and other staff think, without validating where that information comes from with stated facts.
- Findings are not based on facts, but on speculation and conjecture. (For example, “most teachers seemed to believe that minimal work was the best that could be reasonably expected...”) Findings, paragraph 1.
- Please correct the start date from June to March.
- Questions: What dates did you visit? How many classrooms did you visit? How many staff members did you interview? How long were each of your observations? What questions did you ask? How did you record information?

Response to POC Draft Recommendations

- Recommendations, including contracting with another public school district or charter school, and changing state legislation, are proffered, even though you note that the report only reflects “observations of laypeople.”
- What evidence do you have that the recommendations of using a charter school or a school district would yield better student outcomes? The question is more critical given that many of our students have had little, sometimes inconsistent schooling in school districts or charter schools. Upon entering the juvenile halls, students are assessed using the Star Reading and Math assessments to ascertain their reading as well as math level. Data from the assessments administered during the 2020-21 school year revealed that

students entering the Juvenile Court Schools are reading on average at the 4.5 (fourth grade and five months) level and are performing on average in the 4.8 (fourth grade and eight month) level in math. This is well below the students' current grade level which averages in the 11th grade at our juvenile court schools.

- The report states “When there are ambitious reform efforts arising from the staff at a facility, those efforts should be prioritized over fidelity to programs created offsite or attempts to ensure LACOE’s compliance with state law and regulations.” We are leaders in reform, yet, we are required to follow the law. To suggest otherwise is troubling.

Educational Program

- Students are expected to know the number of credits that they have earned and the number they need to finish high school. This requirement is mandated by the DOJ Settlement Agreement, as are other requirements that are criticized in this report.
- The use of the rewards system is also part of the DOJ Settlement Agreement, both the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. These systems are widely used in schools to positively reward good behavior.
- We agree that students should be allowed to express themselves freely and authentically around the themes and content. As such, we have adopted an instructional program that is designed to allow for authentic reflection. We also recognize there is a need to continue to support our staff with professional development that provides them with strategies on how to better structure authentic classroom discussions.
- Thank you for noting that our schools are accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), as this is an extensive process where educational experts evaluate our schools. You can find the WASC reports on our website: <https://www.lacoe.edu/LACOE-Schools/Juvenile-Court-Schools>.
- You make assumptions that the students experience “alienation from the content” that “most students seemed to feel.” LACOE takes issue with this. We recognize the importance of relevant content. In addition, teachers continuously collaborate as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to develop and update RTSA units to address the needs of their students. Each school PLC collaborates to select relevant RTSA themes and to include theme aligned literature in the lessons. This provides an opportunity for the educators who are most connected to the students in the classroom to provide input regarding the lessons and resources for implementation of the RTSA unit, and to provide feedback regarding the effectiveness of implementation.
- We recognize that critical to the process of selecting culturally relevant resources is providing educators with access to professional development that supports examining one's biases and critically examining the learning environment and textbooks, to reflect the students at our school more accurately. Our Equity Specialist and Social Science Program Specialist also support PLCs with sourcing culturally relevant resources and implementing culturally relevant lessons that include increased voice and choice for students. Here are

some of the books that are covered at any time within the RTSA framework and under different themes: *Unbroken, The Hate U Give, Bless Me, Ultima, I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, The Rock and the River, Two Tickets to Freedom, Sojourner Truth, Enrique's Journey, Who's Coming to America, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Ain't I a Woman.*

- Questions: Why are you assuming that the POC visitors were treated as a “welcome disruption?” What facts show that? Why are the ambassadors treated as a negative protocol? Do you know who the students were, how long they had been in the class and what challenges the student had? Does the presence of the observers alter the class behavior, particularly when the observer interacts with the student? Did you ask the adults what their role was in the classroom?

Please know that our LACOE team is committed to our students in the juvenile court schools and to continuing to:

- Work with principals, teachers, staff and students to continuously improve our practices and engage our students.
- Partner with CBOs and other agency partners, including Probation and the Department of Mental Health to best meet the needs of students. Please note - we have shared the list of CBOs that currently work with our schools. CBOs are integrated into the RTSA curriculum to enhance the learning.
- Work with our partner agencies to protect instructional time.
- Teach using culturally relevant curriculum.
- Minimize the use of substitute teachers, as the pandemic has been a challenge to many schools.
- Reach out to parents and engage them in their children's education.

This is not an exclusive list of things we are working on. In the future, we will invite you to our monitoring visits, as we want to collaborate with all partners, as it takes everyone to best serve our students. We look forward to working with you and advocating for our most vulnerable youth.

Sincerely,



Debra Duardo
Superintendent

cc: Julien Wendelyn
Erica Reynoso