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January 14, 2021

Subject: Strategic Plan for Community Based Restorative Truancy Prevention and Intervention

I wanted to provide you with concrete information about the strategic plan for **Community Based Restorative Truancy Prevention and Intervention** for all 42 school districts in San Diego County. Addressing truancy is a priority for me as we know that a child's truancy is a red flag to a path towards becoming a victim of crime or a perpetrator. We've made great progress in reducing the prison pipeline through early intervention utilizing restorative practices that are trauma informed with a dramatic reduction in our juvenile detention and incarceration. Putting together a plan going forward that can effectively reduce truancy while complying with the changes in truancy laws and the input from the community was a critical step. For several months DA Juvenile Branch Chief Lisa Weinreb and Assistant Chief Shawnalyse Ochoa worked closely with the San Diego County Office of Education, School District experts, SARB hearing officers, the Children's Initiative, community based organizations (CBOs), our community partnership prosecutors and other stakeholders to create this new strategic plan that meets the changes in the law and challenges due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

We realized that we needed to reimagine and reinvent the DA's Mediation and Truancy Program that we utilized for the last ten years because the dramatic changes in truancy laws and the elimination of participation by the Courts required that we go back to the drawing table working with our community and stakeholders.

The Plan: This plan relies on the existing County of San Diego Multi-disciplinary CAT programs that exist regionally with Central, South, East, Inland and Coastal North in our county. These regional assets utilize Community Based Organizations (CBO) to provide assessment and services to school age youth (6 -18) and to their families. These teams have agreed to assist all school districts with youth experiencing truancy issues. The CBOs will have the resources to assist the school districts in addressing the many underlying causes of truancy. Additionally, I am excited to let you know that the CBOs will be funded to provide a minimum of 3 months of case management for each family. The referrals will be tracked and reported by the CBOs, so that utilization by all school districts can be monitored and we can continue to learn and adapt from the data gathered. The CBOs will also attend SARB hearings twice a year to strengthen their relationship and understanding of the schools' processes and challenges.

My office will continue to work hand in hand with the schools and the CBOs to support this strategic plan by introducing the program to the school districts, attending the planning meetings and providing support through prevention education to youth and families. Our expertise in the connection between truancy and delinquency will be offered to students and families in a trauma informed program including presentations on campus and in the community.

We are in one of the most challenging times for our schools with the difficulties of distance learning that are presenting more than just educational challenges but also severe risks to the mental health of our youth and documented increases in online exploitation by predators and human trafficking. The data is clear from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children along with the data from our San Diego Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force that have seen reports more than triple during this time of students not being physically in school. We also know that the impact on educational equity will be higher for families that are suffering from food and economic insecurity. I'm committed to working with you on keeping our kids safe and healthy during the pandemic and in the aftermath of anticipated economic and emotional ramifications.

We will be closely monitoring and engaging with you to be sure that this strategic plan provides culturally competent and effective services for our students to prevent and intervene in reducing truancy and thus reducing involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Please find attachments that further describe the CAT program and a directory of regional resources. The ability for the schools to utilize the established CAT and its aligned focus on prevention and intervention for families with school age youth (6-18), who are at risk of entering or continuing in the juvenile justice system. The ability of CAT to leverage its multi-disciplinary team composed of case managers, alcohol & drug specialists, parent educators, mental health professionals to provide assessment and services to students with truancy challenges and their families brings much promise for the future of our kids.

If you have any questions, please email to set up a conversation with Lisa Weinreb at lisa.weinreb@sdcda.org. As always, I'm available if I can help you.

Sincerely,



SUMMER STEPHAN
San Diego County District Attorney