

**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HOLLY J. MITCHELL  
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July 12, 2022

**Enhancing School District Capacity to Protect Student Safety**

Too many students across Los Angeles County (County) are impacted by violence on campus, in their homes, and in their communities. This can be in the form of bullying, suicide, domestic and intimate partner violence, and community and gang violence. Community violence and systemic violence, such as over policing in schools, disproportionately impacts communities of color. In 2019, 13% of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) high school students reported [not going](#) to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school. From 2017-2019, 20% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders in the County reported [fear](#) of being beaten up at school, and 16% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders reported [suicidal ideation](#). Increased violence in the County, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in the loss of social and school connectedness. Ongoing violence continues to plague communities within South Los Angeles and other areas of the County, making it difficult for youth to thrive. The school shooting in Uvalde is an urgent call to action to do more to support youth and schools. These forms of violence are interconnected and require a holistic approach that includes prevention and intervention strategies.

To help schools develop more robust and comprehensive approaches to school safety, foster positive school climates, and provide students with necessary supports, the

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Board of Supervisors (Board) approved a [motion](#) on June 8, 2021 requesting a [report](#) back from the Youth Diversion and Development [Division](#) (YDDD) of the [Office](#) of Diversion and Re-entry (ODR) with recommendations on how to achieve this. This report identified a need to support some school districts with enhancing their capacity to comprehensively address school safety. It identified a need for staff training opportunities to support a more robust approach, with the goal of enhancing in-house prevention strategies, including strength-based empowerment, holistic supports, and specific skills for identifying signs of behavioral issues. It also examined intervention strategies, including protocols for responses to conflicts and de-escalation, to assist schools with being more responsive to students' needs.

A model in Denver provides a promising comprehensive approach to school safety, resulting from a collaboration between schools, law enforcement, and community organizations, where the focus is placed on positive youth development and disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline. In this model, policies were developed to support and empower teachers to proactively address issues in-house and at the classroom level to avoid, whenever possible, the use of more severe responses, including removing students from the classroom. In addition, social service providers play an active role in school safety. Researchers [found](#) promising results, with in-school suspensions decreasing by 35%; expulsions decreasing by 32%; and referrals to law enforcement decreasing by 30%. Other jurisdictions have also implemented similar models effectively, including the Lynwood Unified School District's "Safe Schools Collaborative." The County has an opportunity to support similar local efforts to develop comprehensive approaches to school safety. Additionally, several County efforts may be aligned to help build the capacity of schools, including the efforts of the Department of Public Health (DPH), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Human Relations Commission, and others who can work together to develop and implement recommendations for resources, policies, and practices to better support schools.

In recent years, the County has taken a more coordinated and intentional approach to violence prevention and intervention. On March 13, 2018, the Board of Supervisors approved a [motion](#) that created the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) within DPH. The

OVP works to strengthen coordination, capacity, and partnerships to address the root causes of violence, prevent all forms of violence, and promote healing. OVP's Trauma Prevention [Initiative](#) (TPI) has created infrastructure for community driven public safety by investing in peer intervention and community leadership building. The TPI's Street Outreach and Community Violence Intervention Services provide programming for at-risk youth, and safe passages to and from parks and schools. OVP is also implementing a Crisis Response Violence Intervention Pilot Program, which will provide a hybrid County-community response after a crisis event to those most immediately impacted, and to the broader community to promote healing, and connect residents to critical healing services and supports, utilizing trauma informed and culturally relevant approaches. OVP is implementing Trauma Informed Care systems change in partnership with County departments and has had initial conversations with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) to discuss the provision of a trauma and healing informed training series for school district staff. Additionally, DPH has established School Wellbeing Centers at 50 high schools, designed to address the social, emotional, and sexual health needs of young people through evidence-informed health education, integrated services, and peer support in a welcoming space.

Supporting youth and school safety is a priority of the OVP Strategic Plan. To that end, OVP has worked in partnership with several County initiatives. The County has an opportunity to utilize OVP's deep expertise to support school districts in their efforts to protect the safety of their students more comprehensively.

LACOE provides technical guidance to school districts on violence prevention, trauma informed practices, and safety protocols. In 2020, they partnered with the California Department of Education to update the "Educator's [Guide](#) to Comprehensive School Safety Plans" and to provide training and technical assistance with annual revisions to their safety plan as required by California Education [Code](#) §§ 32280-32289.5. These tools can be used to guide efforts to identify and assess models and strategies to improve school safety and climate. LACOE's Community Schools pilot launched in 2019 at 15 high schools to serve as hubs for services, providing a full-time program specialist to coordinate services and an educational community worker to support parent

engagement. Services include mental health support, physical health, college and career readiness, behavior interventions, and enrichment programs.

LAUSD's Wellness Centers serve the highest need communities in Los Angeles. Wellness Centers serve students and community members and are run by federally qualified health centers. Each Wellness Center has a minimum of one mental health provider. All Wellness Center campuses have Student Advisory Boards and ten sites are implementing DMH's Youth Community Ambassador program. Early data shows that students are confident in seeking care and supporting friends who seek care.

The Commission on Human Relations has established Dream Resource Centers at eight schools throughout the County. These centers provide safe, welcoming spaces in schools, serving all students, but providing promise for students historically targeted for bullying, including immigrant students; students of color; LGBTQ+ students; special education students; English Language Learners; and other groups targeted for hate and bias. Whether it is by offering a place to hang out; hygiene or school supplies; bandwidth; printers for homework assignments; art activism projects; peer-to-peer counseling; peer mediation; or other requested services, Dream Resource Centers have been recognized for the increase in positive social relations and feelings of safe school climates.

The DMH Prevention Division implements programs that support safety in schools. The Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Network has implemented a peer and community-based approach to suicide prevention that strengthens protective factors and promotes well-being and connectedness; promotes early help-seeking; provides a safe and compassionate response during and after a crisis; and supports individuals, families, schools and communities with short and long-term responses. DMH has also implemented several training programs to build the capacity of school personnel to integrate trauma-informed practices, stigma reduction, and compile training resources for school districts, including Red Flag Training to prevent school shootings. In addition, DMH's School Threat Assessment Response Team is designed to address the need for comprehensive threat prevention and management in school settings, preventing stated or perceived threats from escalating into potentially more violent situations.

School communities throughout the County are looking for more effective solutions

to keep our young people safe and support them holistically. The County should work with school districts in areas with the highest rates of violence to identify ways it can best support their long-term efforts to improve school climate and protect student safety. A school safety pilot would intentionally guide efforts to identify needs and strategically align and facilitate the provision of County services.

**WE THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:**

1. Instruct the Director of the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP), in collaboration with the Superintendent of the Los Angeles County Office of Education; the Superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD); Acting Director of the Department of Youth Development; Acting Director of the Department of Mental Health (DMH); Executive Director of the Human Relations Commission; Director of the Department of Children and Family Services; Chief Probation Officer; Executive Director of the Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development; community service providers; community organizations; and other relevant stakeholders; in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer, to report back in writing in 180 days with:
  - a. A list of school districts with school areas experiencing the highest rates of violence in the County, both on campus and in nearby areas.
    - i. Work with stakeholders to identify metrics and analyze the impact of multiple forms of violence on school districts with the highest rates of violence;
  - b. A description of feedback and data from school districts and input from students and parents with schools in areas with the highest rates of violence on what supports and services the County of Los Angeles (County) should provide to improve school climate and safety, building on, but not limited to, the findings and recommendations of the [report](#) entitled, "Strengthening Oversight of School Law Enforcement Services (Item No. 2, Agenda of June 8, 2021)" (Report).
  - c. Identification of 2-3 school districts with schools in areas most impacted by violence, and with existing safety initiatives, including, but not limited to, the

Trauma Prevention Initiative (TPI), Department of Public Health (DPH) Wellbeing Centers, LAUSD Wellness Centers, Community Schools Initiative (CSI), Dream Centers, DMH's Prevention Division programs and School Threat Assessment Response Teams (START), to participate in a pilot effort to incorporate:

- i. Healing informed trainings for students, families, and all school personnel to improve school climate;
  - ii. Social and emotional learning at all grade levels;
  - iii. Peer mentorship and leadership training for youth;
  - iv. Technical assistance to develop their Comprehensive School Safety Plan, including clear roles and responsibilities to address a range of safety issues and scenarios; and
  - v. Establishing a School Safety Collaborative to identify successes and challenges to guide implementation and inform Countywide recommendations.
- d. An identification and assessment of models and strategies, conducted in partnership with impacted school districts, designed to comprehensively and collaboratively improve school safety and climate, building on the strategies identified in the Report. Such models and strategies should:
- i. Include an assessment of opportunities to expand existing school-based safety initiatives, including, but not limited to, student assessment and response teams, social-emotional learning curriculum, START, CSI, DPH Wellbeing Centers, Dream Centers, and TPI safe passages and youth programs.
  - ii. Enhance the capacity of schools to address a wide range of safety issues and scenarios, ranging from low level conflicts to high level emergencies.
  - iii. Utilize a process that is inclusive of all relevant stakeholders and that supports school connections to the surrounding community as a safe hub.

- iv. Seek feedback and input from students and families from planning through implementation, to inform response strategies, protocols, and action measures, as well as efforts to create a positive school climate.
  - v. Identify concrete ways to empower youth and families in developing solutions to promote positive school climates and safety through innovative programs and technology.
  - vi. Develop protocols and action measures that define roles for all school personnel in identifying and responding to threats to student safety and encourage shared ownership of school safety among all school stakeholders.
- e. Building on the report back in sub-directives 1a – 1d, this report should identify any key implementation needs and challenges, including, but not limited to:
- i. Any trainings necessary to implement safety models and strategies.
  - ii. Barriers to successful implementation and recommendations on actions the County can take to assist school districts in addressing them.
  - iii. Funding needed, with cost estimates, to implement models and strategies, with the goal of sustainably achieving improved school climate and safety over the long-term.
  - iv. Potential federal, state and local public and private funding sources.
- f. Recommendations on how the County can best support schools, including trauma and healing informed supports for school personnel, students, and families, in areas most impacted by violence with the goal of enhancing and expanding each school district's long-term capacity to address a wide range of threats to students' safety.

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