

TO: Panelists, Blue Ribbon Panel on School Safety
FROM: Marissa Roy, Chief Consultant to the Blue Ribbon Panel on School Safety
RE: Minutes from April 28th Public Hearing

The second Blue Ribbon Panel hearing took place on April 28th from 2 p.m. to approximately 5 p.m. at Narbonne High School in LAUSD District 7, represented by LAUSD Board Member Richard Vladovic. The meeting opened with the pledge of allegiance presented by Narbonne High School's color guard. The Panel Co-Chair Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer remarked that the Panel had been started in the wake of the tragic mass shooting in Parkland to ensure that safety policies in LAUSD are as effective as they can be. City Attorney Feuer then introduced Board Member Richard Vladovic. Board Member Vladovic stressed that the standard for taking care of our students shouldn't be ordinary care, but extraordinary care to keep students safe from guns and violence in school. After this address, City Attorney Feuer explained that while the first Panel meeting had provided an overview of school safety practices at LAUSD, this second meeting would focus on student mental health on-campus, taking a student-centered approach to school safety. City Attorney Feuer introduced the members of the Panel.

The second Blue Ribbon Panel hearing focused on "Addressing the Isolated Child: School Mental Health Resources, Anti-Bullying Initiatives, and Restorative Justice." The hearing featured presentations from three LAUSD representatives—Pia Escudero, Dr. Judy Chiasson, and Deborah Brandy—as well as expert in school violence across cultures Dr. Ron Avi Astor.

Pia Escudero, Director of School Mental Health at LAUSD, gave the first presentation to the panel. Ms. Escudero emphasized that after finding that trauma was prevalent among students at LAUSD, School Mental Health began transitioning to evidence-based and trauma-informed practices, offering universal, targeted, and intensive services to students. Ms. Escudero described four main programs at LAUSD: 1. School-based services, where schools can opt to "purchase" a social worker, either part-time or full-time—currently, there are approximately 160 social workers at 120 schools; 2. A partnership with the County Department of Mental Health, in which LAUSD is co-located at seven health centers in addition to seven stand-alone mental health clinics and some satellite operations at other schools; 3. Special education services where students can get weekly consultations with psychologists; and 4. Crisis interventions, where schools trained by LAUSD School Mental Health convene crisis teams for students presenting a threat of harm to themselves or others; LAUSD School Mental Health also presides over a team convened from multiple city and state agencies—including LASPD, DCFS, and the L.A. City Attorney's Office—to conduct an in-depth threat assessment for two severe suicidal/homicidal cases each month. Ms. Escudero cited a high need for mental health services at LAUSD. Upon screening 8000 LAUSD students, LAUSD school mental health found that 26% are at high risk for traumatic stress.

Following Ms. Escudero's presentation, panelists had the opportunity to question her in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **City Attorney Feuer opened questioning by asking for the ratio of Psychiatric Social Workers (PSW) to students at LAUSD, noting that a PSW present in the first Panel**

meeting had said the ratio was approximately 1000:1. Ms. Escudero responded that there are 450 PSWs and mental health personnel, but she does not know the ratio to students.

- **City Attorney Feuer followed up by noting that in Denver, the ratio of counselors to students was 330:1. City Attorney Feuer asked if School Mental Health had the resources necessary to evaluate all threats arising from students, given that it is a fairly labor-intensive process.** Ms. Escudero responded that LAUSD's threat assessment model is premised on training each school to assemble a team to conduct threat assessments. She stated that she did not think any county could be prepared for all threats as the need is so great.
- **Antonia Hernandez, President & CEO of the California Community Foundation, asked if School Mental Health worked with kids who are termed "unruly" or "disruptive," but might really have underlying mental health issues.** Ms. Escudero replied that School Mental Health focuses primarily on threatening behavior, but that "disruptive" behavior can be a starting point. She emphasized that School Mental Health is trying to train school personnel on trauma-informed practices, but admitted that "disruptive" behavior might not always be viewed through a mental health lens.
- **Ms. Hernandez followed up by expressing concern that the emphasis on expulsion for unruly behavior disproportionately affects African-American and Latino men.**
- **Julia Macias, President of the LAUSD Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, asked whether School Mental Health examined a correlation between race or socio-economic status and trauma in its screenings.** Ms. Escudero said that she would look at that data for correlations.
- **Laura Chick, former Los Angeles City Controller, asked why a school would opt not to hire a social worker.** Ms. Escudero responded that schools have local control over their budgets and have to make decisions for their schools. Hiring a social worker could come at the expense of having a school nurse or assistant principal.
- **Ms. Chick asked what resources are directed to address students with mental health needs when these students are identified.** Ms. Escudero responded that identification starts in the classroom, and then students are sent to wellness centers or special education consultations if the need is severe.
- **Ms. Chick followed up by asking if these services were adequate.** Ms. Escudero said that while School Mental Health has good processes, there are not enough teams at schools and social workers feel overworked.
- **Rocio Ramirez, a parent leader and PTA vice president, asked how LAUSD is using the parent community to support students in light of scarce resources.** Ms. Escudero responded that School Mental Health provides parenting classes and is embedded in other workshops and campaigns for parents.
- **Ms. Ramirez noted that she is concerned that these programs may not be reaching working parents and suggested using accessible technologies so parents do not have to be physically present to receive the benefits of these programs.**
- **City Attorney Feuer asked if it was the case that suicidal ideation is a risk factor for violence.** Ms. Escudero said that suicidal ideation is a spectrum and can be homicidal.
- **Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Dean at the Charles R. Drew University School of Medicine, said she was impressed by the notion of a curriculum to teach resilience and asked how long and to what extent that program is in place at LAUSD.** Ms.

Escudero responded that the resiliency curriculum has been an LAUSD project for four years in conjunction with UCLA, but did not specify how many schools the program was in.

- **Dr. Prothrow-Stith followed up by asking if LAUSD School Mental Health had a curriculum about emotional intelligence and if the 8,000 screened students had received this curriculum.** Ms. Escudero said she would have to get numbers on how many students had received the resilience curriculum.
- **Daniel Barnhart, United Teachers Los Angeles Secondary Vice President, asked what it would take to have a PSW at every school.** Ms. Escudero noted that there is a California bill that would require a social worker to be present at every school.
- **Dr. Marleen Wong, Senior Vice Dean at USC's Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, noted that students of color have been punished and expelled at disproportionate rates and asked if mental health services are now being brought into these situations.** Ms. Escudero replied that PSWs may not be able to screen each student across the district, but said that there are new programs to link these students to services.
- **Dr. Garen Wintemute, Director of the University of California Firearm Policy Research Center, noted that with a labor force of 450 PSWs for 1100 schools, simple math suggests that most schools aren't getting the services described; the 8000 students screened account for less than 2% of students in the district.** Ms. Escudero replied that School Mental Health is not the only program that is helping students' mental health.
- **Los Angeles School Police Department Chief Steve Zipperman said that the department is involved with parent groups and that parents help direct individual school funds toward services needed at the school. Chief Zipperman expressed support for involving more parents through technology.**

This concluded the panelists' questions for Ms. Escudero.

After Ms. Escudero's presentation, Dr. Judy Chiasson offered a brief overview of LAUSD's anti-bullying programs. Dr. Chiasson noted that bullying is both over-identified and under-reported and that the district seeks to distinguish "teachable moments" from instances of bullying. Dr. Chiasson said that LAUSD Student Health & Human Services trains all LAUSD personnel on bullying prevention twice per year. Dr. Chiasson said that most effective response to bullying is prevention by teaching students to how to build positive peer relationships and properly manage conflict.

Following Ms. Escudero's presentation, panelists had the opportunity to question her in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **Ms. Ramirez asked if there was any training for adults to prevent them from bullying children.** Dr. Chiasson said that emotional regulation should apply to everyone, not just children.
- **City Attorney Feuer noted that statistics suggest that 28% of children feel bullied and asked if LAUSD had statistics for the district.** Dr. Chiasson said that self-

reporting in the district reflected that the percentage of those bullied was in the teens, but said that these numbers likely reflect underreporting.

- **Michael Pinto, an architect and education expert, asked whether teachers were universally trained in anti-bullying practices.** Dr. Chiasson responded that all teachers are trained twice a year as well as if any teacher models inappropriate conduct.
- **City Attorney Feuer asked for the percentage of threats assessed by LAUSD involved students who had been victims or perpetrators of bullying.** Dr. Chiasson said she did not have that data available.
- **Dr. Wong asked how LAUSD is addressing online bullying.** Dr. Chiasson responded that the district was working on teaching students digital citizenship, or how to behave online, noting that students can mitigate online bullying by producing positive counter messages online.
- **Dr. Prothrow-Stith asked for clarification on how bullying is over-identified and underreported and how that relates to race and gender.** Dr. Chiasson clarified that parents often report conduct that isn't really bullying—and thus bullying is over-identified—yet real incidents of bullying are often underreported. Dr. Chiasson stated that she did not have data on race or gender.
- **Dr. Wintemute asked how modifiable bullying behavior is and how often the department sees repeat bullies or victims.** Dr. Chiasson responded that the younger the student is, the more responsive the student is to modifying bullying behavior. Dr. Chiasson acknowledged that there are some students that are repeat victims, even as they change schools; many of these repeat victims are LGBT students or students with special needs.
- **Ms. Macias asked if LAUSD helps empower students who feel bullied by teachers based on their identity.** Dr. Chiasson replied that LAUSD wants students to report these incidents and said that students should report this behavior to someone they trust.
- **Mr. Barnhart commented that anti-bullying programming must be more widespread than two trainings per year and asked how such programming can be integrated school-wide to encourage a more positive school climate.** Dr. Chiasson said the schools that have had the most success integrating anti-bullying initiatives were those that had ongoing programming like “No One Sits Alone” month that engages students to build personal relationships and combat isolation.
- **Chief Zipperman noted that threat assessment data does track bullying and that the Panel should examine this data.**

This concluded the panelists' questions for Ms. Escudero.

After Dr. Chiasson's presentation, Deborah Brandy provided a description of LAUSD's restorative justice initiatives. Ms. Brandy explained that in 2013, the LAUSD School Board approved a motion to integrate restorative justice practices into all schools by 2020. The purposes of restorative justice practices are to set community expectations, reward positive behavior, and redirect negative behavior. Restorative justice practices require a paradigm shift from punitive practices to restorative practices with an emphasis on relationship building. LAUSD trains schools in restorative justice practices over two years: The first year is focused on teaching principals and teachers how to use community building circles in classrooms to identify school values, teach empathy, and diffuse conflict; the second year is about teaching schools how to reintegrate students who are reentering the school community. Ms. Brandy noted that LAUSD

is currently on track to train all schools in restorative justice practices by 2020. She explained that schools were chosen for training based on their suspension rates and incident reports.

Following Ms. Brandy's presentation, panelists had the opportunity to question her in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **City Attorney Feuer asked if any data showed that restorative justice programs reduce instances of school violence.** Ms. Brandy responded that she would say that data shows a reduction in violence where restorative justice is implemented “with fidelity.”
- **Dr. Wong asked who analyzed data of violent incidents at schools and what are the questions that the district wants answered on safety.** Ms. Brandy replied that the data from incident reports (ISTAR) is analyzed by many different departments in LAUSD.
- **Dr. Wong followed up by asking if analyses of aggregated data showed increases or decreases toward violence.** Ms. Brandy did not have information about aggregated data.
- **Mr. Pinto asked if the metrics being used to identify schools for restorative justice training (i.e. suspension rates) are the metrics that correlate with schools across the nation that have had incidences of gun violence.** Ms. Brandy did not have an answer.
- **Mr. Barnhart asked what type of ongoing restorative justice training there will be after 2020 as well as how resistance to restorative justice is addressed.** Ms. Brandy said that training will be ongoing after 2020, especially where there have been staff changes at schools. Ms. Brandy offered that where there is resistance to restorative justice, principals can contact the district for support. Ms. Brandy also noted that auditors have randomly examined thirty schools' restorative justice practices to make sure that schools are implementing the initiative.

This concluded the panelists' questions for Ms. Brandy.

Following the presentations from LAUSD, Dr. Ron Avi Astor provided insight on best practices for providing students with necessary services to reduce violence. Dr. Astor conducts interventions to reduce violence in schools around the world, with much of his work in Israel. Throughout his career, he's helped bring about 50-75% reduction in violence including use of weapons at schools; in the 145 California schools he's worked at, Dr. Astor has helped bring about a 39-55% decrease in weapon use on campus. Dr. Astor noted that he's seen a lot of programs come to schools and fail after three years because of lost funding or new personnel. He emphasized the need for modeling programs based on school need and student input, which in turn would support sustainability. To determine which schools were in the most need of services to reduce violence, Dr. Astor strongly recommended that LAUSD begin participating in the California Healthy Kids Survey—noting that LAUSD is one of the only districts in California that does not participate in the survey. Dr. Astor recounted that the survey asks students if they have ever brought a weapon or seen a weapon on campus. In other California school districts, 6% of students self-report bringing a weapon to campus; 9% of students report being threatened by a weapon on campus; and 20-30% of students report having seen a weapon on campus in the past year. Dr. Astor stressed the benefits of LAUSD participating in this survey not only for comparative reasons, but also to bring this data to individual schools rather than aggregate it. Dr. Astor noted that in his global research, he has found that weapons concentrate at certain

schools—in Israel, 80% of weapons were in 6% of schools—and thus by identifying particularly at-risk schools through collecting data, LAUSD can direct services to these schools.

Following Dr. Astor's presentation, panelists had the opportunity to question him in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **City Attorney Feuer asked Dr. Astor what recommendations he would have for LAUSD aside from using data, bringing it to school sites, and soliciting suggestions through parent and student focus groups.** Dr. Astor responded that those are his main suggestions, but that he would also recommend that PSWs maintain a more sustained presence on the ground at individual LAUSD schools.
- **City Attorney Feuer followed up by asking Dr. Astor if he had examined districts with similar demographics to Los Angeles and could give concrete recommendations for reducing school violence based on best practices in those other districts.** Noting that Los Angeles' demographics are unique, Dr. Astor recommended collecting data from LAUSD schools and then using the demographic data from LAUSD to find comparable districts for best practices.
- **Ms. Chick asked if there are schools that are doing surprisingly well on violence prevention that the state is examining for replicable best practices.** Dr. Astor conceded that the data is revealing schools that are doing surprisingly well on violence prevention, but that California is not examining these schools.
- **City Attorney Feuer followed up on Ms. Chick's question by asking if model schools could be identified with specific criteria.** Dr. Astor said yes and that LAUSD likely already knows the model schools.
- **Chief Zipperman noted that he would be interested to see how many students brought a gun to campus and how many saw it.** Dr. Astor responded that if one student brings a gun, many students might see it and thus feel generally unsafe at school.
- **Chief Zipperman followed up by asking whether violent communities increase the number of weapons on campus or if violent schools make communities unsafe.** Dr. Astor noted that counterintuitively schools often generate some community violence because gang business and drug sales often happen on school grounds.
- **Mr. Pinto noted that in the first panel meeting teachers had said that smaller class sizes would reduce violence and asked whether the presence of more teachers or more social workers correlated with a reduction of violence.** Dr. Astor responded that you need teachers to integrate philosophies of violence reduction in the classroom in order for additional programs and social workers to have a positive effect on violence reduction.
- **Dr. Prothrow-Stith noted asked for examples of model schools where violence reduction programs had been integrated on a large scale sustainably.** Dr. Astor responded that Israel was the gold standard for reducing violence in schools.
- **Ms. Macias asked Dr. Astor for examples of violence reduction programs that had successfully integrated student voices.** Dr. Astor said that every school in the United States has failed in this regard. Dr. Astor noted that the students at Parkland feel that their school has been made a prison, and the principal is not listening to their concerns. Dr. Astor noted that superintendents and principals must accept that a student voice is key.

This concluded the panelists' questions of Dr. Astor.

After questioning had ended, City Attorney Feuer opened the floor for members of the audience—most of whom were current and former LAUSD students, parents, teachers, and employees—to give concise public comments:

- **Three members of the audience** supported integrating the student voice into school decisionmaking by participating the California Healthy Kids Survey, convening student focus groups to discuss school safety, and implementing student focused leadership programs like peer counseling.
- **Two members of the audience** noted that while restorative justice can be helpful to resolve many conflicts, it also cannot stop certain types of violence. For categories of violence that cannot be helped by restorative justice, these members of the public suggested juvenile bootcamp programs.
- **One member of the audience**, an LAUSD teacher, noted that the PSW at her school was initially only budgeted for two days per week at the school, but even when the PSW spent five days per week at the school, she was completely overwhelmed by the caseload. This teacher noted that schools are often choosing between a PSW, a nurse, and a math teacher, and this teacher suggested that the Panel lobby Sacramento for increased funding for PSWs in schools as a public health issue.
- **One member of the audience** noted that students often bring weapons to school for their own protection because there are no safe passages to school and recommended focusing on this aspect of school safety.
- **One member of the audience**, a former PTA president, cautioned the panel that good programs are taking too long to implement and asked that the Panel's recommendations have an accelerated timeline for implementation.

In addition to their comments and suggestions, a number of audience members thanked the panelists for their time and for bringing attention to the important issue of student safety at LAUSD. The meeting closed with information about the next day's panel hearing.