

## Community Partners Provide Input on School Safety

For children and youth to learn and to thrive, it is critical that they are provided a safe and welcoming space to do so. Increased violence in the County, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in loss of social and school connectedness, for already struggling families and communities. This has created an added burden on schools across the County.

Last month, the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) partnered with the Second District Supervisor Holly Mitchell for a 90-minute, virtual program “A Conversation About School Safety”. Public Health Director, Dr. Barbara Ferrer joined the Supervisor to provide opening remarks and to listen to community input. Kelly Fischer, Deputy Director, OVP, served as facilitator, and OVP and Public Health Education Liaison staff led four breakout sessions, one of which was conducted in Spanish. More than 40 parents and community stakeholders participated.

The listening session stemmed from a July 2022 motion, sponsored by Supervisors Mitchell and Hilda Solis, which among other things called for a pilot program to support two or three districts most affected by violence and COVID-19. Participants were asked to identify resources and strategies and offer recommendations on how the County can best support schools in these difficult times.

Prior to this session, a School Safety Partners Workgroup including representatives from multiple county departments, LAUSD and LACOE, identified six categories of pilot strategies, which helped to guide last week’s conversation. These included “Centering Student Leadership,” “Family Engagement and Support,” “Community Hubs and Safe Passages,” and “Reimagining School Security/Culture of Healing”.

Attendees offered a slew of valuable insights and suggestions, including “uplift and consider community voice,” “violence in schools can’t be addressed in isolation from violence in homes and communities,” “creating school environments that actually are a place of healing,” and “more restorative justice instead of suspensions.”

These suggestions and many more will be incorporated into the pilot program. The overriding goal is to meet the standard – for all students – outlined in this working definition of school safety:

“Enhancing school safety requires addressing the root causes of violence and trauma in schools, school-related activities, and the communities surrounding them, through policies and practices that strengthen their network of response services through an equity and healing-centered lens.”