



Governor's Office of
Planning and Research

To: California Racial Equity Commissioners
From: Racial Equity Commission Staff
Re: Los Angeles, CA Community Meet-n-Greet Event Summary, May 8th, 2024
Date: July 17th, 2024

On May 8th, 2024, Racial Equity Commission Staff cohosted a Community Meet-n-Greet at [Community Coalition](#) (CoCo) in South Central Los Angeles with the Youth Empowerment Commission and the Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications (OCPSC). Commissioner Dr. Manuel Pastor attended for the first 30 minutes, after which Commissioner Gabriel Maldonado and Commissioner Simboa Wright joined. Around 100 community members attended. SEIU Local 721 donated dinner and CoCo provided Spanish translation.



CoCo, founded by Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, is an organization with deep ties in the South Central Los Angeles community that “trains activists and organizers in order to support power building with Black, Brown, Indigenous, and people of color.” The evening focused on engaging with and learning from CoCo’s youth members and parents.



Opening remarks

Commissioner Pastor, a board member of CoCo, provided the night’s opening remarks. He shared that the Racial Equity Commission is meant to take a view of racial equity and drive it through state government to make sure that state policies pay attention to racial disparities, correct racial inequities of the past, and ensure full participation by communities of color. The goal is to make sure that future decisions do not worsen disparities, but rather ameliorate them. Commissioner Pastor shared his belief that because California should be ensuring racial harmony for

future generations, it is important for the Commission to hear directly from young people. We also heard from CoCo President and CEO Alberto Retana, who spoke about the core visions of the organization and highlighted the meet-n-greet as an opportunity to openly talk about systemic racism in their communities and the ways they are impacted. He talked about the structural racism in the school systems, such as not having enough teachers and resources, poorly maintained and expensive housing, and racism experienced by communities from police. CoCo members are currently engaged in efforts to combat structural racism,



including fighting to close motels and turn them into senior living centers, parks, housing centers, places of employment.

Benjamin Casar, Associate Director of Youth Programs, co-presented with Devin, a youth leader from Coco's [South Central Youth Empowered thru Action](#) (SCYEA), on the group's ongoing campaigns, which include:

- The Student Equity Needs Index (SENI) fund is a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) equitable funding formula secured for the next two years that allocates more money to the schools that need it most. CoCo is advocating to the school board to continue SENI funding for the 2026-27 school year and beyond.
- [The Police Free LAUSD](#) coalition fights for their vision to remove police presence from schools and reinvest the police budget into programs that serve students.
- The [Black Student Achievement Plan](#) (BSAP) is a program created by Black students that provides "culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, partnerships with community-based organizations, and increased staffing to provide targeted supports for academic performance, social-emotional development, positive cultural identity formation, and a reimagined school safety".¹ SCYEA youth have continued to advocate for funding for BSAP, African American studies classes, and academic support tailored to Black students.
- Many SCYEA and CoCo youth participate in [Brothers, Sons, Selves](#), a coalition fighting against the criminalization of young men and boys of color in community and educational settings. They advocate for a positive school culture that makes these young men and boys feel safe, affirmed, seen, and respected.
- SCYEA has been meeting with Superintendent Carvalho to center equity, justice, and south central in decisions. Only 3% of LAUSD's \$18 billion dollar budget follows the equitable funding model, and SCYEA wants to 100% of funding equitable funding.

Interactive activity led by Youth Empowerment Commission and OCPSC

Thomisha Wallace, Executive Director of the Youth Empowerment Commission, co-led an activity with OCPSC's Executive Director Yumi Sera and Partnerships Deputy Director Aubrie Fong. The icebreaker activity included questions such as "TikTok or Instagram?" and "Taco Bell or Del Taco?" to prompt discussion. When asked the question, "What makes you feel connected to your community?", many responses cited CoCo's members and programs. Many attendees also shared that they feel connected to their community when they look past differences and find common experiences among one another. When asked, "What could be implemented to help deepen your connection to your community?", attendees shared that they would like to see more connection across racial groups and increased unity. They also want lower gas and food prices, lower taxes, better schools, and more place like CoCo that provide spaces to hold dialogues about community needs.

Following the icebreaker, attendees broke into five small groups to discuss the questions, "If financial barriers did not exist, what would you do to take care of yourself mentally and physically?" and "What could be implemented within your schools to enhance your educational experience?". Coco's community organizer, Enrique Gaspar, supported Staff in facilitating the small group discussion among Spanish-

¹ [The Legacy of Brown v. Board Today - Community Coalition \(cocosouthla.org\)](#)



speaking attendees. For this activity, parents, community members, and youth came together to hold discussions with a broad range of perspectives.

Commissioner Maldonado facilitated the final portion of the activity: the share out. A representative from each group shared main points from their discussions. These are some common themes across groups:

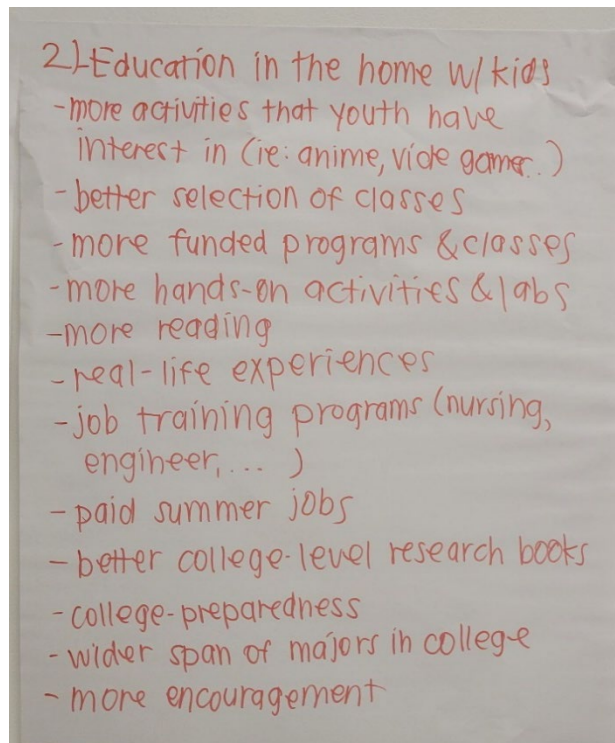
Question 1: If financial barriers did not exist, what would you do to take care of yourself mentally and physically?



- **Economic pressures relieved**
 - Parents shared that they would feel happier and less stressed because they would not have to worry about being able to afford bills and food.
- **Family and community**
 - Not having to worry about money for food and bills would allow community members to spend more time with the people who matter most to them.
- **More time and freedom to do what they enjoy**
 - Community members shared they would spend time on hobbies such as horseback riding, meditating, enjoying nature, travelling, and listening to music.
 - They would have more time to themselves.

Question 2: What could be implemented within your schools to enhance your educational experience?

- **Stronger support mechanisms provided by schools**
 - Parents want their children to have more guidance counselors who can provide mentorship, empathy, and motivation for student. They also want teachers and other faculty to be trained about mental health to gain skills for supporting students in crisis.
 - Parents want schools to be safe for students with special needs.
 - They want schools to have smaller classes, more teachers, and a wider selection of courses.
 - Parents want schools to provide students with skills such as auto shop, welding, carpentry, and money management.





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- Parents want their kids to have access to healthier and tastier school meals.
- Parents want schools to ask students what they would like to gain from their educational experience.
- **Parental involvement**
 - Parents want to bring back the Parent Teachers Association and other opportunities for parents and guardians to volunteer their time.
- **After school activities**
 - Parents want their children to have the option to participate in after school programs at all ages, including extracurricular activities that provide physical activity.

Considerations for the Commission

This community meet-n-greet gave Staff and Commissioners the opportunity to step into the CoCo community and learn about their passions and long history of advocacy. They have a strong drive to continue advocating for equity in their schools and turn to the Commission to make recommendations that transform the current system of government policies into one that supports them in their campaigns such as securing equitable school funding and embedding community priorities into decisions made by school leaders.

Prepared by Ashley Gerrity, Senior Program Analyst