



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
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For Immediate Release

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY AND COUNTY COUNCIL ANNOUNCE THE
DELCO HEALTHY KIDS, HEALTHY SCHOOLS INITIATIVE**

March 8, 2021

MEDIA — District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer and Delaware County Council Vice Chair Dr. Monica Taylor today announced the launch of the “Delco Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools Initiative,” a collaboration between County government, the District Attorney’s office, and schools across Delaware County to assess and, ultimately, to improve, the way mental and behavioral health services are provided to school-aged children in Delaware County.

“We are excited to publicly announce the launch of this initiative,” said Dr. Taylor. “The unique challenges during the pandemic have only confirmed our belief that we need to do more to care for the mental and behavioral health of our children. While we recognize that this initiative cannot solve every problem facing our families and our schools, we want to make sure that we are listening to families and educators, and that we do everything in our control to reduce barriers to accessing care and to reduce the stigma associated with such care,” said Taylor.

“As the District Attorney, I often see what happens when kids don’t get what they need to thrive,” said Stollsteimer. “It is my hope that by assessing and – hopefully – improving the mental and behavioral health services for kids in Delaware County, we can keep more kids out of the juvenile justice system. As noted by Dr. Taylor, we will not be able to solve many of the problems that hold us back – limited resources, as well as too few providers will always be an issue – but if we don’t understand the problem, we certainly can’t solve it.” said Stollsteimer.

The District Attorney’s Office has been awarded “Safe Schools” state grant funding for several years, and the funding has been distributed to Delaware County public schools to improve the physical safety of their buildings through the

purchase of locks, cameras and similar items. This year, for the first time, the District Attorney requested, and received, permission from the state to offer the funding to parochial schools for improvements to the physical safety of their buildings.

Last year DA Stollsteimer, Dr. Taylor, and Councilman Kevin Madden, reached out to a group of educators to ask what was the biggest challenge they faced in keeping their kids safe. The educators stated unequivocally that the most significant challenge to the safety of their schools were the untreated or inadequately treated mental and behavioral health needs of their students. As one educator stated the problem, “we can’t discipline our way out of a mental health problem.”

As a result of those conversations, the County and the District Attorney decided to invest some of its “Safe Schools” funding to hire a consultant to, first, conduct an assessment of the way in which mental and behavioral health services are accessed by and delivered to school-aged children in Delaware County, and second, to support a strategic planning process with a broad group of Delaware County leaders to improve those services. The County hired Bloom Planning to assist with this project. Beginning in December 2020, Bloom has interviewed more than 40 stakeholders, including educators, mental health providers, community organizations, and human services staff.

The success of the initiative will rely in part on the community’s participation, and in announcing the initiative, the County and the District Attorney also requested the public’s assistance. Bloom has prepared a brief survey which are available at <https://tinyurl.com/6sxpuyfn> (for families) and <https://tinyurl.com/4n4c26y4> (for school staff). Parents and school staff are encouraged to complete the survey, which should take approximately 5-10 minutes. The consultant is also working with schools (on a voluntary basis) to make the surveys available to their school communities through a variety of channels, consistent with each district’s policies. All responses will be kept free of any identifying information, so complete confidentiality is assured. Additionally, individuals may sign up to be considered for focus groups to provide more in-depth input.

“Conversations with Delaware County educators served as the catalyst for the work we announced today,” said Councilman Madden. “Educators have played a vital role in informing the work of our consultant in the design of this initiative. It is also critical that we reach out directly to our families, students, and staff so that we better understand their experience with the way mental and behavioral health services are delivered in Delaware County. Our hope is that families across the

county complete the survey and provide us with the information that we need to better serve our children and families in Delaware County,” said Madden.

For press inquiries, please contact Margie McAboy, Public Information Officer, Delaware County District Attorney’s Office, 610-579-0429.

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