

**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 29th Public Hearing

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The third Blue Ribbon Panel hearing took place on April 29th from 3 p.m. to approximately 5:30 p.m. at Holman United Methodist Church in LAUSD District 1, represented by LAUSD Board Member Dr. George McKenna III. Panel Co-Chair Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer opened the meeting by explaining the purpose of the Blue Ribbon Panel on School Safety and expressing his hope that this Panel would add value to school safety efforts at LAUSD. City Attorney Feuer then introduced Board Member McKenna. Board Member McKenna remarked that unsafe and underperforming schools should be contradictory concepts. He stressed that the lack of resources for schools was the problem, not the students themselves. After this address, City Attorney Feuer provided a summary of the previous two panel meetings and outlined the purpose for the third panel hearing.

The third Blue Ribbon Panel hearing focused on the “Effects of Children’s Exposure to Violence Off-Campus: Violence in the Home and Community.” The hearing featured presentations from Professor Robert Hernandez of the USC School of Social Work, clinical social worker Marisa Faynsod from the Children’s Institute, and LAUSD’s Pia Escudero.

Professor Hernandez gave the first presentation to the Panel. Professor Hernandez engaged the Panel in a visualization meant to put them in the shoes of students in impoverished enclaves who struggle with trauma at school and off-campus. Professor Hernandez noted that there is a 22% increase in trauma symptoms among children who live in impoverished enclaves. This trauma can stem from witnessing violence in the home or community, direct victimization, and the mere fact of living in poverty. Such trauma can have a detrimental impact on the young brain as it develops. As a result, there is a correlation between unaddressed trauma and violent behavior in youth. Professor Hernandez noted that 30-35% of urban youth develop PTSD, a higher rate than deployed soldiers. Professor Hernandez advised that to mitigate this trauma, three institutions—schools, family, and law enforcement—must be upheld because when any one of these institutions is compromised and becomes a source of violence, children will not feel secure and can develop trauma.

Following Professor Hernandez’s presentation, panelists had the opportunity to question him in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **City Attorney Feuer opened questioning by asking for Professor Hernandez’s top recommendations for LAUSD.** Professor Hernandez said that LAUSD needed to continue and expand its trauma-informed and restorative justice practices as well as increase the presence of psychiatric social workers (PSWs) on campuses.
- **City Attorney Feuer followed up by asking if there was any school district that LAUSD should aim to replicate.** Professor Hernandez could not think of school district model, but advised that the Children’s Institute is engaging in positive work in this field.
- **Former California Supreme Court Justice Carlos Moreno asked if research children’s exposure to violence distinguishes between witnesses real acts of violence**

**and witnessing violence in popular media.** Professor Hernandez said that he could not speak to the popular media piece.

- **Dr. Marleen Wong, Senior Vice Dean at USC's Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, noted that Augustus Hawkins High School provides a good model within LAUSD for trauma-informed education.**
- **Pastor Kevin Sauls of Holman United Methodist Church asked Professor Hernandez for his recommendations for administrators and teachers.** Professor Hernandez emphasized building up students' self-esteem and helping them feel engaged with their schools.
- **City Attorney Feuer followed up by asking for concrete steps for building students' self-esteem.** Professor Hernandez mentioned a pilot program in East Hollywood that emphasizes peer mentorship, youth leadership, and building emotional intelligence through healing circles and other strategies.
- **Rocio Ramirez, a parent leader and PTA vice president, asked whether Professor Hernandez believed school curriculums should be changed to teach emotional intelligence.** Professor Hernandez emphasized the importance of integrating emotional intelligence into school curriculums.
- **Los Angeles School Police Department Chief Steve Zipperman asked how to balance the need for law enforcement presence on campus with the necessity for integrating trauma-informed practices.** Professor Hernandez acknowledged that schools do need law enforcement presence, but that the us v. them stigma should be reduced by training law enforcement officers on trauma-informed practices.
- **Julia Macias, President of the LAUSD Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, asked how race and culture would factor into Professor Hernandez's recommendations.** Professor Hernandez responded that race should be acknowledged with the aim of healing rather than blaming.
- **Dr. Garen Wintemute, Director of the University of California Firearm Policy Research Center, asked whether students affected by PTSD symptoms see schools as safe places where they should seek help or if schools are seen as largely irrelevant.** Professor Hernandez replied that this varies from school to school, especially depending on whether students feel like they need to bring weapons to school to protect themselves.
- **Michael Pinto, an architect and education expert, asked whether we should be integrating trauma-informed practices into elementary schools, not just high schools.** Professor Hernandez said yes because the need for trauma-informed practices comes at a very early age.
- **Daniel Barnhart, United Teachers Los Angeles Secondary Vice President, asked for Professor Hernandez's thoughts on how to integrate these programs into schools given the transiency of schools.** Professor Hernandez said that LAUSD needs to focus on retaining students at schools.
- **City Attorney Feuer asked whether addressing children's trauma starts with schools or the community.** Professor Hernandez noted that exposure to violence in the communities manifests at school so both schools and the community need to work together.

This concluded the panelists' questions for Professor Hernandez.

After Professor Hernandez's presentation, Marisa Faynsod gave a presentation on children's exposure to violence and the work that the Children's Institute does to address the effects of this exposure. Ms. Faynsod began by defining trauma as stemming from direct victimization from violence, witnessing violence, hearing a violent act, experiencing extreme poverty, or even overexposure to violence in popular media. Ms. Faynsod told the panel that this trauma can change the brain on a cellular level. When children are exposed to trauma, their stress systems become over-activated while the parts of the brain related to impulse control and reasoning become underdeveloped as a direct result. This can lead children to experience symptoms of PTSD, impact their academic performance, contribute to higher rates of suspension/expulsion/absenteeism, and lead children to act violently. Additionally, this exposure to adverse childhood experiences can lead children to develop many health issues as adults, including cancer and heart disease. The Children's Institutes emphasizes the need for screening children for traumatic experiences to direct them to mental health services. The Children's Institute screens children for trauma and then conducts a ten week group program to help children process their trauma and learn social problem solving skills. The Children's Institute has a memorandum of understanding with 11-13 LAUSD schools to conduct these programs as well as ongoing therapy because LAUSD only has the resources to address situations that have turned into crises. Ms. Faynsod recommended that collaboration with schools needs to increase and involve the community; that trauma-informed care needs to be integrated into trainings for all LAUSD employees; that mindfulness exercise like yoga need to be integrated into the school day; that students need to be given a place to go like a sensory room to relax or process emotions at school; and that families and communities need to be educated about the effects of trauma on children.

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

- **City Attorney Feuer opened questioning by asking for recommendations on how to expand the types of intervention that the Children's Institute offers.** Ms. Faynsod emphasized that there are many organizations and departments that do work similar to Children's Institute and that the Children's Institutes tries to focus on giving in-depth services to fewer schools rather than shallower services to more schools.
- **City Attorney Feuer followed up by asking how the Children's Institute determines which schools to work at.** Ms. Faynsod responded that Children's Institute looks for schools where a high number of students display symptoms of trauma and where principals are receptive to trauma-informed practices.
- **Juan Flecha, President of the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles, noted that as long as the priority for teachers and administrators is student test results, emotional intelligence will fall by the way-side. Mr. Flecha asked for recommendations on this point.** Ms. Faynsod responded that it needs to be emphasized to teachers that when students are nurtured and their emotional needs are met, their academic performance will improve.
- **Dr. Wintemute asked what the Children's Institute is doing to document their procedures, evaluate their effectiveness, and get the word out about trauma-informed practices.** Ms. Faynsod responded that the Children's Institute uses the UCLA trauma index to measure trauma before and after treatment and generate reports from this

research. She relayed that the indexes have shown children's improvement and that this information has been shared with the county Department of Mental Health to inform their evidence-based practices.

- **City Attorney Feuer noted that the panel is focusing on school safety and asked if there was data tying trauma informed practices to a reduction in violent behavior.** Ms. Faynsod said she did not have that data.
- **Ms. Ramirez asked how schools can work with what they have to make their environment more engaging and friendly.** Ms. Faynsod emphasized that school culture must be set by the principal and administration. She recommended that principals have an open door policy, coffees with parents, and implement initiatives like encouraging an act of kindness every day.
- **Chief Zipperman asked if schools are addressing trauma in children too late.** Ms. Faynsod said that caregivers and parents should be given information on childhood trauma as early as possible.
- **Chief Zipperman followed up by asking how schools could get a profile on children's exposure to trauma upon enrollment.** Ms. Faynsod noted that this would likely require parental consent and release for children to take an adverse childhood experience (ACE) survey.
- **Pastor Sauls asked for LAUSD's current investment in trauma informed care.** Ms. Faynsod said that the Children's Institute has contracts with 11 schools and has fielded 165 referrals for mental health treatments.

This concluded the panelists' questions for Ms. Faynsod.

After Ms. Faynsod's presentation, LAUSD Director of School Mental Health Pia Escudero gave a brief address about how LAUSD addresses students affected by trauma. Ms. Escudero emphasized that LAUSD is transitioning to incorporate more trauma-informed practices, but noted that there is no funding available for these programs because funding is tied to grants with specific purposes. Ms. Escudero recommended that the Panel advocate for state or federal grants that are tied to integrating trauma-informed practices into schools and that the Panel consider how different community agencies and organizations can partner to address childhood trauma.

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 whether students have a choice whether to participate in mental health programming upon referral.** Ms. Escudero replied that most programs require parental consent and acknowledged that sometimes that is an issue preventing treatment.
- **City Attorney Feuer asked how data on student trauma at LAUSD is being used to reorganize policies and services.** Ms. Escudero responded that each school makes decisions based on data whether to hire a school social worker.
- **Dr. Wintemute asked whether it would be a good idea to have all students do periodic resilience check-ins.** Ms. Escudero said that this is LAUSD's vision, and currently LAUSD is doing this screening in 60 schools.

- **City Attorney Feuer asked how rates of student mental health issues at LAUSD compare with other districts.** Ms. Escudero did not have this data, but Dr. Wong noted that LAUSD is a poverty district with a high association of risk factors and could likely be compared to New York City, Chicago, Miami, or New Orleans.
- **Ms. Ramirez ask what steps are being taken to address the rates of trauma that LAUSD's data is showing.** Ms. Escudero said that information from LAUSD's data is being used to inform schools on their areas for growth so that schools can decide how they want to allocate their resources.
- **Ms. Ramirez followed up by asking how Ms. Escudero would recommend involving parents.** Ms. Escudero said that schools need to talk to parents directly, not just through technology.
- **Mr. Flecha asked how LAUSD employees should be engaging in self-care.** Ms. Escudero responded that teachers need to take care of themselves so that they do not burn out.
- **Pastor Sauls asked how the faith community can help children affected by trauma.** Ms. Escudero said that schools need to partner more with communities like the faith community to provide families with greater support.

This concluded the panelists' questions of Ms. Escudero.

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:

- **Six members of the audience**, student activists, called for an end to LAUSD's policy of randomly searching students with handheld metal detector wands. These commenters noted that 96% of school districts do not randomly search students and asserted that wandering disproportionately targets students of color, making them feel unsafe.
- **Four members of the audience** emphasized the need to shift the paradigm at schools away from over-disciplining children to emphasize learning and empathy. One member of the audience said that there was not a money problem at LAUSD but rather a problem of priorities.
- **Two members of the audience** called for greater attention to students voices when evaluating school culture and safety.

After the audience had given comments, Chief Zipperman announced that LASPD was convening a student task for to reevaluate LAUSD's random metal detector wandering policy. Many student members of the audience signed up to receive further information on this task force. The meeting closed with information about the panel hearing on May 6th.