

Safe Havens of Learning:

PSEA policy
recommendations
to enhance safety
in PA schools

March 2018



Introduction

Students, parents, teachers, and administrators have the right to expect their schools to be safe havens of learning. Several important strategies and resources can be used to create safe, positive, and secure school environments: (1) quality relationships between staff and students and their families; (2) adequately trained staff; (3) support from the community, including law enforcement, mental health, and social service agencies; and (4) safe physical buildings, equipment, and grounds.

Gov. Tom Wolf asked PSEA to collect members' comments and ideas about how to keep schools safe. Within a matter of days, PSEA members sent nearly 1,000 comments. The ideas expressed in their comments show our members' concern for the safety of students in our public schools, and the breadth of their ideas is evidence of the rich diversity of Pennsylvania educators.

We have distilled the comments into this report. The first section includes specific PSEA policy recommendations and a sampling of members' comments that provide additional detail supporting these recommendations. The second section includes additional member comments that demonstrate the broad thinking of our membership; we include these comments even if they express a view that is different from our official organizational positions.

PSEA policy recommendations

Policy recommendation #1

Increase appropriations for school safety grants that can be used to provide funding for:

- a. Physical improvements, like secure entrances, panic buttons, door jammers, and streaming video shared directly with a local law enforcement station;**
- b. Active shooter training programs; and**
- c. School resource officers.**

Hundreds of PSEA members identified the need to improve the physical safety of school buildings. Some members recommended specific upgrades, such as bulletproof glass and metal detectors. Others share logistical concerns, such as the fact that most classroom doors do not lock from the inside and the challenge of securing all entrances at all times.

PSEA recommends additional funding for Pennsylvania Safe Schools grants in the final FY 2018-19 budget. Currently, the program is funded at \$8.2 million – with 60 percent of the funds set aside for districts to hire and maintain school security personnel, and 40 percent set aside for evidence-based programs such as positive behavior supports, conflict resolution, restorative justice programs, and diversion programs. **In addition to increasing funding for the grant program, PSEA recommends that the current distribution and priority determination within the school code should be reviewed and revised to ensure maximum flexibility for school entities to utilize grant funding to address their specific needs.**

To better understand such needs, **we strongly recommend more safe school audits that evaluate facilities, personnel, and school climate and are based on state-specified standards and guidelines.** The audits should be conducted on a regular basis, and at a minimum as part of the district's five-year strategic planning process.

There is no legal requirement for facility audits nor is there a one-stop resource for information, supports, and best practices. Without regular audits based on standard guidance, it is impossible to determine the scope of safety threats our schools face or to help officials prioritize resources and improvements to address the threats.

PSEA member comments on physical improvements

There is ADT 24/7 home security. This company monitors your home for intruders and any suspicious activity. We need to have these types of cameras and security systems for schools.

Suzi, Northeastern¹

I believe ALL schools should have the SAME safety measures implemented to ensure all of our students are safe. Bulletproof doors and glass, double set of doors (both locked), easy to lock doors on all rooms at the school, a drop box where visitors pass their ID through to personnel who can properly check using programs like the Raptor system (prior to setting foot in the building), security cameras at all doors and metal detectors are essential. All law enforcement agencies should be in contact regarding any suspicious people and should communicate with the schools on a regular basis. We should NOT fall back on the mentality that “it won’t happen to us” or “we do with what we have” and “life will happen.” School personnel, teachers, and students have the right to be protected and safe. We became teachers to nurture and teach our students, but we need to be in a safe, protected environment.

Quinn, Northeastern

There is a product out there that is bullet resistant window film. It is clear and will not allow bullets to penetrate nor can the glass be broken. This would be perfect for first-floor windows, entrances, doors with windows.

Cara, Mideastern

All schools [should] have one point of entry. All schools [should] have ID scanners for staff; and at least one city or state policeman on grounds or in main office at all times. All classrooms need walls and doors. Merely threatening a mass killing should constitute fines/arrest. State controlled firearm drop off for unwanted guns currently in homes.

Mandi, Central

¹ Please see Page 47 of this report for a map of PSEA’s regions.

Each school district should provide the tools/devices needed to secure doors.

Shannon, Northeastern

...One entrance/exit for building with metal detector...

Karen, Central-Western

...All doors to the buildings must remain locked at all times. Students are blocking open doors and or just letting people in. Cameras at all doors are required. If any student is caught opening or propping open a door it is a Superintendent Suspension, and fine that must be paid before entry back to school.

Once school starts, there can be only one entrance available for entry. This entry has to be locked, have a guard and metal detector. An outside ID reader should be installed and before entry the person has to produce some type of name and face ID.

No matter how long it takes for students to enter school, ALL must go through metal detectors. In addition, once inside the building, NO book bags or coats should be allowed.

Craig, Mideastern

School safety does not begin by removing all guns, it begins by updating our outdated school buildings with environmentally safe structures designed to deter criminals. Putting in bulletproof windows, removing large and unneeded glass hallways, making structures less easily accessible to criminals. It means putting in facial recognition devices at the entrance and any other openings to school buildings. Not sure why we have the best technology available in this country and yet no one is using it to keep our buildings safe? Apple can't work with the government to develop something logical and user friendly for offices to use?...

Kimberly, Northwestern

The state should allocate funds to school districts specifically for updating, upgrading, and improving school security. The funds could be used to purchase and install metal detectors, make entryways into classrooms more secure, hire additional school police. Either way, funding to increase school security is crucial.

Justin, Central

Please see the following link for ideas to keep make our schools safer: www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/inside-the-safest-school-in-america-1166029891710.

Cindy, Mideastern

All schools should be equipped like Southwestern High School in Indiana.

Bev, Southwestern

This is an infrastructure issue. Similar to the ADA building modifications ..., there needs to be an ingress and egress structure to schools' entrances to provide security. A dual door setup, where a camera is installed inside for security to visually/audibly contact the guest. Bags could be opened on a table, Coats removed, etc. after being buzzed into the area. The guest remains there until the contact arrives to check credentials and to escort the guest out. Everything recorded and weekly audited by a professional skilled at looking at these things for potential future issues. Special attention given to contractors that need to be permitted in advance before arrival with higher level of checks performed. The holding area needs to be built to withstand an attack without looking like a prison access point of course...

Robert, Northeastern

Cameras in classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, and washrooms. This would end the bullying that leads to school violence while protecting students and staff. Cameras would also help us restore in-school discipline lost to he-said/she-said defenses and parents in denial.

Kelly, Northwestern

...Until we are totally safe, I believe the state should supply staff with (a) body armor--vests can be purchased for \$200-\$300 and (b) flash bang grenades--totally non-lethal and would better disable a shooter than the lacrosse balls I was provided.

Frank, Southeastern

Safety standard for all classroom doors. This can be as simple as all doors must have deadbolt that is lockable from the inside of the classroom, and no windows on classroom doors, to as detailed as the door being bulletproof. Additionally, setting school safety guidelines that are monitored and measured regularly. As well as an anonymous safety reporting system for each district. This can go directly to administration, that safety concerns from staff are being reported. OR this could be a safety committee that meets regularly to identify safety issues for the school. Our school has one, but we have been told it's only to discuss workers compensation issues and now no one wants to attend.

Rob, Midwestern

Implement the Door Guardian by School Gate Guardian on all classroom doors.
www.schoolgateguardian.com.

Alana, Central

** Bulletproof glass in all first-floor windows*

**Emergency doors with alarms on all exits not controlled by a secretary who buzzed people in*

**Barriers like the cement posts around the school where necessary to prevent a vehicle from ramming into the building*

**Metal detectors*

**Bulletproof glass on classroom doors*

Candace, Central

Quality video surveillance on the outside of school buildings and a dedicated staff member to monitor this and buzz people in and out of the front office would be helpful. A public address system that allows any staff member to alert the school immediately to an emergency situation, not just a principal, is also important, and I am glad that our school now has this measure. Finally, do we need to revisit how students respond to the fire alarm? Since fire is a less imminent threat than violence in schools, should we have a different procedure for responding to a pulled fire alarm than we currently have in place since the fire alarm can be used to create disorder as it was recently in Florida?

Brett, Mideastern

Evaluation of all schools' safety procedures and their buildings needs to be performed. Secure reception areas. Visitors kept between entrance and access doors to building until ID presented and verified. Do not let anyone roam the building. Metal detectors. Armed and trained security personnel present.

Drills with students and staff. All classroom doors secured, and bulletproof glass installed. If fire alarm tripped, immediately notify entire staff via intercom if not a scheduled drill to immediately lock down.

Betty, Western

Has anyone ever considered putting a chip into weapons that would alert officials when they get within a certain range of schools, hospitals, public buildings?

Mary, Eastern

A para-educator passed a message along to me about ideas to protect our students. I saw this device [Intruder Defense System] some time ago. I was actually asking others to help me find grants to fund purchasing these for every classroom in our district. Perhaps others will see the value in them as well. The perfect solution for teachers not wanting to have a gun in their possession. Thank you for letting me share my thoughts.

Melissa, Northeastern

...In the interim, until some effective gun controls are put in place, I would ask the governor to allow the National Guard to assist willing school districts to complement whatever security measures that are in place for said school districts. I am not optimistic about legislative reform based on past results.

Ed, Northeastern

Institute a driver's license verification system to be used by front office staff to verify a parent's identity. Texas uses such a system to protect their schools.

Robert, Mideastern

PSEA member comments on training programs

A.L.I.C.E. (or similar) training in every school, with training for everyone - all staff and students. We have not had a fire-related death in a school for dozens of years (possibly going back to the 1950s from what I can tell) and while that is due to many, many drills - a lot of that is due to better construction, construction materials, and design of newer buildings to prevent the spread of fire and entrapment of students. Most student deaths in schools are due to homicide, suicide, or transportation accidents (with weather-related deaths rounding that out.) We need to cut back on Fire drills and start doing other types of drills, sadly.

Michele, Central

...Routine A.L.I.C.E. drills are only unsettling students and teachers and making them realize how jeopardized they truly are if there were a person on campus who intended to do them harm...

Keith, Mideastern

State funding for “Safe2tell.org” programs for our schools...

Laureen, Eastern

...Provide “active shooter” training for all staff and students...Develop a schedule to regularly practice “safe classroom” strategies... Encourage and expect staff and students to report any potential issues that are seen or heard in school or on social media...

Jayne, Central-Western

Follow the idea of the school in Indiana, put many more “real” time cameras, linked up directly to police, install smoke bombs in ceilings to stall and blind an intruder. Also, invite police in to the schools so they know their way around and have drills in combination with police departments. Mandate that principals listen to teachers’ concerns without teachers feeling there will be repercussions for speaking out about safety problems. Treat schools the same way courthouses and airports are treated, no large bags, metal detectors and armed guards.

Pamela, Northeastern

PSEA member comments on school resource officers

I believe that anyone who is to be an armed adult in a school should be rigorously trained and evaluated in “shoot/don’t shoot” skills. He or she should also be able to demonstrate a sound mind in training scenarios. That is why we selected to contract with county law enforcement for school resource officers. School-based interviews should also include an evaluation of the candidate’s suitability for a school assignment...

David, Northwestern

Provide office space in each school for sheriff’s deputies to work. This would put an armed officer there during the time school is in session. Train teachers who voluntarily want training to conceal

and carry and allow them to do so in school. Employ retired military or law enforcement officers as protection at schools.

William, Northwestern

Military veterans should be hired to help with school security. They can either collaborate with local police departments or the state police.

Rachel, Southwestern

School entrances need to be more secure...I would love to see visitors enter through a secure, bulletproof check-in area sealed off from the rest of the school. Here, a highly trained security guard could pass the visitor through a metal detector and scan their ID...A first line defense of a highly trained armed security guard or two, such as a veteran or retired police officer could give us a ray of hope. This is not the same as arming teachers who don't want to be armed and have no experience with firearms. These need to be people who have had years of training with firearms and experience with confronting attackers, who have a history of putting their lives on the line to protect us.

Amanda, Southwestern

Why not put returning veterans in our schools as protection? These are trained military people who can read and handle situations. It provides jobs and keeps our students safe.

Michelle, Eastern

My thought on this situation is to employ a qualified, trained resource person AND a trained drug, bomb, and firearm sniffing dog. This team could greet the students entering the school, patrol the halls and check the lockers without infringing on the rights of an individual while protecting the students and staff. When the schools are empty, allow the dog to patrol the building. Trained dogs are expensive, but our students and staff safety is worth it.

Karla, Retired

Policy Recommendation #2

Focus on student wellness and invest in more school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, school nurses, behavioral specialists, home and school visitors, and paraprofessionals.

Much of the debate around school safety has centered on mental health. However, we believe mental health is just one component of student wellness. Our members' comments in this area show they care about their students and understand that students need to be healthy and feel supported in order to meet their full academic potential.

Every Pennsylvania school has students who struggle with physical and emotional health. Those students need support and encouragement – not blame and shame. Research shows the overwhelming impact of ensuring every student feels supported by at least one adult in school. These meaningful connections help students navigate challenges and help ensure their basic needs are met.

School employees are on the front line; they can be the first individuals to spot changes in student behaviors and mood, perhaps before anyone else. Sometimes the behavior is impossible to ignore – a student may lash out, cause harm to himself, other students, or the teacher. Or maybe a student's problems are manifested in more subtle ways – changes in how the student interacts with his peers or in how a student expresses himself in assignments. An educator can be the first to notice any warning signals of an underlying illness or concern for a student and could be the essential first connector for getting that student the help he or she needs.

But the ability for school employees to truly observe their students – and then connect them to the kind of supports they need – is greatly restricted when the teacher has 30 other kids in their class, receives no help from teacher's aides or additional support, and feels daily pressure to improve his or her students' scores on the PSSAs and Keystone Exams.

This is the reality for most of our teachers today.

If we are to genuinely engage in a constructive dialogue around the necessary actions to be taken to prevent the next Parkland, then we must recognize and acknowledge the truth of what's happening in our schools today. The ability of our teachers – and all adults working in our schools – to connect with students and intervene at the earliest sign of despair, before a crisis, has been severely hampered by a lack of resources and intensified focus on standardized testing at the expense of social and emotional supports and learning.

There aren't enough paraprofessionals and certified, trained professionals – school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, behavioral specialists, school nurses, and home and school visitors – working in our schools to support the behavioral and mental health needs of our

students. Not only are the resources falling short to help ensure certified professionals in our schools, but our laws fall short, as well.

Pennsylvania law does not require school districts to employ certified school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, or home and school visitors.

This means that some teachers and students don't have a school counselor or other certified mental health professional to turn to for support and assistance in their time of need. Even if the school district does employ a counselor, that counselor is likely responsible for nearly 500 students on average – *double* the caseload recommended by the American School Counselor Association. The other reality is that many school counselors – and school psychologists, school nurses, social workers, and home and school visitors – are tasked with a variety of other duties like mandated reports and paperwork that greatly limit the time that can be spent focused on building relationships with students and supporting their behavioral and mental health needs.

Often after tragedies like Columbine, Sandy Hook, and now Parkland, there is a great deal of attention on building infrastructure improvements. We heard many of those suggestions from PSEA members, as outlined earlier in this report. Those improvements certainly have their place; however, **PSEA strongly urges that we not lose sight of the necessity of longer-term investments to ensure there is an infrastructure of human capacity to support our students on a daily basis.**

PSEA member comments on improving student wellness

The following is a sample of the several hundred comments we received on this issue.

Each school should be doing preventative measures to prevent bullying (a statewide mandatory curriculum that involves teaching topics like the holocaust, slavery, bullying prevention, special needs awareness, etc). Each SCHOOL (not district) should also have at least one to two mandatory counselors and psychologists on duty so staff and students can alert for potential threats and offer support groups by trained professionals. Each school should require students to take a mandatory stress-prevention class that would teach tested practiced techniques of self-regulation ... Teachers should also be required to take several trauma-informed-teaching classes and restraint classes...

Regina, Southeastern

...when a teacher identifies a student as emotionally unstable or a possible threat, administrators should be allowed to act upon that. They say, "see something, say something," and as teachers we always do, but nothing comes of it. The administration always says, "we know but there is nothing we can do about it," unless of course it is an actual threat.

Victoria, Eastern

Thank you for the opportunity to convey our ideas on school safety! I believe this is a mental health issue and as a special education teacher I believe we need to partner with more mental health agencies. I also feel we need greater funding for mental health agencies. I understand funding is always an issue, but many hospitals are nonprofit and may be convinced to partner with school districts. Also, expand services for the IUs across the state to further address mental health issues...

Marianne, Central

Please install an anonymous box in each school that has no cameras facing toward it where students can leave tips for teachers and students.

Christie, Mideastern

In brief I have been pitching a 24-hour mandated psychological evaluation if a student is a danger to self or others without parental consent when we have exhausted our resources in-house. Other states are already using such proactive legislation...

Michelle, Western

...I feel it would be very effective to have school counseling services available to address emotional and behavioral concerns when the children are young enough to deter further problems. Children just don't wake up one day and decide to do violence. It is a symptom of unresolved psychological issues and feeling disconnected from the school community. I think it should be mandatory for all elementary schools. I know I helped to prevent future problems with the children I worked with.

Al, Southeastern

Just want to mention programs already operating such as Rachel's Challenge founded by a father of a Columbine victim, and Better Angels as noted in [a recent] David Brooks column. {It would help to} know who is engaged in such initiatives and where such forums are being held.

David, Western

It seems that a common thread in the individuals perpetrating these events is a feeling of alienation, non-acceptance, depression, or a lack of resilience to difficult times. Public schools once worked to increase extra-curricular activities for students to find a "niche" which can lead to higher self-esteem. When money for schools was reduced many of these programs were cut or converted to "pay to play" (making it difficult for some to participate)...

All public schools should offer parenting classes at all three levels (elementary, middle level and high school) of a child's development. These classes would teach basic parent skills, challenges that children might see in each level, and, most importantly, how to help children develop a child's self-worth and resilience. When schools identify students as "at risk" parents would be legally required to attend these classes...

Kevin, Central-Western

...While I do feel there needs to be some sort of gun reform, it cannot be the only solution. These past horrific events are a result of mental illness, and the belief that a person has a right to hurt someone, in retaliation for being "wronged." As a public school teacher in a Title I school, I have had 20 years of experience working with Emotional Support students from K-6 grade. Some of the children I have taught have had serious issues, as a result of circumstances that an adult would have trouble dealing with. Our answer is to place these children in a separate mainstreamed class and having them participate in weekly social groups. The problems that these children have cannot be solved within the public school system. They need consistent, professional interventions. They, along with their families should have mandatory counseling to teach socially acceptable behaviors, coping skills and promote healing. This service needs to be provided by the state, not the school, as part of an IEP. Often the students who have these needs are the ones who cannot afford private counseling. There needs to be a bridge between inpatient facilities and the public school. We cannot continue to send children away for a week, only to return to school in the same

condition. They are not cured or healed. If we put money and effort into these children at the elementary age, perhaps we can prevent these tragic events from occurring in high school.

Deborah, Northeastern

...anti-bullying campaigns should be reworked to provide teachers with the authority to thwart bullying. Behind the scenes of most all the school attacks is some sort of detachment of the student(s) from the school community. This occurs because teachers are too often limited in their ability to respond to bullying or bully-like behavior. These limits take two forms; overt policies that hinder teacher involvement or covert actions by the administration resulting from fear of legal action, i.e. lawsuits. Teachers need to have the ability to advocate for all children, but especially children on the fringes. This hurdle is compounded by the lack of patriotism and moral training within our schools.

Paul, Southwestern

As a School Counselor for over 15 years, I think we should pass the House Bill 1844; which was put together but never made it to the floor to be passed. HB1844 would mandate the state of PA to have school counselors that have certified school counseling degrees (not psychology degrees or mental health counseling degrees) within our public education schools with a recommended ASCA School Counselor to Student Ratio of 1:250. We need to have mandated School Counselors who have Master's degrees in School Counseling to support and help students as a preventative and proactive approach to the recent and ongoing tragedies schools face today. Many other states have done this with the backing of ASCA (American School Counselor Association). I think it's time for the state of PA to step up too with mandating properly trained and school counseling certified School Counselors to assist students with resources and counseling support. I would also like to see the state of PA adopt a statewide SAFE2TELL resource, like Colorado has set up. SAFE2TELL would allow everyone in the state of PA to anonymously report any suspected acts of potential violence toward schools and school students/staff as a preventative approach and coordinate efforts with law enforcement and school administration to act accordingly to prevent such incidents. Thank you for taking the time to listen.

Melissa, Northwestern

I believe any student who has been suspended or expelled should be denied access to buying firearms for an extended period of time. If they do try to buy a firearm, authorities will be notified and can look further into that individual.

Daniel, Northeastern

We need to arm our schools with more guidance counselors and community partners to help students develop resiliency. When schools struggle with budgets, often the most important resources (teacher, counselor, art program, sport) get cut. As a middle school teacher in 8th grade, I have witnessed an increase in the number of students without support at home and lacking the ability to cope with emotions (anger, anxiety, depression). As a parent, I think that our schools are not being equipped to deal with this fact. In my middle school, we have two counselors and over 730 students. As the last line of defense for the well-being of our students, we (faculty and staff) are in the trenches and we have no way out.

Alisha, Southern

Bullying was a common element with all of the shooters who took lives with assault weapons in schools. Schools must work to identify victims of bullying and exclusiveness that runs pervasive in our schools when someone is “different” “weird” or “unusual.” We ran a peer mediation group in a high school where I worked in Lancaster County that allowed students to come in and talk about their problems. It was funded by MHMR by the state and run as a pilot program. It was successful for us. It has to be supported by administration and teachers within the school for it to work. And it is important to bring together a cadre of great kids with kindness and an ability to relate and reach out to support these kids who are so isolated and feeling unloved, unwanted, excluded and alone. This is the key that doesn’t get much attention in our society, but it is a critical part of keeping students safe. LOVE is the answer.

Donna, Southern

Protocol is in place for abuse...making it mandatory for staff to report potential cases...with follow-up required within a short time period. Make this practice policy for all suspected depression, social/mental stress alerts suspected by staff/student interaction and student reporting. REQUIRE not only immediate follow-up but tracking by trained identified staff using checked protocol, follow-ups and other multiple staff conferencing/examination on each. In most student-

centered shootings follow-up reports say, “There were signs.” We need to address the signs before. (American Pediatrics has new strong recommendations.)...

James, Retired

As a school counselor, I can say what policy change is desperately needed... “Mandated mental health care when indicated.” I have called CYS MANY times only to be told that “We cannot force parents to get mental health care for their child.” We spot mentally ill children at the elementary age all the time and if a parent is not cooperative, which they often are not, the child’s issues go unaddressed and continue festering. If the state can mandate care for asthma and diabetes, we should mandate mental health assessment and care when schools see warning signs. This is not a gun control issue at all.

Michele, Southeastern

Students needs to have at least one adult and one friend in school that they care about and who cares about them. A mentor or advisor connection is vital for no child to feel disconnected or disenfranchised. Relationship building is paramount to keeping safe in school. Time for mentor and advisory programs; morning meetings and incentives for kindness and courtesy. The curriculum would be focused on soft skills and appreciating others in all grades.

Lauri, Southeastern

Look into the “red flag” legislation in California, where a teacher, doctor, parent, etc. can report concerns about a person’s mental health as it relates to violence. The person undergoes an evaluation and guns are taken away if he/she is unhealthy or must get a judge to allow them to buy a gun.

Kathy, Retired

In response to keeping our schools safe; placing guns in our buildings is NOT the solution. We need to cut through the “red tape” that teachers face every day when raising concerns about specific students. Some of our most needy behavior issues are the ones that receive the LEAST

amount of intervention. We need more social workers and psychologists, not on site after an incident, but in our buildings NOW. We have students everyday coming to us with less, less food in their tummies, less supplies in their backpack, less support at home. We need to have more resources available IN our schools today more than ever. The suggestion to arm teachers is ludicrous and will have disastrous results. Many times, we as teachers can't even give a lunch detention without "permission" or support!

Christina, Southeastern

Schools need a way to mandate that students identified as needing a mental health evaluation get the help they need. By law they can say "no thank you" and schools have no recourse.

Mary, Western

As a retired teacher and now current student assistance counselor in the schools, I highly believe in SEL's (Social Emotional Learning) curriculums being explicitly taught just as math, reading and writing are explicitly taught. These evidence-based programs are proven to be effective and if given precedence starting at the younger grades, will help kids learn to identify and share empathy and compassion, as well as other pertinent social skills that they are just not learning or receiving at home. I highly recommend Second Step Program as an example to follow.

Lisa, Retired

Please see: www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework. As a school psychologist, I strongly advocate for proactive interventions and mental health/social emotional supports. However, this is often limited by funding and existing frameworks. Policies and funding that support comprehensive school safety and mental health efforts are critical to ensuring universal and long-term sustainability. These frameworks exist, but often fail to be implemented for various reasons. This change will require collaboration of all stakeholders.

Sarah, Northeastern

More funding for mental health awareness for teachers and parents, ease the stigma of shame or embarrassment so help can be sought. But more importantly, funding for more social workers to address and work with students who are experiencing difficulty. The teachers cannot do it all! One guidance counselor for 200 students cannot do it alone. Maybe money for an SRO in the schools, but I don't believe that addresses the issue just the visual perception of safety. However, that authoritative person just being seen can be a great deterrent for violence. I live in Bradford County, but lived and taught in Virginia for two years and Florida for 12 years (county districts) and being that we are so rural, make it possible for the seven districts in the county to share resources better, rather than all independently and thus can't afford the personnel. The IU doesn't cut it - too spread out and not always economical. At this point, the mental health/drug issues I see on a daily basis with our students needs to be addressed. I do believe the schools try - just not enough personnel, resources &/or funding.

Christi, Northeastern

...a district near to my own utilizes their School Resource Officer to implement mental health programs such as Aggression Replacement Training. There are many research-based mental health prevention programs such as Aggression Replacement Training that can be effectively implemented by personnel without formal mental health training. If schools had additional funding to hire School Resource Officers, we would benefit from not only their additional safety presence, but also their time to work with at-risk students.

Finally, we need our teacher performance measures to reflect the fact that academics are not the sole measure of a successful school. For example: My district has begun to implement the Second Step social/emotional curriculum. Many teachers are resistant to implement the lessons, because it requires them to give up math and reading time. They have directly stated that they are concerned about having their PSSA results affected. I appreciate that effectiveness measures continue to evolve, and with the new PA Future Ready index, we are adding an emphasis on career-readiness. But some of the positive effects of the mental health supports schools are increasingly expected to provide are difficult to measure in the outcomes we are presently focused on.

Perhaps incorporating some process-oriented measures to teacher/school ratings would encourage the implementation of more mental health interventions. So, in addition to teachers/schools being measured by academic and career readiness outcomes, they would also be measured on whether they were implementing programs such as Second Step, Aggression Replacement Training, Youth Mental Health First Aid, etc., with fidelity.

Tony, Northwestern

As a school counselor, I am exhausted. Our ratio is 360-1 in the middle school. I have sent four students to crisis in the last month. My office is a revolving door. I never have time to catch my breath. My own health is suffering. We need more of us in our buildings. We need crisis counselors. We need to value Restorative Practices to build meaningful relationships with students. I am a licensed trainer for the International Institute for Restorative Practices and run a Peacekeeper program as part of our discipline program at school. Students are facilitating conferences to repair harm. They are doing amazing things! We need to listen to students and listen to what they need to feel safe. We need smaller class sizes to help strengthen community. Our class sizes are as much as 35 this year. That is way too much! We need help! We are only being reactive and don't have time to be proactive. I want to help guide legislators to make policies that empower our students. They are the key here!

Jen, Eastern

I would like to see an approach like Chicago is using to entice marginalized students into the circle of being valued in our communities. If I remember there is a thread that connects Columbine Colorado, Sandy Hook Conn., and the Florida mass shootings together. It is students identified as troubled and isolated who lacked good problem-solving skills. If we can't find a way of adopting a policy of everyone is important we end up paying for jail cells that are a lot more expensive than schools and will just see yet another tragedy take place not if but when.

David, Southeastern

I feel today's problems are a combination of many issues. One being guns, one being mental health issues...etc. I teach Kindergarten. I am SURE that if we had counselors at this level, social workers, and social skill activities, we could reach the children in need. They are taking away play. They are increasing academics at this level. Children do not know how to be children. They need to play, learn how to get along, learn how to handle emotions, learn how to express themselves and understand what is normal and what is not. All we seem to do is push them through to meet the standards that typically aren't developmentally appropriate. Every grade level, starting in kindergarten, should have social skills built into the school day. Counselors need to be available and instead of suspending and expelling, we should be counseling and supporting the needs of our children. Especially those who don't get emotional support at home.

Lori, Southwestern

A role should be created in public schools that focuses on building relationships with all students, especially those at risk. The role should be a current, experienced teacher. The teacher would make a three- to six-year commitment to this role. After the term is up, the teacher would return to the classroom. In this role, the teacher would focus on building positive relationships with children at risk. The children could be identified by school personnel. From greeting them as they arrive at school, to positively reinforcing their good choices, this role's possibilities are great! At the same time, this role would not focus on what is keeping school counselors from a greater focus on children, and that is testing and paper work.

David, Mideastern

... We also need to give schools some power when parents refuse to get their children the help that they need.

Peggy, Southern

- 1. Policy mandating and funding school social workers to support students' non-academic needs in a meaningful and comprehensive way.*
- 2. School-based mentoring programs, surrounding students with concerned, interested adults.*
- 3. Character education curriculum incorporated into all aspects of academics, putting it on an even plane with student academic progress.*

Diane, Northeastern

Better mental health trained professionals, professional staff, IAs, counselors, AND substitutes. Open-door policies for students to speak freely without fear of repercussion. Mandatory classes on recognizing signs of mental health disorders and funding for organizations such as MHDS to provide services that school personnel may not be able to handle such as CBT/DBT therapies. It's not a gun issue, it's a mental issue. Deal with the immediate need for help and remove the need for students to feel death is the only answer.

Cathy, Northeastern

...Our Mental Health system is a mess, and the students in need of support simply cannot access it. Having in-house psychologists to meet with students during the school day will remove any barriers to helping these kids through difficult times, and hopefully remove the choice to attack others as an option. (This is different from adjudicating someone to commit them to an institution, which will not help.)

Mike, Southeastern

We do not need metal detectors or guns in our schools. We need relationships. We need time to develop these relationships with our students throughout the day through the content that we teach. We need smaller class sizes and less standardized testing pressure to nurture these relationships and guide students in their development of character skills. Safe schools are created by cultivating a community of caring individuals instead of data points on a graph. All of these tragedies were committed by students who were part of our community. We cannot keep them out, they are us. Students need to learn how to process emotions, deal with disappointment, have empathy for others. Teachers need time to work with their students to develop these skills through their content without the fear not covering enough material or low test scores. Give us our classrooms back and let us teach. Reduce the unnecessary political pressure on arbitrary test scores, reduce class sizes, create standards that are cognitively age appropriate and let's focus on the development of the whole child.

Debbie, Northeastern

...Regarding increasing partnerships with mental health providers, legislation that funded this bridge could put more social workers and mental health providers in schools to run social skills group as well as anxiety and depression support groups. Having trained mental health professionals in our schools would also assist in early identification of emotional and behavioral disabilities, allowing interventions to be put in place to support these children and prevent them from acting out violently.

Policy to increase partnerships with local police departments, possibly creating school liaisons in these departments, would increase police presence in our school buildings which would be both a deterrent to attacks, and promote strong, healthy relationships between officers and students.

Luther, Mideastern

Student confidentiality seems to trump the safety of teachers and other students in buildings. For example, the identity of students who make threats against the school are kept confidential, but it would be much more helpful if we, as educators, knew who to keep an eye on and provide help to him/her.

The Manifestation determination laws protect students with learning disorders and emotional disorders; therefore, if a student with an emotional support and/or a learning support IEP makes a threat, they cannot be suspended from school. This causes great concern for the remaining school population.

Robin, Mideastern

I know there are unaddressed mental health issues my students are facing and bringing into school. There have not been any mass shootings in my community, but the city is extremely violent and there are shootings almost every day. Classes need to be smaller, and schools need better resources for populations experiencing chronic trauma. Unless we are taken seriously, this cycle will NEVER BE BROKEN. And that's the fault of every elected person and every silent voter. Schools need help. And it's going to be expensive. Please do something. We are literally dying from bad policy.

Theresa, Northeastern

I believe that each school should have a crisis counselor and all schools should be following the American School Counselor Association guideline of 250 students to 1 counselor. In addition, each school should have a social worker assigned to the school to meet students' (and their families') basic human needs. The state needs to help with funding this increased need for more mental health-associated services in our schools and not put the burden on local districts and local tax payers. Having more adults advocate for students can only help identify mental health dangers in our system before those affected become a threat. Creating the above services as part of a school district allows students who need assistance to be identified and helped without the sometime barrier of a parent/guardian who won't allow the student help.

Susan, Northeastern

School counselors have state standards to follow but surprisingly are not state mandated. Not all districts have school counselors on staff from K-12. I think this is a valuable position that can be utilized to teach or improve self-regulatory skills, self concept, or other skills that may unfortunately be lacking in our students. I think as a part of the updated policy, school counselors should be mandated at every level and utilized appropriately.

Lisa, Southern

...The pressure put on our kids (K-12) is enormous and leads to mental health issues and takes away from student-teacher bonding. The more I'm allowed to connect with my students in a meaningful way and keep a close eye on their social-emotional well-being, the better...

Caitlin, Southeastern

Please keep high focus on early intervention in the social and emotional domains. Make it mandatory for school counselors to be full time K-12. Our district has 4 elementary schools and NO SCHOOL COUNSELORS. The inner dialogue for resilience and connection to mental health resources are critical at all ages but especially the youngest. Make policy to have administrations take testing away from high and middle school counselors and allow them to spend time teaching more in the social emotional realm with students.

Nancy, Northwestern

I have questions that may lead to ideas... My questions revolve around identifying students of concern and reporting same. If a student is identified, perhaps as SED or having some sort of psychological or psychiatric issues do privacy laws prevent schools from making the police or others aware of the issue?

If a student graduates, does any record follow them or is it sealed? Does this also apply to any police record? I ask this because many of the mass shootings have been perpetrated by individuals who are postsecondary.

As mandated reporters can teachers or others report their concerns about a potentially violent student to authorities, such as the police, outside of the district? Where do privacy laws come into play here?

If juvenile court records or school “student of concern” records were available to authorities for background checks could this stop some people from legally purchasing a firearm?

Lastly, I don’t think that teachers should be armed but maybe there could be designated lockers to hold a weapon scattered throughout a school with only certain well-trained personnel only to have access in case of an emergency. This could include all school personnel from cleaning staff through administration so that designated safety personnel could be kept somewhat secret.

Ed, Retired

Similar to Megan’s Law, which provides information that encourages parental vigilance, we propose legislation that would require a student’s parents to REPORT the existence of a gun in the home IF a student has been disciplined at school for making a terroristic or violent threat to the school or classmates. No guns are confiscated. No parents are arrested, tried, or fined. We simply obtain the INFORMATION that this child has access to a gun, and we can thereby follow the proper protocol and increase both vigilance AND support for the student in question.

As with anything, I believe an awareness is critical in this situation. If the right people have the right information at the right time, I know that school shootings can be prevented.

Sara, Northeastern

...Community and school partnerships must be encouraged in every way possible. The more connections between all stakeholders, the more invested everyone will be in helping each other.

Michele, Central

Increased funding for hiring more school counselors to match the ASCA recommended ratio of 250 students to 1 counselor. This would enable us to reach more students who may be suffering from mental illness, so we can intervene at an earlier age and put more effective services in place. It would also allow us to implement more proactive measures like direct instruction of a social-emotional curriculum such as Second Step that teaches students empathy and compassion and how to recognize, report, and refuse bullying and how to be a more supportive bystander. Professional development for classroom teachers regarding how to recognize signs of depression and other forms of mental illness and/or changes in a student’s behaviors that may signify a student’s intent to harm others. Increased police presence and visibility around and/or within schools to develop a sense of security and relationship with students. More rigorous security measures, doors that

lock, alarms that are different from a fire alarm that can be triggered from anywhere in the building so that a threat of intruder can be communicated more quickly. Communication between the school and law enforcement regarding students who have a history of aggression throughout their school career, so they can continue to be monitored after graduation.

Connie, Southeastern

I am currently a Promise Leader through the Sandy Hook Promise organization. With the support of my administration, I am presenting in small groups to our middle and high school students the Say Something Program. The students will learn three steps to promote a safer and healthier school: Look for Warning Signs, Signals, and Threats, Act Immediately, and Say Something to a Trusted Adult. In the spring, student ambassadors from the high school will present the Start with Hello program to our elementary school students. They will work with the elementary school to bring the message of building a stronger and more connected school community by teaching kids how to identify signs of social isolation and how to connect through saying hello and reaching out. I believe that every school should be connected with the Sandy Hook Promise to bring their programs (free access) to their schools.

Bonnye, Eastern

...With budget cuts and restrictions, access to school counselors and other health officials can be limited in many places. Although a potentially costly endeavor, I think that this would have positive effects. Additionally, teachers AND parents need to be more aware of what signs to look for in their children to determine whether seeking professional help might be the right path. Through awareness and public programs, the stigma of mental health issues has lessened, but the reality remains that we need to catch these issues sooner. Please do not arm teachers and add more weapons into society...

Haley, Mideastern

Schools desperately need more help with mental health. There is a clear connection between the opioid crisis and the increase in violent behavior and mental illness in our schools. Please look for ways to provide appropriate mental health for our society including social workers in each school, more counselors, additional funding for Children and Youth, and more short- and long-

term care options for residential and day programs to address mental health. DO NOT arm teachers and put guards in our schools; prevent violence by healing the mind.

Dana, Mideastern

... We need to give kids a safe way to express themselves, and more strategies to help identify loners, kids that are at risk of acting out in these drastic ways.

Lisa, Mideastern

Policy Recommendation #3

Establish threat assessment and crisis teams made up of law enforcement, mental health professionals employed by both the school and county, teachers and support staff, and administrators.

If there is true hope for addressing the underlying causes of student violence, rather than merely reacting to that violence, that hope very likely lies in establishing threat assessment and crisis teams. Our member comments in this area identify communication problems when systems do not collaborate.

PSEA is working with the associations representing Pennsylvania superintendents, principals, and school boards to share ideas in this area. In March 2018, our organizations offered webinars for our members on threat assessments because we believe they are critical to keeping students safe. We will continue to work with these groups on this issue, and PSEA believes there is a value to bringing these teams to every district in the commonwealth.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, threat assessment is a violence prevention strategy that involves: (a) identifying student threats to commit a violent act, (b) determining the seriousness of the threat, and (c) developing intervention plans that protect potential victims and address the underlying problem or conflict that led to the threatening behavior. The goal of threat assessment is to keep schools safe and help predict and prevent tragedies like shootings, self-harm, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and criminal activity. Threat assessment teams also provide an alternative to zero tolerance policies that have proven to be counterproductive.

Access to a team that is dedicated to creating individualized assessments of each threat, and to recommending a course of action that involves considering complete wellness would be an enormously important resource for Pennsylvania's schools, and we strongly encourage the Legislature to adopt a set of guidelines, like the well-known Virginia Assessment Program.

When coupled with a greater emphasis on student wellness, these interdisciplinary teams *can* make our schools safer and will help countless students.

Once again, according to the National Association of School Psychologists: "Effective procedures to assess threats include establishing district-wide policies and procedures, creating interdisciplinary assessment teams, and educating the school community."

Establish district-wide policies and procedures. All threats of violence must be taken seriously and investigated, so it is important to have a specific policy and established procedures for dealing with student threats. The policy should clarify the role of educators in relation to that of law enforcement, identify the threat assessment team, and specify the team's training requirements.

Create an interdisciplinary assessment team. Effective threat assessment is based on the combined efforts of a school-based team including representatives from administration, mental health professionals employed by both the school and county, and law enforcement. In unusually complex cases, the team might draw upon other professionals in the local community. The interdisciplinary team approach improves the efficiency and scope of the assessment process and reduces the risk of observer bias.

Educate the school community about threat assessment. Implementation of a threat assessment approach hinges on educating the school community about the importance of a positive school climate that focuses on providing help for students before problems escalate into violence. Schools should regularly assess their climate, with particular emphasis on students' trust in adults and willingness to seek help for problems and concerns. All members of the community, especially students, must understand the distinction between seeking help to prevent violence and "snitching," or informing on someone for personal gain. Written materials should be publicly available and specific efforts should be made to explain relevant aspects of the threat assessment policy to staff members, students, and families.

PSEA member comments on threat assessment teams

Can we make PA a model for the U.S., in terms of funding mental health resources for all children of school age? Put a hotline in place where any concerned community member could reach out to voice concerns on specific situations. Often schools are concerned about safety reports and are in

a “this won’t happen here” state of denial. The hotline would allow for tips on suspected threats. Push to dismantle the automatic weapons availability across the state.

Shannon, Mideastern

Virginia is utilizing a threat assessment model. <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/threat-assessment-at-school/threat-assessment-for-school-administrators-and-crisis-teams>. Perhaps we could start with a standardize threat assessment model inhouse that moves to a mandated evaluation when high risk without parental consent.

Michelle, Western

Create a tip line for anyone to report suspicious social media posts, peer behavior or other concerns to the local district and police department. In Bucks County, the BEACON Employee Assistance Network provides short-term counseling and referrals. Expand this model through school districts to students who feel they may be in crisis and to the families as a resource for needed help.

Robert, Mideastern

...Train the teachers to stay alert to students’ concerns and threats from social media...Any student making threats either verbally or through social media needs to be checked out. A psychological evaluation and threat assessment must be done. If the threat is plausible that student needs to be referred for a 72-hour psych evaluation as well as being brought to the attention of law enforcement, to determine if the student has access to weaponry or the ability to create a threat through other means....

Michael, Northeastern

...What I observed [after Columbine] was different districts adopting different “crises plans” that could be put into place with efficiency, but without having those with skill sets at the table... From that time on our school counseling department advocated hard to have the administration create

a district crisis plan which included a core team, a flight team, action plan, communication chains, second and subsequent days, etc. We advocated for lockdowns and intruder drills and to let parents and community members know we had plans without going into great details. This worked well for a while, but then other issues seemed to take more time and there was less time for crisis preparation... I hope the powers that be are given funding to assemble a group of stakeholders who will come to the table with commitment to locate experts in the U.S. who have worked with those communities affected by these tragic events. I hope this group will then find consensus without individual drama to come up with a template and resources for school crisis response.

..10-15 core teams across PA each consisting of an educator, other school personnel, an administrator, member of the community, local responder, and a legislator will need to be trained to go out this summer to in-service all school staffs as efficiently as possible so school employees are "armed" with a plan of response and that all levels of the school staff are committed to practicing with our most valuable resources, our school children!...

Liz, Northeastern

- 1. Bring police, health professionals, parents, teachers, students, politicians together to form dialogue groups in every region of PA.*
- 2. Summarize all data collected. Bring selected members from regional groups together to review data.*
- 3. Take action on ideas that may work for Pennsylvania schools.*

My ideas:

Coordinated student assistance teams grades K-12.

Coordinated student assistance teams post high school institutions.

This database should be made available to county mental health teams and law enforcement agencies.

Use programs from Sandy Hook and Columbine to build strong school communities. Every student is important, especially those who are emotional troubled by life's experiences (divorce, bullying, learning challenges, social media, etc.)...

Joann, Retired

Policy Recommendation #4

Work with Congress to protect the Title I, II, and IV funding designed to provide healthy and secure learning environments.

In their comments, our members repeatedly recommended investments in school culture.

The president's recently released 2019 budget proposal provides no increases in Title I funding; eliminates all Title II funding, which provides critical resources for educator training and professional development, including training for positive school climate and emergency preparedness; and eliminates funding for virtually all Title IV programs, which are specifically authorized under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to provide students with a safe and healthy learning environment. This funding proposal directly undermines the ability of states and schools to fully utilize federal programs authorized by ESSA to improve school safety. It would be a critical mistake to defund these programs given the recent events highlighting the need to provide support for school safety efforts.

PSEA member comments on healthy and secure learning environments

-Training for teachers and staff on how to recognize signs of mental health issues and how to get them help.

-Training and resources to promote more positive means to punish children instead of traditional loss of recess, detention, and suspensions.

Angela, Western

If schools are set up to succeed, then the chances of violence occurring from within the school community can be greatly reduced. When students are actively and positively engaged in their education in a way that school feels positive, supported, included, and valued violence will be less likely. When staff and teachers feel supported, respected, and valued as employees they are more likely to provide the support students need. To support these ends, I would recommend funding to allow the following to occur at the district level for HIGH SCHOOLS: Reduce classroom size (max 30 in high functioning classes, max 20 in lower level classes) so that teacher increases positive interaction with students and can build stronger academic relationships with students... Build and

strengthen school-community and school-alumni partnerships. Co-teachers in all basic and core level classes for mandatory subjects so there is an increased staff presence in the classroom. Reduce counselor to student ratio (1:200 max in higher performing high schools and 1:50 max in Title I high schools or high schools that cater to high needs populations). Double the number of social workers, psychologists, and related support staff onsite in all schools. Higher quality cameras in general use areas of schools, especially middle and high schools, so that security and staff can more easily identify individuals that are a potential safety risk.... Grants or similar funding available for districts that have been routinely underfunded so that basic building repairs can be made...

Onsite independent outside counselors for staff that serve high needs communities - sometimes the teachers really do need someone to talk to because it can be very high stress. Most of the remaining areas of support needed within the school community that I can think of need to be resolved at a district or building level...

Have sufficient security staff to have daily random checks for weapons at the door. Bring in drug sniffing dogs at least monthly to high schools and middle schools. Have a help line or anonymous tip line and/or social media site that is well advertised around schools and regularly monitored by local police and school authorities for citizens to report anything potentially unsafe from suicide to bomb threats. Develop a clear response plan for tips received.

Flora, Eastern

Heavy reliance on standardized testing has been detrimental to school climate and is very expensive. Many countries with high literacy rates DO NOT use standardized testing in elementary schools and use it minimally above that level. Eliminate, or sharply curtail testing. Use funds saved to provide more art, music, extracurricular activities, after-school programs, etc. Reduce class sizes so educators have the time to connect with students. Play is crucial to learning, but many schools across the country have sharply curtailed, or eliminated recess. No school schedule should show just minimal recess time. More and more of our children become marginalized because they don't feel a part of the school family. Many times, marginalized children perpetuate the violence. Increase ALL opportunities for students to become involved, i.e. peer and cross age tutoring, mentoring. Create an atmosphere where every child feels that he or she will be missed if absent... Finally, all members of the Legislature should be required to take the 9th-grade PSSA. Publish test results and don't forget to focus on their failure, rather than their successes in other areas of their lives...

Marie, Retired

Academic standards are not enough. Students need to have regular lessons on self-regulation, conflict resolution, social skills, emotional awareness. Placing a large focus on these skills would allow more children to know what to do when they are angry. They would know how to manage their feelings without harming themselves and others. The academic standards have been pushed down, and teachers are working relentlessly on teaching concepts that students are not developmentally ready to learn. This further inhibits teachers to feel comfortable spending time on important social skills and collaborative learning.

Melissa, Southern

Policy Recommendation #5

Provide space and opportunity for school districts to work together to find customized solutions.

Pennsylvania is a diverse state. Tioga and Philadelphia counties are very different places, and a one-size-fits-all solution is simply impractical in the school safety context. **PSEA urges policymakers to allow flexibility and local autonomy in order to enable locally elected officials, parents, and schools to determine how best to use the resources available to them.**

PSEA member comments that show the need for customized solutions

...I think you need to involve experts from many areas so that there is a variety of thought processes occurring: emotional education, teachers, administrators, gun advocates, students, law enforcement, parents. Most importantly, this cannot be a political venue. Uninvite anyone, and I mean anyone, who tries to make this a way to further themselves or their business. This needs to be about safety for EVERY human in the school and law enforcement official who may arrive on the scene... this is not just a school, parent, environment, gun, etc. problem. It involves all of us and should be professionally discussed.

Carol, Mideastern

This is obviously a very complicated situation. I personally do not feel that there is only one solution. I feel that there are several things that could be done and they all fall under one of two components. The first component is PREVENTION, the second is PROTECTION. For the PREVENTION component, I feel that early identification and counseling should be more common. The idea here is to NOT let students get to the point where they feel like doing harm to others...For the PROTECTION component, I feel we need to strongly consider a Security Assessment for each district. The assessment would involve local and professional personnel. Each district is unique, and issues need to be addressed by people who understand the specific needs of each building. I realize money is always an issue, so I feel we may need to consider making non-lethal options available throughout the buildings to help neutralize an intruder until professional help arrives. This idea is in response to the idea of arming teachers with guns. I feel it may be a happy medium that appeals to all and may cost considerably less than hiring several security personnel for each building.

William, Northeastern

The Department of Education needs to make a larger investment in mental health support for students and their families. Improved school support teams and resources with collaboration and consistent access to communicate with health care professionals specifically designed to establish quality goals for children and their families dealing with trauma, behavior disorders, and/or personality disorders. These quality professionals should be separate from school counselors and psychologists so that they can continue to work with more typical school wellness initiatives such as creating a positive school environment, positive peer interactions, and educational testing for learning needs.

Laura, Mideastern

...there are wonderful programs that build community in the schools and classrooms (example - The Responsive Classroom). Often, they end up being watered down or eliminated because they are take away from instructional time. Research will support that time spent creating a safe, nurturing, and supportive classroom community does pay off. However, in our data-driven era, we are challenged when we set out to collect data on school climate. Not everything that is tested matters, and not everything that matters can be tested.

Marilyn, Retired

...We need commonsense gun laws in Pennsylvania. Just as important, if not more, we need additional supports, people, services, and placements for students facing a variety of emotional and mental issues. If we really want to make a change for the positive, we need to find ways to support our students' needs, and even sometimes their family's needs. Our children are being asked to function when their basic emotional needs are not being met. Please read How Children Succeed by Paul Tough.

Catherine, Southeastern

... Form school teams whose job is to try to identify troubled students through surveys and conversations to make the proper referrals and notifications...

Anita, Eastern

Other PSEA member comments

PSEA has a broad and diverse membership with a variety of perspectives and solutions, and the following statements represent the ideas of some of our members, not organizational positions. We view this diversity of opinions as healthy and recognize that regardless of where a public-school employee falls on this debate, we all come from one place – the desire to keep schools and students safe.

While we feel it is appropriate to share comments that support allowing teachers to carry guns, these comments should not be considered official organizational positions. PSEA strongly opposes Senate Bill 383, as does a majority of public school employees in Pennsylvania.

Diverse comments from PSEA members

I believe strongly that we should Fix NICS. HIPAA should have limitations especially when it comes to background checks. The majority of the perpetrators of school shootings have mental or emotional issues. A national database could help this situation.

I also believe mandated and funded school security guards are a good idea. If the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania can afford the Keystone Exams, it can afford to help pay the costs of security personnel, advanced locking systems, surveillance cameras and bulletproof class for schools.

I also believe that First Person Shooter video games should have age restrictions. The vast majority of children play video games. I believe violent games create a violent mindset.

I am a proud member of PSEA for 29 years. I am also a proud life member of the National Rifle Association. I abhor school violence. As a law-abiding citizen, (I've never even had a speeding ticket) I am sickened that the media has chosen to vilify me and my affiliation with the NRA as a reason for school violence. I believe in the Constitution of the United States of America. I hope that PSEA can look at the situation of school violence objectively and make recommendations to the governor based on facts not emotions.

David, Central-Western

I think putting students with issues in separate schools designed to deal with those issues is a good idea. When I taught in Harrisburg, we had an alternative school for those students who could not behave or function properly in a traditional school setting. It helped the other students feel safe

and allowed the teacher to perform without interruption. I think this idea could be expanded to students who have a potential to do harm to others. Students who have been identified with that potential could be helped while the school could be safer. Instead of paying teachers to carry guns (a ridiculous idea) they could be paid extra to teach in a school for disruptive students.

Daniel, Retired

In light of the recent violence and ongoing violence in our country the following subject should be addressed in policy. As educators we should start the discussion about the use of "Mature Rated" (16 and up) video games by our young children at home. I evaluated 20 boys in the last three weeks for OT services. Fifteen out of 20 boys age 5 play the games "Doom," "Grand Theft Auto," and "Call of Duty." Parents do not understand the danger of these games for young children. These games not only make it difficult for young children to focus and attend at school, but they neurologically impair children in the area of the limbic system of the brain. With too much exposure to the violent images, clear graphic representation of people being killed, rude and destructive language, and outright practice shooting people (images that are very life like) change the way a child responds to violence and encourages violent acts. Young children become desensitized to violent images, and worse actually think that after being shot, people stand up and can be shot again. It should be apparent to all that use of these games at a young age create violent youth and can cause psychological disturbance in children. The rise in kids in emotional support, the increase incidence of poor attention and focus, the increase in impulse control problems can all be attributed at least partly to participation in violent video game play. Because of this the PA teacher associations need to explore how to teach families the danger of letting children under the age of 16 play these video games.

Amy, Eastern

...We need a single point of entry, metal detectors, live-feed cameras, and more security staff. I also think that we need to ban students from having cell phones during the day - check them at the door. Students are sending and receiving messages from and about outsiders, they video staff, students, and the building interior, and relay information very quickly. This could go a long way toward getting their focus back in the classroom, rather than what is going on outside of the classroom. It has been done in other schools (Indiana and Massachusetts, I think?) with success. Clear backpacks are another option for deterring concealed weapons. NO guns for teachers!

Cheryl, Eastern

As an educator, parent, and Christian, I feel that more than gun control or lockdown trainings, our schools need God. While I realize that laws make this difficult to impossible, it doesn't mean we can't still teach our students what is right as citizens. I feel the root of the problem with shootings, etc. is the lack of moral education. I believe it would make a big impact for our government to invest in character development curriculum and mandate a given number of minutes that each grade must teach this essential lifelong concept. We are required to teach a given number of minutes of math, reading, and even physical education, yet no requirements exist to teach our children a good moral background.

Brad, Central

Cutting art, music, clubs, drama, etc. does not give some students a feeling of belonging somewhere.

Janet, Southeastern

Smaller class sizes – that would allow teachers to know students better.

Deborah, Northeastern

Teachers really do try to keep tabs on all of their students, this is much easier to do in elementary schools where class sizes are smaller, and students stay with a homeroom for much of the school day. In high schools, where teachers may have over 100 students a day, this is an issue.

Kathleen, Southeastern

State pension funds should be divested from companies that manufacture assault weapons and magazines/ammunition. In order to be approved in Pennsylvania, it would be realistic not to divest in guns and bullets from those that are used solely for hunting!

Roberta, Southeastern

I believe that restricting the sale of automatic/semi-automatic weapons to young adults (18-19) would help. Also, requiring (and funding,) schools to have a mental health therapist per school (not just district,) and enough counselors could go a long way in helping students with anger issues.

Shane, Southwestern

Comments opposed to arming teachers

Please do not consider any legislation that would require teachers to carry guns into schools. I would frankly not be able to concentrate on my very demanding job of TEACHING were I to understand that guns were everywhere in my building. Regardless as to my level of skill in using a gun, I do not feel as though I could guarantee the safety of my students with its use or presence. In fact, I would feel much LESS safe. While I understand the complex nature of society and safety today, my life as a teacher began 29 years ago with teaching students, which I thought meant I was teaching curriculum, but I also teach pride, respect, responsibility, determination, empathy, and so much more. I work well beyond the “official work day.” I have a master’s degree, and administrative certificate, and 30 credits beyond my master’s degree. All help me be the best TEACHER I can be. To think that any teachers would have to remove their focus from their families and students to become experts at shooting a gun is a recipe for disaster. Let me do my job and find other expert ways of protecting my students and me in the classroom.

Helene, Mideastern

School safety is a concern for all teachers; however, having teachers carry a firearm into the classroom is a terrible idea. I personally own a pistol and have a concealed-carry permit. I am comfortable with the safe operation of my firearm. However, in a critical situation, I would not feel that I have the training or skill to use my firearm to protect my students. My main concern is their safety, but trained law enforcement officers are the best ones to handle these situations...

Joseph, Retired

The safety of students in public school buildings is of paramount importance. When students come to school they should feel comfortable knowing that they are in a safe and weapon-free learning environment. Arming teachers with guns is NOT the answer to school safety. Requiring teachers to have military experience is also not the answer. I got into teaching because I am passionate about working with young people. I enjoy seeing those aha moments when they finally understand a concept I am teaching them. If there are weapons in my building, even being kept by “specially trained” staff members, I feel that will infringe on the “Free and Appropriate Public Education” (FAPE) that we are providing to students.

Esther, Mideastern

As a teacher, I have many jobs and responsibilities every single day. Teaching my students how to read, comprehend, infer, write, complete math problems well above their grade level, help bridge the gap between my low-achieving students and the standards set forth by my district and state. I also teach science, social studies, computers, respect, manners, gratitude, grit, compassion, empathy, compromise, and collaboration. Woven in to all of that I also teach how to enjoy learning, how to tie your shoe laces, how to organize your materials, how to be a kind friend, how to accept defeat and celebrate success, and many other topics not listed in any curriculum guide. The job of a teacher is to help shape future leaders.

When an elected government official states that he is proposing that teachers carry guns to keep schools safe I am enraged. I have gone to school and multiple workshops, classes, and professional development training sessions to develop my teaching skills and hone my craft every single year. And now we as teachers are potentially expected to also learn how to use a gun in case of an emergency. This is not something that is just learned through one day of training. Trained professionals learn, practice, and practice more for years to be considered proficient. Do these government officials think that teachers just wake up one morning and say, “I want to teach,” and then they do? Doctors? Surgeons? No. Years of training are needed. The same holds true for using a gun.

So, IF teachers are to have guns ... where is it proposed that we have TIME for the training? In case you weren't aware, our jobs don't end once the last student leaves. Teachers bring home work to grade and comment on. We work hours upon hours beyond the school day. That also doesn't take into account the time needed to decompress, spend time with family and friends, enjoy hobbies, do laundry, clean our house, food shop, and oh yeah ... sleep.

I've heard some people comment about mental illness and “what if a teacher gets upset and shoots a student.” If that's your belief, then you should probably live in a bubble or on a deserted island because doesn't that belief apply to anyone? A cop with a gun? A chef with a knife? A surgeon with a scalpel? A driver who carries a gun and has road rage? I don't see how this is specific to a teacher having a bad day. I know that there are good and bad teachers, just like there are good

and bad workers in every single profession. But 99 percent of the teachers I know got into this profession to help children.

So, this professional is going to continue doing his job of teaching the future leaders of the world. I would appreciate it if trained professionals were responsible for keeping my school safe. I would also appreciate it if the government officials would think first before speaking. It's what we teach our children to do.

Michael, Mideastern

... A student with a grudge could overtake a teacher with a gun. An unplanned accidental shooting of a student in or not in a crisis situation would cause a school district to be sued. Where would this gun be located? Would it be loaded for immediate use? For those of us who have spent any time in a classroom, it is such a ridiculous idea that it could be funny if not so serious. The added responsibility of possessing a gun is far beyond what educators need as they plan each day... with more than enough already on their plates.

Suzanne, Southern

Clear backpacks are another option for deterring concealed weapons. NO guns for teachers!

Cheryl, Eastern

First, NO to teachers with guns! Ideas: Counselors (at least one per building) who teach anger management classes in a multi-level and ongoing curriculum, teach "See Something, Say Something," use ideas promoted by Sandy Hook Promise. Advocate for extreme risk protection orders. Work with local police and at-risk families to improve their situations. Metal detectors at entrances (economically feasible?). Advocate for gun safety issues like better background checks, no gun sales until clearance checks out - no matter how long it takes, gun show, and private sales MUST follow all requirements, age limits on gun ownership, and ban on all assault weapons.

Lois, Central

I do not want to carry a gun as a first-grade teacher! I think this would exasperate the problem! Instead, we need to fix it at its source – people feeling disconnected from each other and the organizations there to help – schools, community centers, churches, etc. Students also need to learn in less pressured environments that [allow them to] leave the room for a time to develop their social and emotional sides as well as their mental capabilities.

Michelle, Eastern

Please do not put the pressure of carrying a gun on the teachers. We need retired or active duty military personnel at all schools. It would employ our servicemen and women to help protect the schools while allowing the teachers to do our jobs! I think a uniformed soldier with a high powered military weapon would make anyone think twice before coming to harm us. I lived through the stabbing on April 9th in my district. Heavily armed soldiers trained to kill... yes... that is what I want and need to feel safe. Do NOT arm me and my colleagues.... there is no way we are trained or truly capable to shoot our students who may be harming us. Our prison inmates are protected better than our educators. Let's fix this immediately and simply! Soldiers protect... educators teach!

Erin, Southwestern

I agree with the policy that PSEA has already put forth. Teachers should teach; they should not have to function as policemen (or policewomen). I've held this position ever since I started teaching in September of 1959.

Frank, Midwestern

Comments in support of arming teachers

I do believe that firearms have a place in our educational system; however, arming teachers as a general vision is dangerous and irresponsible. We need to take a holistic approach to safety and security. I propose that you and the Legislature pave the way to the development of proper training programs and mental evaluation for the purpose of arming willing and competent educators, staff, and administration. The development of these policies will take multiple experts and organizations to do this effectively. The collaboration of PSBA, PSEA, PASA, Pennsylvania Principals

Association, law enforcement officials, and others can help to organize priorities and address everyone's needs for safety and security.

Because not one shoe fits all in Pennsylvania, the Legislature should develop these policies and allow individual districts to enact them as they see best to serve their students and community...

Brad, Eastern

...Arming teacher who want to be armed and providing body armor to those who volunteer. I am a teacher and have state police, child line, and FBI background checks. I also have a sherriff's department check and a legal gun permit. I am more than willing to take the firearms training given to police officers if it were offered. I am also willing to protect my students if and when necessary. Whether armed or not, I would do this, but I would be more confident if armed... Legal protection for any teacher who acts against a perpetrator from lawsuits. Whether with a firearm or a baseball bat, a teacher taking action should not have to worry about prosecution or legal action for protecting the student body. I know some of these suggestions are counter to PSEA's and NEA's position, but as a 34-year veteran teacher, I have seen too much talk and the continued policy of tying our hands to act...Thanks for the forum...

Michael, Northeastern

I will agree with any policy to help keep guns out of people's hands that shouldn't have them. I will agree to any actions to make it harder to get into our schools. I think we need to be able to hold kids more accountable. But as a U.S. Army veteran, I do believe that having a safe box with a weapon is something that should happen. There is a zero percent chance of this making the school less safe under my watch. If there was ever a time when someone was hurting my students, I would do everything in my power to stop the person, whether I had a weapon or not, and I really would like to help my own chances at survival in that situation by being armed. You should be able to trust teachers and school districts to make the best decisions for their own situations. My students are my family, and I will lay my life down, or take a life, to try to protect them.

Bob, Western

Arm SOME staff members who may have prior training or are willing to learn. Just like air marshals, trained armed teachers would be a deterrent. All schools should have metal detectors and serious screening for all who enter. Advocate for better mental health services and more

access to records protected by HIPPA laws, so background checks might actually work. Advocate for a return to family values, respect, and standards of conduct. Stop accepting the “anything goes” culture! It is NOT OK for students to swear at and/or attack teachers, police, or any authority figure. Violent movies, video games, and TV are making our youth numb to violence and killing. And return to common sense. We know kindergarteners who bring a toy gun are not a danger. Focus on the REAL causes of why we are where we are.

Patricia, Retired

...Conference with the NRA and local law enforcement and see how armed staff may be of assistance. Thank you for seriously looking out for my students and personal children in schools!

Jamiel, Southeastern

There are many facets to the gun violence issue that we face, and there must be a variety of solutions considered to solve it... We need to be looking at a variety of options to keep our students and faculty member safe while in school. There are teachers in school buildings throughout our state that have served in the military and National Guard. To think that allowing these teachers to be armed, if they wished to take on that responsibility, wouldn't make our schools safer is ridiculous. Countless numbers of other teachers hold concealed carry permits, have undergone training to increase their proficiency with weapons, and carry weapons daily while outside of the school building. Again, thinking that these people would not help to keep students and teachers safe shows a significant lack of knowledge around the issue. It is frustrating to listen to people in leadership positions speak of making a difference but not be willing to have an open mind when presented with solutions. No one is claiming that arming teachers and support professionals is the magic solution to this complicated problem. It is, however, one change that, along with several others, would lead us in the right direction of improving safety in our schools.

Eric, Southeastern

Individual districts should be given the ability to allow properly trained, F.A.S.T.E.R., staff members to conceal carry a firearm. The great majority of school shootings end within one minute of an armed first responder entering the building. An average four- to five-minute response time is too long to allow our children to be targets.

...I have been a competitive shooter for well over 10 years and hold the rank of master in two divisions of the International Defensive Pistol Association. I have shot USPSA and Three Gun for many years, as well. I'm an NRA-certified instructor in a number of different disciplines and have undergone training at my own expense numerous times. My skill and competency with firearms exceeds well over 95 percent of active law enforcement officers, possibly more. But, should trouble come to our school, I'm helpless due to my employer's weapons policy and the prevailing irrational fear of firearms which permeates the liberal progressive culture.

Bob, Central

Untrained teachers, administrators, and security personnel carrying guns is not the answer. However, it is time to come to a happy medium in which employees who have the proper permit should be permitted to have their personal protection in their car. Not permitted outside of the vehicle. Teachers are unarmed leaving work and an easy target for criminals.

Please consider no backpacks in schools. Many schools have gone with online textbooks; PE classes don't change clothes anymore. Lunch bag or purse only. Sports participants must drop off sports bag to a designated room. Band participants must drop off musical instruments to the music room prior to the start of school.

Michael, Midwestern

PSEA region map

