What the TTF has learned/agreed to so far:

Overall Approach:

- Truancy is not a crime, but "the tip of the iceberg" that results from other problems. Therefore, a comprehensive approach with an array of components is needed to properly address it, and different approaches for different causes of truancy (not doing well in school, bullying, poor parental supervision, fear of going to a new school, etc.), and for different age groups (elementary, middle and high school) and communities is required.
- The focus of those dealing with truant youth should be on keeping students in school and keeping them out of the court system as much as possible.

What is not working well:

- Criminalizing truancy with citations, fines, jail time, etc., results in youth missing even more school time, parents missing work, and puts a financial burden on families. This frequently leads to more trouble (e.g., driver's license suspensions) when youth and/or their parents are unable to come to court or pay their fines. Fines, in particular, appear to be a waste of time and resources and prosecuting parents for their children's truancy does not appear to be very effective. Further, students resent being treated as criminals and can suffer emotionally from this experience.
- Some low-income neighborhoods with high concentrations of African-American and/or Latino students (e.g., South LA, Boyle Heights, East SFV) are being targeted unfairly with disproportionate numbers of citations. In some cases, youth are even being cited when walking TO school.
- Current approaches are generally "blunt instruments" that don't differentiate well among different groups of truants and, therefore, don't link truant youth to the right services.
- There is a disconnect between parental expectations (almost all want their children to go to college) and their behavior (e.g., not getting their children up for school every day) that must be addressed.

What is working well, in Los Angeles County and/or elsewhere:

Schools

- Transforming schools to create a positive culture with high expectations, excellent management, good teachers, a solid curriculum, strong parent involvement and engagement, and learning environments that are culturally relevant and respectful of the skills and knowledge students bring to school.
- Welcoming schools where students want to be and feel they belong and where students feel that schools care about them. For example, if student is missing from school, staff members go to their homes and knock on the door to find out what's wrong.
- Big Picture Learning approach takes care of truancy by creating schools that students want to attend. Its schools focus on one student at a time and zero in on student strengths and interests and filling in their individual knowledge gaps. A project-based learning model is used with small advisory groups that stay together throughout all four years of high school. Outside, "real world" student internships tied to each student's academic program are a major component as is involvement of student's outside mentor and parent as resources to the school community.
- Steering youth to compatible, supportive schools
- Schools that are seen as safe havens or safe places to be and that connect students to what they need
- Schools where students have a voice
- Changing from a student-focused lens to a school-focused lens
- Community schools
- Teachers in every classroom that believe in engaging students, and classes that are engaging and relevant
- Giving truant students (and others) who are behind academically a chance to catch up through accelerated instruction and Saturday schools to make up lost school time and catch up on missed work.
- Helping students make up credits to facilitate their graduating on time
- Tiered approaches for dealing with different levels of and reasons for truancy
- Providing a positive school climate/culture at the first "universal level" of a 3-tiered model, with attendance expectations and school-wide incentives for achieving those expectations
- High-quality alternative and continuation schools, including those (such as the Frida Kahlo High School) that are part of a comprehensive approach
- Linking students with counselors or other health and wellness resources to help them with challenges that interfere with their academic, personal or social adjustment (AUSD Gateway Program)
- A central process for all referrals (whether the students are truant, need mental health services, etc.)

- A safety net of intervention services available to students when they return to school
- Tapping into and collaborating with community resources, especially when dealing with special populations such as foster and probation youth
- Incentivizing school attendance through students being able to earn desirable prizes
- Providing incentives within schools
- Addressing school attendance from the time students enter Kindergarten.
- Looking at chronic absence—i.e., missing 10% or more of school in an academic year, whether absences are excused or not—in addition to other attendance measures
- Schools doing more to handle some of what is now being sent to the court to deal with

Parents

- Parents must be involved in their child's education. They need to go to parent-teacher conferences, help their children with their homework and monitor their attendance among other things. Some propose that this may be most important factor of all for preventing truancy.
- At any rate, all agree that student and family involvement is essential to increasing school attendance and is intensive work with families.
- One promising practice used by the courts to engage parents in preventing truancy are contracts that require them to accompany their children to school. The success of this tool is due, in part, to the positive connections parents form with school personnel as a result.
- Parents need more resources at their disposal early on so that their youth don't become a part of the system. They are pleading for help and don't know where to turn.
- Changing parental attitudes about attendance.

Courts

- Judicial officers should routinely determine reasons for truancy and base their sentencing decisions on those reasons.
- Asking youth key questions about why they are truant
- School representative in each IJTC court or at least a designated school contact for court to confer with about their students
- School stability is key; youth need to be kept at home supported by tutoring, substance abuse prevention services, mentoring, etc. When a low level sanction is required, community detention should be used.
- There should be no tickets for tardies and, if those tickets are issued and sent to the court, they should be kicked out.

- Juvenile Court needs to extend its accountability for truancy from IJTC's focus on youth and parents to looking at how well truancy laws are being applied by police officers and how well schools are doing their part.

Law Enforcement

- LAPD's new directive regarding the handling of truancy/daytime curfew violations is a good first step and the one in development by LASPD may be an even better one; a next step may be amending the City of LA municipal code to reflect these very positive policies/procedures
- Partnering with schools, advocacy and community organizations on effective alternatives to criminalization

Community

- Strong community partnerships that support school-based project-based learning efforts
- Civilian responses, such as community task forces, interns working on the streets outreaching to youth, safe passage programs, businesses opening their doors later in the morning (after school starts) and not serving students during school hour, are important contributors to increasing school attendance
- After-school academic and enrichment programs

General Policies/Practices

- All of us must communicate with each other more effectively
- All stakeholders (schools, youth-serving agencies, families and students) must be held accountable for attendance
- A resource-based comprehensive approach, as an alternative to criminalization, that addresses the root causes of truancy, such as mental health services, social/emotional supports, academic support, job training/career counseling/youth employment opportunities, peer and mentoring programs, targeted cultural programs, arts programs, and legal support; academic and non-academic issues should be addressed simultaneously
- Alternative, diversionary approaches such as school or community-based truancy centers, the AIM approach, YouthBuild charter schools, etc.

- Mediation Programs, such as the following examples:
  - Denver Mayor's Office and Public Schools partnered to develop, implement and evaluate a mediation program for youth who had missed school but were not already involved with the juvenile court
  - Ohio's Truancy Prevention Through Mediation Program for elementary and middle school students provides a non-threatening opportunity for school personnel and families to discuss the issues around a child's unexcused absences and to develop mutually acceptable solutions.
- Youth connection to a caring adult (e.g. AIM coaches, YouthBuild staff) and "near peer" role models (e.g. City Year) is critically important
- One-on-one support, mentoring, individual attention
- Focusing on students who face factors at home, in the neighborhood, or in school that put them at risk
- Paying attention to mental health needs, as depression and anxiety disorders are major factors leading to truancy
- Media marketing campaigns that deliver positive messages about staying in school. These should include using social network sites and their messaging capability to remind youth about attending school. Also helpful is a component that makes parents more aware of the detrimental effects of truancy on their children's well-being
- Anti-bullying campaigns, internet safety promotion, violence prevention, alcohol, tobacco and other drug prevention, mental health services for different ethnic groups
- Non-threatening, youth-centered conferences that dig into the reasons for truancy and participants work with youth to figure out a plan
- Aligning transportation (bus/Metro/MTA) pick-up times with school start times
- Truancy prevention/reduction programs and services must be linked, timely, culturally responsive and build on protective strength
- A strong focus on transition planning and reducing the number of school transitions
- Targeting chronically absent students going into sensitive transition grades (Kindergarten, 6th and 9th)
- Smoother probation camp-to-community transitions, beginning with intensive planning with receiving school district 60 days before discharge from camp
- Improving the identification of and responsiveness to homeless youth
- Tardy policies that are developed with all stakeholders, including students
- Data-tracking system that is "school, court and DCFS/Probation-friendly" and that compares how students are doing when they come into a district to how they are doing when they leave
- Data sharing about truancy between schools, county departments and the courts needs to be improved. Even when data is collected, it is not always used effectively. Chronic absence not typically calculated or monitored, even though

that data exists. California is one of only 5 states that does not even have attendance in its longitudinal student data base.

- Making attendance a "must-respond-to" indicator for youth-serving agencies
- Joint training (cross-training) of staff from various agencies to bring the perspectives of different systems together and ensure that all are working towards the same goal, albeit with different roles

Ideas That Could Work:

- Having police take probation youth directly to school during truancy sweeps, especially if there is a school-based DPO on campus, instead of to a police station.
- Referring truant youth to the Probation Department instead of to traffic court
- Courts receiving regular printouts of truancies for youth under their supervision