

# Table of Contents

## AGENDA ITEMS

- Annual Election of Officers
- Executive Officers Report

## PAUL TOUGH PRESENTATION

- Paul Tough Biography and Background
- Summary “**How Children Succeed**” Grit Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character by Paul Tough
- *What if the Secret to Success is Failure?* New York Times September 18, 2011

## OBESITY PREVENTION

- Candice Taylor Lucas, MD, MPH Curriculum Vitae
- Dan Cooper, MD Biography
- Commission Obesity Prevention Investments
- Overweight and Obesity Literature Review-Healthier OC Collaborative Workshops - Orange County Alliance for Community Health Research
- Resources for Primary Care Pediatric Practitioners Addressing Nutrition and Physical Activity Intervention Programs for Children 0-5 years by Abbey Alkon, PNP PhD and Candice T. Lucas, MD, MPH; Jan. 2013

## DISCUSSION

- Strategic Plan Update and Discussion Questions
- Goal Area Reports
  - Annual Summary
  - Healthy Children
  - Early Learning
  - Strong Families
  - Capacity Building
- Examples of Age Continuum / Pathway Models
  - THINK Together, Santa Ana Promise Neighborhood Application
  - OC STEM Initiative
  - Strive Student Roadmap to Success
  - Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade, Project on Effective Interventions at Harvard University, Pathways Mapping Initiative
  - Pathway to Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Project on Effective Interventions at Harvard University, Pathways Mapping Initiative



May 23, 2013

Dear Commissioners,

As my tenure as chair of the Children and Families Commission comes to a close, I thank you for your bold leadership, steadfast dedication, and generous support. These past two years have brought significant changes to the Commission...changes that were sometimes challenging, exciting, and even bittersweet.

Regardless of the changes that occurred, the quality of our programs and services remained constant. How proud I am of what we as a Commission have achieved and what I know we will continue to accomplish in the years ahead. Our initial strategic vision of *All Children are Healthy and Ready to Succeed* has not changed. Likewise, our commitment to fund programs in health, early education, and family support continues to address the whole child and to fulfill the vision that remains relevant still today.

Following the successful AB 99 lawsuit, we instituted a major change in how we fund programs. The catalytic approach, recommended in the Bridgespan Strategic Assessment, requires us to be strategic in making one-time grants that truly change the system of services for young children and families. While this change has been challenging, it has allowed us to invest over \$50 million in sustainable programs for children and families over the next 10 years. Currently, our catalytic funding strategy supports pediatric dental services, provides comprehensive services for children with autism and neurodevelopmental disorders, ensures on-going early literacy and math programs, and is building new emergency shelters for homeless mothers and their children.

At our upcoming June planning meeting, we will discuss with author Paul Tough the concepts from his recent book *How Children Succeed*; this discussion should cause us to think about the programs we fund and whether the children we support are succeeding. I look forward to exploring how we can better equip children with the skills they need to be successful in school and throughout their lives. Also at this meeting we will hear a presentation on obesity prevention from Dr. Candice Taylor Lucas. Her expertise on this issue, coupled with her new assignment here in Orange County, gives us an opportunity to discuss our response to this concern. The facilitated discussion process will allow us to identify potential gaps in critical services for children and determine our focus for the next year.

In my opinion, the most significant changes that occurred these past two years have centered on personnel. After almost 13 years as the executive director who launched and led the Commission, Michael Ruane left us to pursue a new challenge. Christina Altmayer stepped up from her role as a valued consultant to the executive director position. In addition to employee changes, we have seen changes on the dais as several new Commissioners replaced long-time Commissioners and brought with them new perspectives and ideas.

As we approach the 15-year anniversary of the passage of Proposition 10 this coming November, we must take time to review Commission accomplishments, confirm critical priorities, and secure sustainability to support effective programs. Again, I thank you for your ongoing support these past two years and extend my congratulations to our new chair. I know that you join me in pledging to ensure that all children in Orange County are healthy and ready to succeed when they enter kindergarten.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra Barry".

Sandra Barry  
Chair, Children and Families Commission of Orange County

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