AGN. NO.____

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS JANICE HAHN AND KATHRYN BARGER

July 26, 2022

Educating Youth about the School Threat Assessment Response Team

The School Threat Assessment Response Team (START) was established in 2009 within the Los Angeles County (County) Department of Mental Health (DMH) as a way to identify students suffering from mental health issues who might pose a threat to themselves or others, assess the level of risk, and provide targeted intervention and connect them to services. START consists of mental health professionals who work with schools and law enforcement and respond to any concern of potential school violence. In 2019, in response to high demand and a series of tragic school shootings around the nation, the START program was expanded from 10 members to 42.

START is an important tool to protect our schools and keep our students safe. Anyone can contact START about concerning behavior or warning signs by emailing START@dmh.lacounty.gov or calling the 24/7 DMH Help Line at (213) 739-5565. The program provides training and consultation to school districts across the County, informing them of START's services and how to identify warning signs. These trainings are very important and have helped establish a strong relationship between school officials and START, which has led to hundreds of referrals and interventions.

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Studies have shown that many youth who commit acts of violence at school discuss or mention their plans beforehand. Often, these warnings happen on social media or through messaging platforms. Studies have also shown that targeted and direct intervention in response to a warning sign can successfully prevent individuals from following through with violent acts against others or themselves. This means that it is crucial that targeted intervention programs like START be notified as soon as possible whenever there is a warning, and often times the people most likely to see the warning signs are other students.

As START currently operates, anyone can make a referral via email or phone, including students. But up until now, the training and advertisement of the program have been focused on school administrators, teachers, and other staff. There should be a targeted educational and awareness campaign to students so that they are aware of what signs to look out for and how to contact START when they see one. Many youth may see or hear something from a peer that concerns them, but they do not know that the START program exists or that they can contact the program so easily via email or phone. It is our responsibility to make them aware of this path, to explain how it works, and to encourage them to use it whenever they see warning signs.

START is one of the best tools that we have in the County to prevent school violence through professional threat assessment, early intervention, and mental health linkage. It is imperative that we ensure START is operating at its full potential. One way to do this is to educate more people about the program, focusing specifically on youth and students who are more likely to see early warning signs from their peers. Another way to make sure that START is operating effectively is to regularly collect and report data so that we can see areas of success and areas for improvement.

WE, THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors (Board) direct the Department of Mental Health (DMH), in collaboration with all relevant departments, to do the following:

1. Design and implement an educational and awareness campaign, in culturally appropriate languages, promoting School Threat Assessment Response Team (START) services and contact information specifically to youth:
    a. At a minimum, the campaign should educate youth on what the START program does, how to make a referral to START if they see concerning behavior from a peer, and describe examples of warning signs and behavior to report;
    b. The campaign should be prepared in time to launch during the '22-'23 school year;
    c. Consideration should be made of using a consultant for the outreach that specializes in awareness campaigns designed for youth; and
    d. Report back in writing to the Board of Supervisors with a detailed description of the above awareness campaign and its status in 60 days, including the planned timeline, methods of communication and messages to be communicated, locations, expected audience, and persons leading the effort.
2. Establish a biannual report to the Board providing an overview of the START services and responses provided. The report should be timed to align with the school year, providing an update at the middle and end of the school year. The report should include, at a minimum, the following data:
    a. Number and types of trainings provided and corresponding school districts;

b. Number of referrals for early screenings and threat assessments and a breakdown of the referrals by source (student, school staff, law enforcement, parent, etc.) and method of communication (ACCESS number, direct number, email, in person, etc.);

c. Number of referrals that resulted in intervention and a breakdown of the types of interventions; and

d. Number and types of post-intervention services provided.

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