



Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Educator Listening Sessions

INGLEWOOD UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, LOS ANGELES

SUMMARY REPORT



Introduction

This document outlines key themes and recommendations from a series of listening sessions with educators within the Inglewood Unified School District (IUSD), Los Angeles County, regarding their experience as mandated reporters in California.

Laurel Bear, PhD, led and conducted these listening sessions, in partnership with [Just Advocates](#) and [Safe & Sound](#). We are grateful to The Greater LA Education Foundation for their generous support of this work. We are also grateful to Megan Salazar, Ken Berrick, and Katie Albright for their strategic guidance and support along the way.

During the 2023 calendar year, civic leaders representing diverse public agencies, non-profit service providers, and philanthropy have come together to build innovative programming that has the potential to improve outcomes for thousands of families across Los Angeles County: specifically to improve mandated reporting in the county's public schools. A key element of this work has included facilitating listening sessions with mandated reporters from Inglewood Unified School District to help inform a new program design and training to be piloted in local public school districts and support regional reform.

Methodology

To this end, Dr. Bear conducted listening sessions over the course of several months in 2023, in group-based and individual formats with a combined total of 49 participants. These sessions covered five broad categories of information:

1. Role and Experience
2. Child Abuse Training and Knowledge
3. Reporting Process and Support
4. Experience with Reporting
5. System and Training Improvement

In partnership with local stakeholders and leaders, Dr. Bear developed a series of questions designed to elicit information and feedback from Listening Session participants across these five categories. The goal set forth was to capture the professional background of participants, including their roles and length of time working in the district, their understanding of mandates, their experience with mandated reporting and associated training(s), and based on their knowledge and experience – where they identify gaps and opportunities in both systems and trainings.

Participants in these listening sessions included administrators; classified and certificated staff (e.g., teachers, psychologists, counselors); and safety and district police department staff (sworn, civilian, and support). Participants' length of employment working in the Inglewood Unified School District varied from 1.5 to 29 years.

Dr. Bear was engaged to lead this series of listening sessions because of her deep roots in and understanding of the Los Angeles County education system, her experience as a transformative education leader, and the trust she has cultivated throughout her time within the targeted community. Dr. Bear spent over 38 years with the Alhambra Unified School District (AUSD), and during this time built AUSD's Golden Bell Award-winning Gateway to Success program (Gateway). Gateway is now nationally recognized as a model of integrated mental health, prevention, and safety in schools. Gateway was developed in partnership with a diverse array of community members and stakeholders as a way to deliver school-based mental health assessments, education, and services to thousands of students and families – addressing school safety by focusing in part on the mental health and social-emotional well-being of students. Dr. Bear retired from AUSD as their Assistant Superintendent of Student and Employee Welfare and has since been serving as a consultant to the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health and the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

Listening Session Questions

This section provides the specific questions that guided each Listening Session. Based on the participants and discussion, questions were tailored to maximize the information gained in each session. These questions include two formats: Mentimeter, an interactive software that allows participants to share their responses anonymously in written format; and Discussion.

CATEGORY 1: ROLE AND EXPERIENCE

- ▶ What is your role, title, and responsibility within the district?
- ▶ How long have you been working in the Inglewood District? Role?
- ▶ How long have you been an educator? (understanding of mandates)
- ▶ What other districts have you worked in and what assignments have you held?
- ▶ Have you ever been a volunteer in the Inglewood District and in what capacity?

CATEGORY 2: CHILD ABUSE TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE

Mentimeter

- ▶ How do you differentiate between behaviors indicative of child abuse versus neglect?
 - **Template:** Open Ended (allows for free text response)
- ▶ How would you rate the effectiveness of the child abuse training you've received? Do you feel it adequately prepared you to recognize and respond to suspected child abuse cases?
 - **Template:** Scales (participants can rate on a scale of 1-10)
- ▶ What key points from your mandated reporter/child abuse training do you remember clearly and why?
 - **Template:** Open-ended (allows for free text response)
- ▶ How familiar are you with the IUSD Suspected Child Abuse Reporting Board Policy?
 - **Template:** Multiple Choice (options could range from "Very Familiar" to "Not Familiar")

CATEGORY 2 (CONTINUED)

Discussion

- ▶ What type of child abuse training have you had, and how often have you received it? What is the format for this training?
- ▶ What was compelling about the training you received? What was not adequate, and what improvements would you recommend?
- ▶ What do you remember about your mandated reporter/child abuse training and responsibilities? Why do you remember those aspects?
- ▶ What are the top three things you know about your responsibilities regarding mandated reporting?
- ▶ Are you familiar with IUSD Board Policy and have you been provided this policy? If so, what do you remember about it?

CATEGORY 3: REPORTING PROCESS AND SUPPORT

Mentimeter

- ▶ How would you describe your confidence level when filing a suspected child abuse report?
 - **Template:** Scales (participants can rate on a scale of 1-10)
- ▶ Before filing a suspected child abuse report, whom do you contact, and what topics do you discuss?
 - **Template:** Open-ended (allows for free text response)
- ▶ Have you ever felt the need for support or guidance while handling a suspected child abuse/neglect case?
 - **Template:** Multiple Choice (options could include “Yes,” “No,” or “Sometimes”)

Discussion

- ▶ Describe the process and procedures for reporting suspicions of child abuse or neglect in your school and district.
- ▶ How confident are you when filing a child abuse report and believe it is the appropriate action step in response to what is needed?

CATEGORY 3 (CONTINUED)

- ▶ Do you consult with anyone before making a report? If so, who and what do you discuss? If not, why?
- ▶ Is there a list of school, district, and community resources and referrals you can use/make when support is needed, but a child abuse report is not warranted?
- ▶ Are you aware of a consultation service or support when filing a report? If so, what?
- ▶ Are you aware of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Child Protection Hotline's consultation line; have you used it?
- ▶ How do you define student and family support?
- ▶ Have you provided support or guidance to a parent/family regarding a possible issue of child abuse or neglect?
- ▶ Would establishing a decision-support process involving discussing concerns with a colleague or using a decision tree be helpful?

CATEGORY 4: EXPERIENCE WITH REPORTING

Mentimeter

- ▶ How many child abuse reports have you filed in your career?
 - **Template:** Open Ended (allows for free text response)
- ▶ Have you ever filed a suspected child abuse report when you believe the child was in need of additional family resources?
 - **Template:** Multiple Choice (options could include “Yes,” “No,” or “I prefer not to say”)
- ▶ Were you able to maintain a positive relationship with a child and their caregiver/guardian after filing a suspected child abuse report?
 - **Template:** Multiple Choice (options could include “Yes,” “No,” or “Sometimes”)

Discussion

- ▶ How many reports have you made over your career? How many in a single year?
- ▶ What was your experience in filing a child abuse report for each report? Can you tell us what happened when you filed a report?

CATEGORY 4 (CONTINUED)

- ▶ Have you ever made a report to DCFS when you did not believe that a child was at imminent risk of harm but because you believed that a caregiver and student needed resources?
- ▶ Were you able to maintain a relationship with the child and parent after you filed a report, even if they were made aware that you were the reporting party? If so, how were you able to navigate maintaining the relationship?

CATEGORY 5: SYSTEM AND TRAINING IMPROVEMENT

Mentimeter

- ▶ What are your suggestions for improving the current suspected child abuse reporting procedures?
 - **Template:** Open-ended (allows for free text response)
- ▶ What changes or additions would you like to see in the mandated reporter training in education?
 - **Template:** Open-ended (allows for free text response)
- ▶ How comfortable are you asking for additional information before making a child abuse report?
 - **Template:** Scales (participants can rate on a scale of 1-10)
- ▶ How do you think [cultural/racial/economic/etc.] bias influences reporting decisions?
 - **Template:** Open-ended (allows for free text response)

Discussion

- ▶ What do you know about what happens after a report is made to the DCFS hotline?
- ▶ Do you believe the child welfare department receiving the report handled the call well? Did they follow through with the report? How do you know that?
- ▶ What changes would you suggest with the current child abuse and neglect reporting procedures?
- ▶ What changes or additions would you suggest for mandated reporter training in education?
- ▶ What resources or support do you need as a mandated reporter with suspected child abuse?
- ▶ Are you comfortable asking clarifying questions to get more information before making a child abuse report?

CATEGORY 5 (CONTINUED)

- ▶ Is asking clarifying questions encouraged or allowed before making a report?
- ▶ What are your thoughts about the role of [cultural/racial/economic/etc.] bias in reporting?

RECOMMENDATIONS: QUESTIONS FOR CERTAIN ROLES

Educators: Questions related to:

- ▶ Child abuse training
- ▶ Reporting process
- ▶ Experience with reporting
- ▶ Resources or support needed
- ▶ Board Policy Review

School Administrators: Questions related to:

- ▶ Reporting Procedures
- ▶ Support for Educators
- ▶ System Improvement
- ▶ Board Policy Review

School Counselors and Psychologists: Questions related to:

- ▶ Consulting with others before making a report
- ▶ Providing support or guidance to families
- ▶ Maintaining relationships with children and parents
- ▶ Board Policy Review

Listening Session Summary of Findings

This section provides a compiled summary of the information shared over the course of the educator listening sessions facilitated by Dr. Bear. They are organized by category, and where quotation marks are visible, are direct quotes from participants:

CATEGORY 1: ROLE AND EXPERIENCE

Role, title, and responsibility within the district's listening sessions

Administration: 6 Administrators

Classified Child Welfare & Attendance (CWA), including school counselors: 3

Certificated Staff: 23 Teachers/Psychologist/Counselors

Safety and District Police Department Staff: 6 (sworn staff, civilian and support staff)

Miscellaneous Staff: 11 requested not to disclose their job title/responsibilities, (certificated and classified)

Length of employment working in the Inglewood District

Individual length of employment varied from 1.5 to 29 years.

Discussion: Understanding of child abuse reporting mandates

The understanding by staff regarding child abuse reporting, “if you suspect, child abuse, you are ‘mandated to report,’” in the role and responsibility as mandated reporter/employee, you are “NOT to investigate,” you may ask questions for “purposes of clarity,” however “your job is NOT to investigate.” Minimal resources are provided by staff to students/families; staff did not perceive connecting families to resources as their role with respect to the mandated reporting requirements. During the listening sessions, staff often described that their understanding is the requirement “to report,” this is interpreted as the largest concern for a variety of reasons. Participants interpret this as a “fear base requirement and the law.” Staff expressed significant concern about the possibility that they may be “penalized, fined and/or lose their credential,” if they fail to report suspected child abuse. Over 50% of the participants believed that the training “evoked a level of fear.”

Staff who were members of the IUSD Police Department, both sworn and/or civilian staff, were able to best describe their role, their required policy of practice, and how they work with

CATEGORY 1 (CONTINUED)

the City Police Department as well as with the Department of Children Services. They spoke about their responsibility as very “matter of fact,” with limited responsibility and/or opportunity to provide resources, as they relied on the school district staff to provide this additional information and support the students and/or their families. The responsibilities that participants discussed pertained to their specific role and/or job classification within the district, but did not pertain, “directly,” to resource and/or support to students/families in the event of a child abuse report was filed.

Discussion: The variety of assignments held in IUSD and/or other Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

Participants in the listening sessions described the fact that all school employees are “mandated reporters.” There was no initial discussion regarding “supporting rather than reporting,” until the facilitator posed the descriptor of “support.” Participants embraced that statement and expressed the need to acquire additional resources and support, in order to provide resources for the students and families. Additionally, several participants expressed a need to receive additional guidance and/or assistance, by having IUSD provide a “support system,” an “expert” that the staff member would be able to contact in order to further consult with and/or someone who could provide a family with resources when there is a concern and need for support. It was expressed by several participants that the current practice is “extremely stressful,” very isolating, and provides the opportunity for limited support. Often the employee is not confident sharing specific circumstances with other colleagues.

CATEGORY 2: CHILD ABUSE TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE

Familiarity with the IUSD Suspected Child Abuse Reporting Board Policy

Most individuals that participated in the listening sessions had some familiarity of IUSD’s Board Policy and Administrative Regulations (AR), however, they stated that they had not reviewed the Board Policy/AR for some time and had a difficult time referencing specifics within the IUSD Board Policy/AR. They were able to generally speak to the fact that they are “mandated reporters,” and as such, they are legally responsible to “report suspected child abuse, however, they ‘may not investigate.’”

CATEGORY 2 (CONTINUED)

Understanding of key points from mandated reporter/child abuse training

Participants had difficulty recalling the specifics of the mandated child abuse training. They conveyed that their high priority concern was to “report, not to investigate,” along with their “fear of a fine, imprisonment and/or loss of their credential or employment, if they failed to report.” The majority of participants shared that the online training was not engaging, that they were easily distracted due to participating in the same online training repeatedly for several years, and that the training did not truly represent what their needs were as mandated reporters in schools. When asked what those “needs are,” several stated:

- ▶ Additional support by IUSD leadership,
- ▶ Opportunities to consult with an “expert” within IUSD,
- ▶ Changes within the training modality, and
- ▶ The availability of regular community resources for their students and their families.

Discussion: The effectiveness of the child abuse training you have received

Participants in the listening sessions agreed that the training needs to be updated. Additionally, the general consensus is that the training did not represent communities similar to Inglewood. Participants expressed in the group that the training was very dry, unwavering, and did not speak about resources and/or opportunities for students and/or parents. The Police staff believed the training to be adequate, however they did recognize and communicate that their role in IUSD is different than the “educators,” and that they support the Inglewood City Police Department, when a “SCARS [Suspected Child Abuse Report] report is filed.” The staff expressed the desire to have some type of “hybrid training, in which a portion of the training would take place online, (booster type training), with another portion of the training in person, especially for new employees.” They even expressed that the “booster training” could possibly be remote, while the “initial training” could/should be presented in person. The recommendation was that the in-person training would describe and provide resources, expand on the opportunity to “support students” and their families, and provide the opportunity to discuss prior cases with an expert. Additionally, several participants requested to recruit a trainer who “represents and understands” IUSD, and described this as extremely important.

CATEGORY 2 (CONTINUED)

Discussion: Preparedness with reporting suspected child abuse cases

The general consensus is that staff believe they were adequately trained to simply report “suspected child abuse.” However, they expressed concern by stating that they did not believe that they were adequately trained to “support” students and/or families, to further their discussion with students and/or families about such a sensitive topic, to provide resources to students and/or families, in recruiting additional family support, or to provide and/or expand upon their knowledge regarding this difficult topic. Staff also expressed their reluctance and were uncertain of where they could direct families for ongoing services or guidance.

CATEGORY 3: REPORTING PROCESS AND SUPPORT

Confidence level when completing a suspected child abuse report

Participants stated that they simply followed the directions when reporting suspected child abuse and that they were knowledgeable on how to go online to complete a suspected child abuse report. Very few of the participants had used the “consultation line,” although most of them expressed that they were aware of this service. Additionally, staff expressed their level of stress when filing a suspected child abuse report. They also expressed their concern about sharing this information with anyone, including colleagues or supervisors; their biggest fear is that the information would be communicated to the involved family. Many of the participants discussed the length of time that it takes to complete and file a report. Lastly, several participants expressed that they did not feel supported when filing a report, while sharing the information with the hotline. They felt as if they were questioned for their “integrity,” their “lack of judgment,” and the “validity of filing the report.”

Discussion: Staff supports when exploring the consideration of suspected child abuse report (who do staff contact, and what topics to address)

Participants discussed and fully agreed that there exists a need to explore additional “staff support” when filing a suspected child abuse report. The exception to this request came from the IUSD Police Department, sworn and civilian staff, as they did not believe that there was a need for additional support. However, they did convey that they seek support from their City Police Department partners. Generally, IUSD school site and district staff strongly believe

CATEGORY 3 (CONTINUED)

that the additional support would provide assurance, guidance, and the ability to debrief after such a difficult and stressful matter. Currently, staff did report that they were not comfortable sharing circumstance specifics prior to filing a suspected child abuse report, primarily because of the associated “stigma” that they believe may potentially transpire if they were to share with others. Staff also extensively discussed the need for support and/or guidance when filing a suspected child abuse report and/or making a determination as to whether they will need to file a report. Several of the staff involved in the listening sessions discussed and expanded upon the stress they experienced while filing a report. Stress was identified during the course of filing a suspected child abuse report. Additionally, several staff described how stressful it was when the student asked about “why a report was filed” and/or shared the “disruption caused because of a report filed.” Staff did not believe that reports that were filed were “appropriate.” As such, many staff shared with the group that they did not share with anyone associated with the school when they filed a report, as they believed it had the potential to compromise the “confidentiality” of filing a report.

Discussion: The creation of a decision-support process involving discussing concerns with a colleague or using a decision tree pertaining to suspected child abuse

Participants described that they rarely share with their school colleagues whether or not they were involved in filing a suspected child abuse report. There was expressed concern around with whom, and if, they would be willing to share this information. There was a strong discussion regarding sharing information with a professional “confidant,” regarding the need to “debrief” after a report was filed. However, historically, no participants shared that they were willing to discuss any matters pertaining to their “child abuse reporting with IUSD colleagues,” even if they alluded to that possibility that they would share. There was discussion centering on the “fear” to share information with anyone and the possible penalties, discipline and/or stigma that potentially could ensue if they were to discuss these matters.

CATEGORY 4: EXPERIENCE WITH REPORTING

Discussion: Number of child abuse reports filed by staff

Participants shared that the majority filed 2-6 suspected child abuse reports within their time with IUSD. They also shared that the majority of the reports filed did not receive a call back and/or follow-up by DCFS, even if they inquired several days later, after the report was filed.

Difficult Discussion: Whether staff had ever filed a suspected child abuse report when they believed the child needed family resources

Only 1 participant from all the listening sessions conveyed that they filed a report because they could not acquire any support and/or resources to further assist the student and/or family. All other participants stated that they only filed reports if they “suspected, possible child abuse.”

Discussion: Maintaining a positive relationship with a child and their caregiver / guardian after filing a suspected child abuse report

Over 50% of the participants stated that they believed they were able to maintain a positive relationship with the student, although they were unsure about the family, after a report was filed. They also further communicated that they believed the student/family were not aware of the fact that they (staff) were involved in the matter pertaining to the report. Many of the participants did acknowledge that they found it increasingly uncomfortable to fully engage with the student, like they had been able to do prior to filing the report. They did acknowledge that this was perhaps because of “their own discomfort,” more than any other external circumstance. Additionally, they found it difficult to maintain the same type of relationship with the student after a report was filed, simply because of their involvement in filing the report. They also acknowledged that perhaps they would be able to better manage a continued relationship with the student if they were able to converse with an expert, debrief, and acquire some additional skills in moving forward after a report is filed. They also expressed that the entire matter made it that much more difficult to connect and fully engage with the student, and in particular, the student’s family/caregiver.

CATEGORY 5: SYSTEM AND TRAINING IMPROVEMENT

Discussion: Suggestions for improving the current suspected child abuse reporting procedures

Recommendations noted below.

Discussion: Proposed changes or additions staff would like to see in mandated reporter training in education

Participants discussed the possibility of being offered and provided a "tier training" approach. Such examples communicated included new staff being required to participate in an in-person training that also focused on communication, responding to student's difficult conversations and questions, as well as how to navigate and use community resources for students. While veteran staff receive "booster training," perhaps after a specified number of years they would be required to attend a more comprehensive training. Additionally, they also expressed an interest in being provided "case reviews," with the ability to discuss the sample "cases presented," as they believed that this exposure would better assist them as mandated reporters. There was a request to have access to data regarding child abuse reports filed, the reporting impact to students and/or families, as well as outcomes of reports filed by school officials within the context of a school year.

Discussion: Do culture, race, and/or bias influence reporting decisions?

ALL participants believed that there are many levels of "bias and cultural ignorance and/or influence" which impact the filing or even "lack of filing" regarding suspected child abuse cases. Many of the participants believed that filing a report was not done with "malicious intent or with malice," but rather because of "ignorance and/or lack of cultural competency and awareness" when a reporting decision is made. They also conveyed during the listening sessions that the topic pertaining to bias and cultural competency is not addressed in "the trainings provided to all staff, which are deemed as 'mandated reporters.'" Participants also would like to be exposed to the data of suspected child abuse reports filed in communities of color versus "other communities." There was expressed "sadness and extreme concern" during this portion of the discussion in the listening groups. Several participants believe that the training(s) should begin by addressing the topics of bias and cultural competency, before even discussing the mandates of the law pertaining to "mandated reporting."

OVERALL FINDINGS: EDUCATOR LISTENING SESSIONS

NOTE: Job Classification and Experience and/or Lack of Experience Directly Influenced Confidence of the Mandated Procedures and Process:

- ▶ Lack confidence in fully understanding child abuse Board Policy
- ▶ Lack confidence in fully understanding the key points of child abuse training
- ▶ Uncertain about the effectiveness of the child abuse training
- ▶ Lack confidence of child abuse reporting
- ▶ The need to identify a support system for staff regarding guidance
- ▶ The need for school/community resources
- ▶ The need for district contact person(s) to consult related matters, needs and/or resources- additional support for staff

School Administrators:

- ▶ The need to enhance and support staff regarding child abuse reporting and/or procedures
- ▶ The need for ongoing and additional support for educators
- ▶ The need to improve the reporting/supporting system
- ▶ Board Policy review

School Counselors and Psychologists:

- ▶ The request to consult with others before filing a report
- ▶ The request to acquire additional support or guidance to better serve the families
- ▶ The request to sustain/maintain relationships with children and parents

PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

- ▶ Described the process and procedures for reporting suspicions of child abuse or neglect within IUSD, felt unprepared and not very well equipped to make such an “important decision”
- ▶ Confidence depends on the individual report, circumstance, what the child shared, or what was observed
- ▶ Consultation would have been extremely helpful before making a report, but has never been provided; in fact, “my Principal, did not want me to discuss a matter with him, regardless of my request”
- ▶ Would like to have available a list of school, district, and community resources, including the identification of when support is needed
- ▶ Though aware of a consultation service or support when filing a report, reporting parties did not find this process supportive and/or helpful
- ▶ Student and family support is desperately needed for all students, but just as importantly it is needed for school staff; that would be extremely helpful
- ▶ 2-6 child abuse reports have been filed within the career of each interview
- ▶ Participants did not believe that filing a child abuse report was *not* needed, strong conviction that report(s) needed to be filed, however they were not informed of any case updates
- ▶ Became increasingly difficult to maintain a positive relationship with a child and their caregiver/guardian after filing a suspected child abuse report, if they were made aware of “who filed the report/s”
- ▶ The experience(s) in filing a child abuse report were that it is a very long process, it is stressful to find time in the day to make a report, difficult to feel supported by the “hot line,” believed that the person who filed the report felt reprimanded and questioned about decision, judgment, felt as if the reporting party was being “integrated” not “questioned”
- ▶ Child welfare department receiving the report handled the call “ok” however, they did not follow up with the reporting party
- ▶ Major changes would suggest a more supported reporting process, with opportunity to consult with supervisor and/or expert in district
- ▶ Resources that support all mandated reporters with suspected child abuse, as well as resources for all families
- ▶ There was a strong belief by each participant of cultural/racial/economic/etc. bias in reporting
- ▶ Staff not updated and or informed to what happens after a report is made to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) hotline