



Sensible Solutions for Safer Schools

An Educators' Vision for Positive Learning Environments

A COLLABORATIVE REPORT FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE
VIVA NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION IDEA EXCHANGE

Prepared for: Dennis Van Roekel, President, National Education Association

Prepared by: Members of the VIVA NEA Writing Collaborative

Delivered: April 24, 2013

Abstract & Summation: National Education Association members in nine states—Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, and Virginia—spent hundreds of hours debating what proactive role education should take to improve school and classroom safety. Then, a small group of the participants distilled those ideas into seven recommendations for confronting the continuing problem of school violence and protecting students and staff.

Partner: National Education Association



Introduction



The VIVA (Voice Ideas Vision Action) NEA Idea Exchange invited all members of the National Education Association in Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, and Virginia to share their ideas about creating a positive learning environment and safety in classrooms and school buildings. This

VIVA Idea Exchange occurred during a pivotal time in the United States, just two months after the horrific shooting tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, in Newtown, Conn. took the lives of 26 people and touched off a national debate on school violence and safety.

The online VIVA Idea Exchange uses WikiWisdom™, a combination of technology and peer collaboration created by New Voice Strategies. Facilitated by a professional moderator, the conversation is open to peers seeking a safe, productive and easily accessible avenue for joint problem-solving and action.

The VIVA NEA Idea Exchange was open from February 5, 2013–March 11, 2013.

The VIVA NEA Idea Exchange was conducted in three phases:

During **Phase I**, NEA members in the participating states were invited to share their ideas in answer to these questions:

“If you could change the laws and practices in your state or across the country to improve safety in your classroom and school, what would you suggest? What proactive role should education take to confront this continuing problem?”

In response, 344 members added 118 ideas and shared 254 comments with one another.

During **Phase II**, 11 educators whose active participation in Phase 1 was clear in terms of both quantity and quality were invited to join the VIVA NEA Writing Collaborative. Their assignment: Take the ideas presented during Phase I and summarize and synthesize them into discrete, workable recommendations for improving school safety.

Phase III of the process will begin on April 24, 2013, when the members of the Writing Collaborative present their ideas to NEA President Dennis Van Roekel and his senior staff, and to senior staff of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

At New Voice Strategies, we believe in the inspiration that grows from pragmatic experience and in the power of individual voices to make big change. VIVA Teachers is one example of that power in action. We are inspired by the teachers and grateful for their positive contribution to the strength of our schools and America’s democratic process.



Many thanks to the VIVA NEA Teacher Leaders: **Amy Bruns, Cheryl Cofie, Amy Graff, Nancy Hahn, Laura Hirshfield, Katherine Doerr Morosky, Michael O'Shaughnessy, Dean Raizman, Sonia Smith, Suzanne Smith, and Christopher Starmer**, whose profiles can be found at the end of this report. The innumerable hours these teachers spent grappling with big ideas and small details made this work possible.

We wish to thank our partners in this endeavor, the **National Education Association** and the following state affiliates: **Alabama Education Association, Colorado Education Association, Connecticut Education Association, Massachusetts Teachers' Association, Mississippi Association of Educators, Ohio Education Association, and Utah Education Association.**





Overview

Each of us can close our eyes and see the heartbreaking images from Sandy Hook Elementary School on Dec. 14, 2012. This vicious attack on innocent first graders and their brave teachers just before Christmas shook our entire nation. Educators, those of us who spend our days in schools, have particularly strong feelings about every instance of school violence in our collective memories. Shootings like at Columbine, Virginia Tech and West Nickel Mines School, the stabbings at Lone Star College, or the everyday student-on-student violence that rarely makes headlines, all raise the same questions: Why did it happen? And, most importantly, how can we stop it from ever happening again?

The **VIVA NEA Idea Exchange** has been an amazing opportunity for diverse educators to work together to find solutions to the problem of violence in our schools. This writing collaborative identified five central issues that seem most critical to increasing the safety of our schools and our children: changing curriculum and school culture; addressing mental illness; improving building security; connecting schools and their communities; and dealing with guns in schools.

Not every recommendation outlined in this report will be appropriate to every individual school or district. As is always the case, local schools will have to make decisions based on community needs and what is right for them. For the most part, the recommendations in this report reflect the consensus of the 11-member writing collaborative. However, just as the nation is divided on the issue of arming teachers in school, so too was our group. Therefore, we did not take a position on that divisive and controversial question. Instead, because the dangers to our schools and schoolchildren are more widespread than a madman with gun, we have proposed a range of alternative measures to provide our students, families, staff and communities with schools that are islands of safety in a sometimes dangerous world.



THE VIVA NEA IDEA EXCHANGE

Personal Reflections



AMY BRUNS Creating safe spaces for our children is something that we all agree must be a priority in our country. In the VIVA NEA Writing Collaborative, the members of our group endorsed a wide range of opinions and ideas on how to address school safety. Despite our different outlooks, we were able to have rich conversations and debates, and compose our list of recommendations with the common goal of the well-being of our students. It was reassuring to experience this unity despite divergent opinions, and I hope that our lawmakers can do the same, especially on this ever-important issue of school safety.

I urge our lawmakers to trust and consider the recommendations put forth in this proposal, as it represents the views of teachers, members of society who are in closest proximity to our country's children. As teachers, we want to be able to protect our students and prevent them from being seen as easy targets. We need to reduce the vulnerability of those who are the most vulnerable.



CHERYL COFIE Being a teacher is about so much more than teaching the core subjects. It is also about helping to shape students' character, helping them become independent and deep thinking individuals, and inspiring them to become lifelong learners. We invest so much into these students. This investment makes it impossible then, not to do all that we can to ensure their safety, to ensure their mental and emotional well-being, and ensure that they grow up to be happy, healthy, contributing members of our society.

I am so grateful to have been able to work on the VIVA NEA Idea Exchange project because I've been able to work with and learn from educators who feel similarly. Hopefully, we have been able to influence national policy on pedagogy and safety measures for our future students.



AMY GRAFF I have been teaching for almost 28 years. During that time, I have seen many changes in education, most recently in the reduction of services due to difficult economic times. These reductions in services have left "holes" in the support services for students, as well as support for teachers. Teachers work under very different conditions now than when I first started teaching. Safety for teachers as well as students is under question. It is for this reason that I decided it was important to join in the discussion on school safety. It is important that those who make decisions that impact both educators and students hear from those who work, on a

day-to-day basis, "in the trenches." It is for these reasons and others that I wanted to be part of this important report.



NANCY HAHN As a teacher who, once upon a time, closed my door and figuratively posted a “Do not disturb, I’m teaching” sign, I am pleased that what I am reflecting on most about this project is that we are always better together. Engaging in the task of reading, writing, deliberating, and discussing school safety while teaching, testing, planning, attending professional development, and all our additional activities has focused my reflection. We could not have been successful alone. This report needed us all to work together. We had to question, comment, provide growth-producing feedback, and rewrite. This is what school safety requires of us all, too. Our children need us all to work together. Our schools need us all to work together. Our communities need us all to work together. Creating a safe setting for teaching, learning, living, and growing requires us all to stand up, pitch in, share ideas, and work together.



LAURA HIRSHFIELD Today is Monday, April 15, 2013; before today, this was my favorite day of the year. I moved to Boston 11 years ago for college, and that first Marathon Monday in 2002 embodied everything I was looking for when I relocated: international community, solidarity, friendship, and carefree celebration. This afternoon, however, in the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald, my “list of enchanted objects [...] diminished by one.” The senseless tragedy I’ve been following on TV for the past six hours has stained that memory for me. But I try my best to remember that hopelessness never got anyone anywhere. Days like this, which recently are all too familiar, remind me how absolutely vital my job is; days like this remind me how important it is that we have good teachers.

And when I say good teachers, I don’t mean just teachers who are masters at the teaching of their subject. I mean teachers who are masters at the teaching of children. Our children are living in an increasingly violent world, a world that I’m afraid is teaching them that violence is normal. Perhaps even acceptable. So we must address the violent world we’ve built in the past by doing what we can in the present, but more than that, we also need to invest in creating a peaceful future. We’ve shown we’re willing to invest in academic achievement; why not show equal willingness to invest in the achievement of peace? With each passing day I am more convinced that when I decided to become a teacher, it was not to only teach the skills of reading and writing, but more importantly it was to help create a world better than the one I grew up in.

Working with the VIVA Collaborative has been, to steal a phrase from a colleague, like a drink from the well. I’ve met amazing, passionate educators whose students are lucky to have them. So many ideas, so much energy, so much care, and so much passion. Working on this collaborative has truly been a drink from the well—one that after December’s tragedy, was sorely needed. Our children, too, need this drink. They need to know we are working to give them more days like my Marathon Monday 2002, and I hope this collaborative helps make that a reality.





KATHERINE DOERR MOROSKY I am a mom from Newtown, and my daughters are 6 and 8 years old. Before Dec. 14, 2012, those words would not have been my chief identifiers. Graduate of Wellesley and Yale, proud parent of two, high school chemistry and physics teacher, native Texan, married 12 years...My life changed forever in one sickening instant, when 20 of my daughter's classmates and six of her teacher's colleagues were murdered in Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Just a month earlier, in the beautiful New England fall, I chatted with Jenny Hubbard and Sandi Previdi as our little girls ran after a soccer ball. We cheered as Catherine and Caroline scored goals. It's only on reflection that I can appreciate that my life was close to perfect. This spring, I hugged the girls on the team who are still alive and gave each a pink and purple tulip to remember their lost friends. Last school year, Lauren Rousseau was subbing for my older daughter's second grade class. Now her parents are lobbying Congress in their daughter's memory. When I taught Charlotte Bacon in Sunday School, I thought she was the wisest, sweetest 4-year-old ever and chided my own child to "be like Charlotte." Last week, I left church with Francine Wheeler as my two daughters walked ahead with her one son, Nate. His brother Ben is dead; killed at the end of a Bushmaster rifle on Dec. 14.

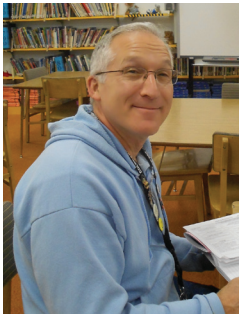
Until that horrible day, I would have described myself as a political moderate and a proud American science educator. I woke up on Dec. 15 with this thought: it is real, and it's my cross to bear. I'm a teacher and a mother devoted to life and peace, because I know how precious it is and how quickly it can be taken from all of us.



MICHAEL O'SHAUGHNESSY I believe if it is the right thing to do, then find a way to get it done. Our schools are in need of some long overdue and necessary improvements to their safety. Although attacks on schools are rare, they are a possibility and we would be grossly neglecting our responsibility for staff and student safety not to prepare for it. In fact it is not just armed attackers that we need to prepare for, but other safety issues as well. We have schools with multiple points of access, we have classroom teachers who have no way to communicate from their classrooms, we have students with mental health issues, we have students who turn "a blind eye" when they witness bullying, we have communities that are not aware of current school safety policies, and we have people acquiring and using weapons they have no legal right to have. There is no way a student will be in any position to learn if they do not feel safe at school.

I have had a wonderful experience collaborating with other teachers through the VIVA NEA Idea Exchange. We have debated, thought, written, reflected, and debated some more. I truly feel honored and privileged to have had such an opportunity. I also feel we have collectively written a document concerning school safety that has merit and action plans that need to be implemented. As I said, I believe if it is the right thing to do, then find a way to get it done. Improving the safety of our schools is the right thing to do, so let's find a way to get it done.





DEAN RAIZMAN At the time Columbine High School experienced its shooting, and 13 innocent students were killed, I was teaching at a nearby elementary school. My school was in lockdown for the duration of that event. Then, there was Deer Creek Middle School shooting, also in my district. And there have been other gun-related incidents in my district. Guns and violence are not an abstraction to me.

If we implemented every suggestion in this report, would it be enough? I don't think so. But this report is a collective effort by a group of teachers to acknowledge that violence, and more specifically gun violence in our culture, has spilled over into our schools. This report is a list of possible responses to that violence.

As I participated in writing this report, I gained some insights. Do we have a problem? The 100,000 gun injuries yearly that lead to 30,000 deaths say we do. Do our cultural gun issues spill over into schools? The 50 mass shootings in the last 30 years with 297 deaths say yes, they do. Schools do not exist in isolation. Are we willing to make some sacrifices to protect our children? I am unsure of the answer to that question. Consequently, in all likelihood, gun violence in schools won't go away. Sadly I have been left with a deeper question. What can you say about any culture and its political institutions that fail to protect its children?



SONIA SMITH I love teaching seniors! As a senior class co-sponsor, I have also enjoyed planning the countless activities that accompany the senior year of a graduating high school student. Field trips to college campuses and museums out of state give me an opportunity to expose my students to the unfamiliar, and widen their vision for what their future may hold. These are the things that keep me coming back to the classroom year after year.

Unfortunately, I have observed the failure of building security. Students exiting and entering various points-of-entry at all times of the day; they do not realize how dangerous this practice can be. While teaching in a building that has two School Resource Officers (SROs) who are armed, it is still not a safe environment. They cannot be everywhere at all times.

After working on this writing collaborative, I have discovered that school safety is not just about armed guards and locked classroom doors. In order for real school safety to happen across this country, the culture of our public schools and the communities that surround them must change. Students in public schools are not just a part of an individual set of parents; they are also a part of a greater entity. Communities thrive when everyone in that community has invested in that school. From the single college graduate to the retired war veteran, all members of any community should want their neighborhood schools to be safe.

As a third-generation educator, I have witnessed public education change from the outside, in. It is now time for educators to have a voice and affect change from the inside, out. I sincerely hope that with this proposal on school safety that we begin to make that difference that our great country so desperately needs.





SUZANNE SMITH As a middle school teacher with over 20 years of experience, I am becoming more aware of the need to increase safety, not just in our schools, but in our communities as well. The only way to effectively ensure that our students of today become safety conscious leaders of tomorrow is to make safety top priority. As an integral part of the school curriculum, safety instruction can take the form of conflict resolution or peace creation. Thus, students will learn that responding to violence with violence results in nothing more than a vicious cycle of violence.

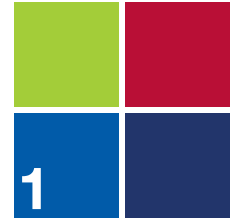


CHRISTOPHER STARMER The VIVA NEA writing collaborative on creating safer schools has been an invaluable experience for me. Not only have the senseless acts of violence in schools caused by gunmen been overwhelmingly disturbing, some of the behavior of students and mainstream culture has matched the cacophony of mindlessness. How can safety be proclaimed in the midst of such insanity? Working with this group of professionals has given me insights into opportunities that I might have otherwise overlooked. It has been refreshing to see the vigilance of other educators in a sea of conflicting ideas and one-sided proposals.

Of course, this topic is too complicated to be answered by any single step as a solution. It will truly require a collaborative effort of mass proportions. Bringing together the whole in a common vision towards safety will require many facets and tremendous cooperation. The future safety of our schools is extremely relevant to all of us. I am not sure teachers carrying concealed weapons is the environment I want for my kids. Being able to represent my voice on such debatable topics as what is the best way to preserve safety in our schools is an incredible privilege. Working with a team of this caliber and commitment to the future of sustainable education was inspiring.

To quote Albert Einstein, “Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius—and a lot of courage—to move in the opposite direction.” He also said, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” I look forward to the progress of new thinking. It all starts with learning and education... and a safe place for it to occur.





RECOMMENDATION 1

Put Character in the Curriculum

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, educators are considered “highly qualified” based solely on their content knowledge. As society evolves, there is a need for training the “whole child,” which encompasses academics, social skills, character building, physical and emotional health, and in some instances, survival. If we continue to teach the way we always have, many students will be “left behind,” not because they lack the academic skills, but because they do not possess the ability to care for and protect themselves and others. Ultimately, the students of today will be our leaders for tomorrow, and it becomes the responsibility of the classroom educator to reach not just the mind, but the heart of each student with whom s/he comes in contact.

Our current education system seems to value only what it can measure. Year after year, educators are required to give more assessments in more subjects more frequently. Yet, all of the attention being paid to this one small part of education suggests that knowledge is the primary goal of education. This assumption comes at the cost of the rest of the child, and ignores the fact that knowledge is a means to an end, and not an end in of itself. Gandhi once wrote “without the right education, the community will not only remain backward, but become increasingly so... [Knowledge of academic content is] essential in the world of today. Without [it] one is crippled. [But] it is also necessary to learn how to put the knowledge thus acquired to proper use.” Just as we do not expect students to learn math, science, language, and other skills on their own, we cannot expect them to also learn character and peace creation on their own. If we value character development and peace creation as much as we value math and language arts, we need to teach them.

Proposed Solutions

1. Develop and offer professional development on educating the whole child.

Educators already have a strong base of content knowledge from which to pull, but most feel inadequate in dealing with values, character, conflict, and crisis situations. Implementing programs like ones the NEA already offers (Making Diversity Count, Managing the Defiant Child, etc.) into schools across the nation would help to promote safety in schools throughout the nation.

2. Counter overexposure to violent acts and language with exposure to rules of etiquette.

Bring back “The Golden Rule,” and teach students what it means to have and practice “prudence, temperance, and fortitude.”

3. Implement curriculum and practices to increase self-awareness.

If we truly want to ensure safety for others, we must first trust that we are safe ourselves. Self-awareness is a skill that can help regulate undesired behaviors and prevent conflicts and negative feelings from escalating. For example, understanding NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP) can help people recognize and reflect on their own mental processes and then consider how to regulate and modify them. Self-awareness education needs



to be offered to students, staff and the community, and can be done through ancient teachings as well as scientific understanding of the mind.

4. Maximize the potential of peer pressure to increase social accountability.

- Schools need to build environments that foster positive, not dangerous, behaviors. If a school's mission is about respect or character, that mission should be reflected in every facet of the school. Students should be required to take ethics courses to gain exposure to moral questions and to develop their own answers to those questions.
- Too frequently, students do not hold each other accountable, and rely on mediators to resolve conflict. They need to be taught to handle confrontational situations in a caring way. Schools should celebrate and reward community values and individual achievements at schoolwide assemblies to show that character counts.

5. Balance curriculum with exposure to nonviolence and nonviolent conflict.

- Humanities classes are dominated by stories of war and violence, which suggests to our students that the only way to respond to violence is with more violence. We can and should teach peace by making the logic, history, and yet-unexplored potential of nonviolence available to educators and students. Studying wars is important, but we should be particular about *why* we are studying them; this rational filtering will allow for room in the curriculum to study a diverse cast of people who have made substantial change *without* the use of violence.
- Nonviolence is both a virtue and an effective and enduring way to resolve human conflict. Students should study nonviolent tactics such as negotiation, compromise, organized resistance, noncooperation, civil disobedience, and civilian-based defense with just as much frequency as they study violent conflict. Though understudied and marginalized in our curricula, nonviolence has proven to be an effective and enduring means of resolving conflict. A more balanced approach to teaching the humanities would leave our students better equipped to deal with conflict in their own lives, and it would make them more informed global citizens.

6. Honor diversity.

- When students learn the value of diversity, they see the similarities between self and others. Yet, many students are underexposed to diversity in their lives, so it is up to schools to help them appreciate and honor people who are different from themselves. Students are exposed to negative stereotyping associated with diverse cultures, races, languages, and religions. Meanwhile, our schools do not do enough to expose them to important contributions made by widely diverse individuals. To change this, schools should implement programs to expose students to positive experiences with diverse races, religions, cultures, and languages across the content areas. Schools should celebrate diversity within both the curriculum and the classroom.
- Educators can be similarly underexposed to diverse cultures. They should have access to professional development to help them teach explicitly and implicitly that human beings of every race, religion, cultural and language background are equally valuable, and that people of all races and cultures have contributed to the country we live in today.



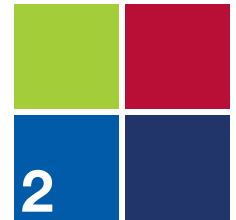
7. Implement a “Pro-Hero” rather than an “Anti-Bully” curriculum.

Our current mandate of an “anti-bullying” curriculum is well intentioned, but only teaches students what not to do, which many students already know. Bystander behavior is a much larger concern, and time and resources would be better spent giving students skills and strategies to stand up for themselves and others. This kind of program would also celebrate the behavior we want to nurture, rather than vilify the behavior we want to eliminate.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

When students show deficiencies in school, educators often look to the lessons they were taught and why they were not effective. When examining violent students, we must consider that we have not been effective teachers of peace. Students who resent members of other races or ethnicities have not been taught to honor diversity. Students who can walk past someone being harassed by another student have not been equipped to be heroes. Students who lash out with violence have not been educated on alternative ways to handle confrontation and frustration. If students are not learning etiquette, social awareness, and social accountability outside of school, then we must make it a part of the school day, or they may not ever learn it at all. If we don’t teach it, we can’t expect our students to learn it.

Peace educator Ian Harris, of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, said, “Human beings are used to thinking about violence and war as problems to be controlled rather than thinking positively about peace as an achievement, as a state of being within their control. Peace education rests on an active vision of peace where skilled individuals, who have been trained in the ways of nonviolence, intervene in conflict situations to manage them without using violent force.” We want our students to be strong, confident, and courageous young people. We cannot expect this to just happen; these traits and virtues need to be nurtured, trained and fostered.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Practice and Teach Effective Conflict Resolution

Statement of the Problem

There is little debate that the endemic violence of our culture spills over into our schools. In 2008, there were 16,270 homicides in the United States, 10 percent of which were committed by juveniles and half of which began with arguments. Clearly, we have not sufficiently equipped our young people to deal with conflict, nor have we helped rehabilitate young offenders.

Oftentimes, our most violent students (“violent” not being limited to physical violence, but also including mental and emotional violence) show a pattern of undesired behavior. Our traditional model of handling unwanted behavior is to punish it in the hopes of curbing it. Children who have behavioral issues are often identified early and “treated” with punishments like staying after class, detention, suspension, and sometimes expulsion. Research suggests lost time in class and school leads to (further) alienation and early involvement with the juvenile justice system. While suspension and expulsion may remove the student from the school environment, they do nothing to remedy the behavior. Furthermore, while the student may no longer be a danger to the school, expulsion puts him or her into the community where the child can cause just as much damage or more. Our system of punitive justice does nothing to heal the “disease;” instead, it often exacerbates it. Even when the system *does* discourage students from misbehaving, it does so under false pretenses. We want our students to behave properly because they *want* to behave properly, not because they are afraid of getting in trouble.

Proposed Solutions

8. Educate and train administrators, teachers and students in restorative justice practices.

- A more productive way to remedy misbehavior is to promote restorative justice practices instead of our current system of retributive justice. When a student gets into trouble, it is important not just to punish (although punishment is often appropriate, it is not *sufficient*), but to address the impact of the individuals’ behavior. Restorative justice allows the student to take responsibility for his/her actions, repair the damage done, redeem him/herself, and learn from the experience in the process.
- Restorative justice emphasizes learning and growing. It values every student, both the victim and offender, as well as the larger community. It offers strategies and tools to enhance school and community safety by preventing conflict and restoring relationships in the aftermath of a conflict.

9. Implement a “True Strength Walks Away” program in schools.

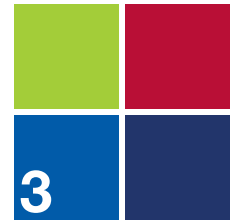
Developed by the NEA, this program would encourage students to walk away from confrontational and violent situations, and provide them with alternative behaviors to use in these. NEA should also maintain a website for students and educators to provide resources and examples of managing confrontation/violence.



Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

Through both restorative discipline strategies and national media initiatives, schools can help to equip students to deal with conflict positively and constructively. We can help students see that responding to violence with more violence only makes the problem worse, and that true strength comes not from the ability to hurt another person, but from an indomitable will to respect other human beings. We want to show students that when they *do* make mistakes, those mistakes do not define them. Instead, mistakes are often the greatest learning opportunities, when a student has a chance to accept responsibility while still being held accountable. Research indicates restorative justice improves the school environment, enhances the learning and development of young people, and promotes safety, inclusion, respect, and positive relationships. Explicitly teaching students positive conflict resolution skills, and taking a more restorative approach to discipline will help build a culture of respect, safer school environment, and students who are prepared to make the world better than they found it.





RECOMMENDATION 3

Treat a School as a Community

Statement of the Problem

Educators and school staff may not live in the community where they teach and, therefore, have limited understanding of the demographics and culture of their students' neighborhood and families. Creating a positive school culture requires staff to understand not only pedagogy, but also the culture of the community and the students the school serves. The economic situation in many areas of our country has declined. Parents and caregivers may be absent from the home because they need to work. Students may be homeless, hungry, in need of health care, or lacking other basic human needs. A community may have newcomers to our country who are unfamiliar with the English language and scholastic expectations. Drug and alcohol use, incarcerated adults, gang violence, and many other stressors can complicate students' emotional and intellectual growth. To develop connections to our students and families, we must know who they are.

Proposed Solutions

10. Offer professional development to ensure professional staff understands the physiological and psychological impacts of struggles outside of school on student growth and development.

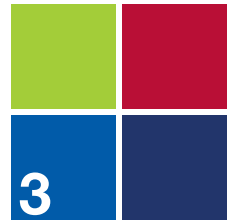
Schools can develop programs to build character, but first they must recognize that the undesired behavior often is not simply a matter of choice. While all our professional staff members are taught the process of brain development in growing children, it is equally important that educators learn about the effect family struggles and stresses and other outside factors have on student growth and development.

11. Increase and foster collaboration between schools and experts on community demographics.

Community experts, including police, city officials and social service agencies, can provide school staff with information about their surrounding neighborhoods and local demographics that impact the safety of the school and students.

12. Offer enrichment activities before and after school.

- Schools should develop and provide meaningful and engaging before and after school activities for students.
- In many schools, educators sponsor clubs or create after-school programs on their own time. Districts need to compensate teachers and staff who work outside of their contractual day.



Enrichment Activities

- Educators or departments should offer some opportunity for homework or catch-up help for students. With good parental contact and cooperation, this can be an excellent solution for students who are struggling.
- Teachers or staff can sponsor clubs or create opportunities for community service.
- Speakers and volunteers from the community can come speak on specific topics or engage students in activities.
- Students can share skills and develop new ones.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

If professional staff is aware of the personal problems students are dealing with outside of school, they are better equipped to manage them effectively. By knowing our students better and why they behave as they do, educators can better create programs and curriculum to address the needs specific to their school populations. They can better develop the relationships that are so crucial to learning and creating safer schools.

According to research, not only do enrichment programs provide a “safe place for children to be during non-school hours, but participation in out-of-school time programs has been connected to improved academic achievement, school attendance and behavior.” When students engage in positive after-school activities in the safe environment of the school, they build more positive relationships with the adults in school, enhance their self-esteem by building academic skills or new interests, and remove some of the negative peer pressure they may encounter in the unsupervised-by-adults world outside school. Positive feelings about school, themselves, and their relationships to adults and the community can work together to create a safer school.





RECOMMENDATION 4

Improve and Increase Mental Health Support for Students, Educators and Families

Statement of the Problem

Recent acts of violence perpetrated in our schools and on school campuses leave us anxious to make our schools safe for students, school personnel, and all who visit. Mental illness is a problem in society that we believe plays a large part in many instances of violence in our communities. As a culture, we need to offer more assistance to students with problems. There is a glaring need for additional mental health support for students, educators, parents, and families. Awareness and treatment of mental illness will reduce the threat of violence in schools and communities.

Due to state and federal funding cuts in education, mental health services have been significantly compromised in school settings. Students who once had access to support services for mental health issues no longer do. Some districts employ a single social worker or psychologist to service all of their students. Enrollment and eligibility determination can sometimes take months, and families and students are often left without necessary services. Once students are able to access services, delivery can be inconsistent due to a lack of adequate funding and resources. Failure to help students progress or receive services early enough often results in more complex problems.

As educators, we must not allow students to move through our classrooms and our schools feeling alone or vulnerable. We must cultivate non-threatening, inclusive communities in our classrooms and throughout our schools. Educators must have support in identifying mental or emotional trauma and disorders, and have our students receive prompt treatment and support. At the very least, educators should be offered professional development opportunities to identify when and how to refer at-risk students to the appropriate personnel. These qualified and trained personnel can then provide mental and emotional support to students, help educators build relationships with students, and teach students mental and emotional strategies required for building compassionate and mutually rewarding relationships with their peers, teachers, and other staff.

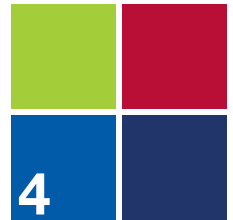
Proposed Solutions

13. Secure funding for mental health programs in all districts in all states to increase the number of counselors, social workers, and psychologists in schools.

The American School Counselors Association recommends a ratio of 250 students to each counselor; however, in the 2009-2010 school year, the average ratio was 459 students to each counselor.

14. Develop character education curriculum and teaching materials to reduce the social stigma of mental illness.

Equip educators to support and educate parents and families to help them understand there is no shame in needing help to work through and process emotions, nor in the emotions themselves, as well as the importance of accepting and seeking treatment for mental health issues.



15. Provide direct mental health services for students in school.

- Give students access to counselors and other mental health services during school hours, and encourage students to seek additional help when necessary. Conduct periodic follow-up visits (for a specified length of time) with students receiving mental health care, to ensure the long-term success of the student.
- Designate specified school personnel as “go to” people when problems arise. This may be a teacher, administrator, support staff, or other staff member with whom the student is comfortable talking/sharing.
- Establish partnerships between school districts and mental health providers, including social services, pediatricians, and local hospitals, to assist school counselors.
- According to the law, those students who are eligible for mental health services are granted accommodations or modifications to the general curriculum; thus allowing for inclusion.

16. Increase professional development for educators and staff to identify at-risk behaviors and make mental health services available for at-risk students.

Districts need to provide school personnel with access to counsel, as needed, as well.

17. Create a clear and supportive network in which parents, teachers, pediatricians, and mental health personnel can communicate with each other.

Make parents and caregivers aware of available mental health services in the school and community through newsletters and email.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

In the United States, more than 20 percent of children and adolescents have mental health problems (Committee on School Health, 2004). To provide the best mental health support for our students and comprehensively meet their needs, there must be easily accessible support for students, teachers, school staff, and students’ families and communities. Funding must be secured for mental health services in and around schools; clear communication must be facilitated among all stakeholders involved in each child’s education and well-being. Unified support in addressing and treating any mental health needs must be made available promptly and must include the appropriate resources to be successful.

Stigma must be reduced in schools and communities. In the “real world,” we must each work and interact on a daily basis with others who are different from us. Teaching students to appreciate diversity is the first step toward eliminating stigma. Full inclusion and respect for those with mental health issues in our society is vital to the strength of our communities. Inclusion should help to cut down on violence, as violent acts are often a result of an individual feeling isolated and withdrawn from others.

As educational personnel, we need to provide a safe and inclusive learning environment for students across all grade levels. Acceptance of those with mental health issues must be met with appropriate interventions, helping students cope with their illnesses and emotions. This will minimize the potential for violent manifestations due to mental and emotional unrest.



RECOMMENDATION 5

Ensure the Security of School Buildings

Statement of the Problem

School safety is a critical responsibility of school officials. They have the task of doing what is necessary to maintain a learning environment that is simultaneously positive, productive and safe. Keeping school buildings safe has many challenges. For instance, many schools were not designed and built with safety as a priority, and have uncontrolled and multiple access points. Frequently, school personnel and students do not understand the importance of adhering to safety policies. Parents and others who regularly visit schools feel they are entitled to free and easy access to buildings.

Proposed Solutions

18. Partner with professional law enforcement agencies to develop security action plans and conduct quarterly school safety audits.

- Determine if doors and other access to buildings are secure, panic buttons and other security technology are functioning properly, and faculty, administration and School Resource Officers (SROs) are following established communication protocols.
- Write action plans in plain, clear language that are easy to follow. If possible, the plans should be simplified to a set of short, straightforward steps that are easily remembered. Inform and train all faculty and staff to follow the school's action plan, and conduct regular drills. Though it is impossible to have a plan for every contingency, every school needs to have comprehensive action plans for a broad range of dangers. This includes being prepared for both authorized visitors and unauthorized people in the building, bomb threats, violent perpetrators, fire, natural disasters, suicidal students, and student-on-student violence.
- Create a culture of safety awareness within the school and surrounding community. Steps would include training for administrators, teachers, education support personnel, and students, as well as inviting members of the community to participate in safety training.

19. Make capital improvements to control access to facilities.

- Limit multiple points of entry. At a designated time, SROs (or school security officers) should lock and turn on alarms for each of those doors. If any person tries to enter or leave during the school day through a door that is not "Door #1," an alarm will sound to alert administrators and local authorities.
- Install metal detectors in all schools. Many inner-city schools require their students, faculty and visitors to walk through a metal detector or submit to being scanned with a wand. To keep schools safe environments, this practice needs to be extended to all schools.

- Invest in real-time communication technology.

Walkie-talkies for administrators and SROs in the halls are not enough. Classroom educators need to have access to real phones that connect with the main office and dial out of the school during a time of crisis.

Educators should also have access to smartphones with text messaging capabilities. It would then be possible for anyone to send an instant, “mass” text message in the event of a crisis so that the entire faculty would be aware of the situation while it was happening. This is better than giving information out over the PA system, in which case the perpetrators would also hear it.

20. Fund at least one School Resource Officer for every school that wants one.

- SROs, preferably from the local police department, sheriff’s office, or other career law enforcement officials would be in direct radio contact with the police dispatcher, thereby saving valuable time lost during a “911” call.
- Having an officer in the school has an added bonus of the students getting to know them as people. Too often our students see police officers at the worst time of their lives (for example, when they see their parents, friends, or even themselves getting arrested). The SRO could make a connection with the students and may even be able to stop something before it ever becomes an issue.

School Resource Officers Show Another Side of Justice

Ideally, a School Resource Officer should have multiple responsibilities that encompass both safety and education. Unfortunately, in some schools, the School Resource Officer has become the maximum in punishment for bad behavior. A better strategy is the model now at work in Denver Public Schools. Officials there came to realize that many student offenses were being handled by police action, which escalated problems and created negative feeling toward the school and toward the police. Earlier this year, Denver Police agreed to adopt a restorative justice approach, and will only intervene with an arrest or citation as a last resort.

The role of the SRO should be one of fostering understanding of the role of law and justice in our communities, rather than representing the ultimate step in discipline. There are a number of ways for an SRO to engage students, from coaching sports to demonstrating fingerprinting for a class studying ‘My Unique Identity.’ As the police chief of New Bedford, Mass., said “resource officers should not only be street smart and tactically trained but my best communicators to build relationships with students.” An SRO may not only be the very first responder in an emergency, but can show students the value of honesty and fair play, and be the human face of the law. Most importantly, for many students, the SRO can show that police officers are people who care about them.



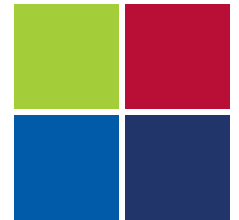
21. Decrease average class size.

Mass shooters appear to choose their targets because of a personal connection to a place where people assemble and the number of bodies per unit of space. Putting resources into reducing class size nationwide would decrease the number of potential fatalities when and if another school shooting occurs simply because there would be fewer children in a contained space. Reducing average class size would also have a positive effect on learning and safety.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

Having schools conduct safety audits and develop easy to understand and follow action plans would go a long way toward improving the safety in our schools. Conducting regular training on how to implement the actions plans will help raise the awareness of staff and the students as to why safety needs to be everyone's concern. Having controlled access to the school will allow for a more focused attention on who is coming and going. During a crisis, communication is of the utmost importance, which is why all rooms need to have a phone and every staff member needs to have a smartphone. Lastly, there is clear evidence that SROs improve safety in our schools. They have the training and expertise and have chosen law enforcement as a career. Just their presence will undoubtedly improve the safety in our schools.

School officials must have action plans for every conceivable incident. However, the action plans are useless unless staff knows how to implement them, and students know that letting people into the school without permission can be dangerous. A school is supposed to be a safe place. Keeping multiple doors open must end. By taking proactive steps through a multi-pronged plan that includes the administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community leaders, we will begin to see success.



Community Connections Matter

Our schools do not exist in isolation; schools are part of communities. If we build stronger connections between schools and communities, including local support service providers, police, and community organizations, all become stronger and safer. When community members without children in school interact with school activities, students and events, they gain understanding of the issues and realities of our schools. When parents and families are encouraged to be a part of our schools, they build understanding about how to help their students. Schools build understanding about how to support the needs of families. When actions are taken that build safer communities, schools benefit by becoming safer, as well. Schools become safer with students, staff, families, and the community working together to build a safe, responsive environment for our children. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, “a caring and personalized school environment is associated with improved student behavior, well-being, and academic achievement. On the other hand, negative school climate is associated with risk factors such as absenteeism, poorer school performance, behavior and discipline problems, increased rates of violence and dropping out.”

In the case of danger from inside the school, as with Columbine or Virginia Tech, a link to safety is clear and building relationships is the key. The Secret Service found that school shooters usually tell other students, but not adults. In the many near disasters with plans in place, the disaster was averted because someone told. Students had an adult with whom they felt a connection and they spoke out about their fears. In a school that is well connected to the community, students will have many adults who are available and with whom they have relationships. There will be more opportunities to identify a danger to a school if all stakeholders have built relationships. Additionally, in a school well connected to the community, the opportunity to support and intervene on behalf of an at-risk child, before the child turns to violence, is increased.

Danger from outside is much harder to prevent, because the connection between the school and perpetrator is often unclear. Such threats are difficult to identify and defuse. Still, in a community full of people who have a relationship with the school, that dangerous person will find fewer sympathetic listeners to complaints and may stick out like a sore thumb. A community with good support services that is working to become safer may be able to identify and intervene before an incident erupts. Schools become safer when students, staff, families, and the community build toward safety.



RECOMMENDATION 6

Strengthen Connections Between Schools and Communities

Statement of the Problem

Not all parents or adult caregivers feel comfortable in or connected to their children's school. Lack of education or limited English language skills can make some parents uncomfortable. Working multiple jobs or having a number of children at home can make visits and meetings difficult. Oftentimes, parents view a call from school as certain bad news.

Educators and school staff frequently have little contact with and knowledge of the communities where their schools are located. Even students may know little about the community outside of their own neighborhoods. This creates misunderstandings and feelings of disconnection, and students may not know how to integrate themselves into the community in a positive manner. Many do not understand the positive feelings that can come from helping others before themselves. Community service is often frowned upon because it is seen as a punishment, not an opportunity for a student to build character and become an asset to the community.

Conversely, many community members know little about what is happening inside their local schools and may have negative opinions of the students and schools.

Finally, despite a school's best efforts, there will be some students and families who remain isolated from their communities. Such marginalization has high cost if the individuals become violent. The safety of schools and communities from these individuals is not a problem schools and small communities can remedy alone.

Proposed Solutions

22. Building positive relationships between parents and the school.

Set a goal number of positive home contacts per week via phone, email, or postcard. Classroom websites and social media are additional ways to stay connected to parents or caregivers. Throughout the year, educators and departments can create curriculum evenings where parents and students participate in activities that demonstrate what is happening in the classroom. In addition to parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings, occasions to discuss school safety or other timely topics can be more welcoming if food, child-care, and translators are always a part of the activity.



Community Engagement Opportunities

Finding ways to create a more welcoming atmosphere and establish a closer, more positive, relationship between families and school will enable students to develop a positive association to school. It also allows staff to see students and their families in a new way. This positive association makes schools safer and more responsive places.

- Educators can periodically update parents or caregivers on a student's accomplishments.
- While many schools have a back-to-school night, adding a social component can increase the number of families attending. The event then becomes an opportunity to chat with other parents, meet the teachers, and feed the little ones before visiting classrooms.
- Parents may welcome the opportunity to help out the school out, so list volunteer opportunities such as painting the art room to listening to students read at every event.

Most communities have neighborhood festivals or events that would welcome students or school staff. Likewise, there are many chances to share what is happening at a school with the community and invite the community to be a part of school activities.

- Caroling at neighborhood businesses, riding on a parade float, performing at a nursing home, or cleaning up trash at a neighborhood park are opportunities to build value and well-deserved pride.
- Contests to collect the most food for the food bank or socks for soldiers are both fun and value building ways for schools to support their communities.
- Staff can become more active community members by attending and voicing opinions at local meetings. This is especially important when the meetings are discussing education issues or, as many have this year, school safety.
- Schools can invite the mayor to Back-to-School Night, ask a reporter from the local newspaper to judge a writing contest, or ask performers from the community theater to visit drama class.
- When the school is hosting a meeting to discuss topical issues, staff can ask to put up notices in the public library and local businesses.
- Local businesses are often willing to donate prizes or rewards for students reaching goals.

23. Create opportunities for staff and students to connect to community, and for the community to connect to the school.

- Encourage staff members and students to participate in positive activities in the community, so local residents see the school and students as assets, rather than as troublemakers or noisy kids, and students see themselves as valued.
- Invite community members to get to know the schools to create a feeling of pride and responsibility. This can also generate new resources in terms of goods, services and volunteers.

24. Require community service as a part of the educational experience for graduation, and integrate community service earlier into the career of students, to help build character and increased self-awareness.

Create community service groups that will be specific to a school. The repeated exposure to mentors and others in the community will create more meaningful relationships. A mandated community service requirement for graduation from all levels of education will generate a deeper connection to desirable character traits and increased citizenship.



The Benefits of Community Service

Students involved in service learning demonstrate more empathy and are more likely to find a positive role in society. Allowing the community to become more involved with the school culture will build stronger relationships for all involved. Students who feel a part of the community are more likely to see the relevance of school curriculum. There is a mental health benefit to service learning along with increased citizenship and cognitive functions through exposure to diversity, multiculturalism, and different ways of thinking.

For example, students could work in teams to build connections with the community. One team might work with the retirement home while another works with the children's hospital. The goal is for the students to develop empathy, social skills, a sense of belonging, and the value of making a genuine contribution. When the students are not visiting with their community partners, they would work on team building skills at the school building. This kind of initiative is an especially effective learning tool for students who would not otherwise be inclined to participate in the community.

There is a preponderance of data on value of community service:

- Students who engaged in service learning ranked responsibility as a more important value and reported a higher sense of responsibility to their school than comparison groups (Leming, 1998).
- Students who engaged in service learning were more likely to treat each other kindly, help each other and care about doing their best (Berkas, 1997).
- Middle school male students reported increased self-esteem and fewer behavioral problems after engaging in service learning (Switzer, et. al., 1995).
- High school students who participated in service learning and service are more likely to be engaged in a community organization and to vote 15 years after their participation in the program than those who did not participate (Youniss, et. al., 1997; Yates and Youniss, 1998).
- Eighty-three percent of schools with service learning programs reported that grade point averages of participating service learning students improved 76 percent of the time (Follman, 1999).
- Middle and high school students who participated in service learning tutoring programs increased their grade point averages and test scores in reading/language arts and math and were less likely to drop out of school (Supik, 1996; Rolzinski, 1990).
- Elementary and middle school students who participated in service learning had improved problem-solving skills and increased interest in academics (Stephens, 1995).

25. Require every publicly educated 18-year-old to complete a term of national service.

Students are provided a free education for 12 years. In exchange, young people should be required to contribute to society in a tangible way. In addition to creating a common experience for all Americans, a national service requirement would serve as a checkpoint for assessing the mental health of all young Americans as they enter adulthood. Someone too mentally or physically ill to contribute would be identified and provided with treatment. Options might be college or other additional education opportunities, employment, military service, community service, AmeriCorps, or other government-sponsored employment similar to programs developed during the Depression.

26. Use Public Service Announcements to inform public opinion about the danger of guns and needed mental health services.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) can be a vital tool in shaping public opinion about the danger of guns, high-capacity magazines and military-style weapons in the same way that the Marlboro Man PSAs shaped opinion about smoking.

PSAs would help the public understand the need for mental health services and reduce public stigma that many associate with mental health issues.

The Power of PSAs

Public service announcements have a long history of advertising actions or knowledge to serve public interests. The purpose of PSAs, by definition, is to educate the public concerning important issues and change behaviors. PSAs have become so much a part of our culture that we are aware of them on an almost subconscious level. The earliest PSAs were made during World War II, when a group of advertising executives got together to see how they could help assist in the war effort. They came up with the idea of “Rosie the Riveter” to encourage women to get involved. Two million women responded to those announcements.

Other public service announcements that have successfully educated and changed public consciousness around important issues include: Smokey Bear (fire), McGruff the Crime Dog (crime), Your Brain on Drugs (drugs), Marlboro Man/cancer (smoking), NY State Smoker’s Quit Line (secondhand smoke), Native American (litter), and Crash Test Dummies (seat belts).

See the Appendix for two concepts for PSAs related to the issue of school safety.



RECOMMENDATION 7

Change the Debate about Guns in Schools

Statement of the Problem

The high profile mass shootings in our nation in recent years have invigorated a national debate over gun violence. The massacre of 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut has put the issue of placing guns in schools to keep children safe at the forefront of educators' minds. All Americans are asking whether changes to gun laws, a stronger police presence, or arming teachers and administrative personnel in public schools would be beneficial or detrimental to keeping America's children and educators safe. This is a highly polarized issue in the media and in discussions among the general public, educators, administrators, and lawmakers.

Arming personnel is a difficult, controversial and emotionally charged issue, with strong opinions on both sides of the debate. The writers of this report did not reach a unanimous position on this matter, but have presented those recommendations where they did find common ground.

Proposed Solutions

27. Support common-sense restrictions on firearms and firearm accessories (as currently proposed in federal and state legislation).

- Strengthen laws prohibiting possession of high-powered, military-style weapons and high capacity magazines. For example, a lack of access to such destructive weapons could have decreased the number of lives lost before first responders arrived at Sandy Hook Elementary. The Newtown killer shot over 150 bullets in about four minutes. In this time he shot through the school's glass front door, murdered the school principal and psychologist and then shot the lead teacher. In the remaining time he moved through two classrooms, killing five children and two adults in one room and 14 children and two adults in the next. When the killer changed magazines, 11 children, having watched their teacher and friends murdered, ran away to safety. Every second mattered at Sandy Hook Elementary School, and limiting the sale of military-grade weapons to civilians would help to mitigate the damage that deranged shooters can inflict.
- Require registration and background checks for all firearms bought and sold, so that firearms are less likely to get into the hands of those who may use them inappropriately.
- Increase background checks including comprehensive psychological history.
- Restrict access to high-capacity ammunition magazines and magazines.
- Do not allow sale or possession of semiautomatic "assault" rifles to private citizens.

28. Increase the presence of School Resource Officers on school grounds.

- An SRO is not a total guarantee against violence occurring in a school. Columbine High School had an armed SRO on the premises in 1999, and Virginia Tech had an armed campus police force. Nonetheless, an SRO would provide peace of mind and a greater level of security.

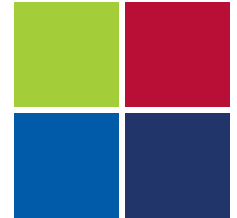


- The challenge for districts is the enormous cost of employing an SRO or guard in every school in the United States, which is estimated to cost nearly a billion dollars. This is significant, particularly when it is generally acknowledged that public schools are already strained for resources. In addition, the funds required to guard every school in the United States may be more reasonably allocated to other safety measures.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

As stated previously, the idea of arming teachers and administrators in our schools is a polarizing topic. As a group, we could not come to consensus as to whether it should be allowed. However, we do agree gun laws should be changed to keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have them. Schools may consider employing an armed School Resource Officer (preferably a police officer) who has the necessary skills and training to serve and protect. If a school, district or state chooses to arm its teachers and/or administrators, they must be subject to standardized training. Those who wish to carry weapons must be held accountable for meeting clearly defined levels of proficiency with their weapon and continuing their training, particularly on handling tactical situations. This accountability and standardized training will ensure that everyone knows exactly how teachers and administrators have been trained and what is expected of them. Ultimately, arming ourselves might be an appropriated response, but arming ourselves does not change the overwhelming nature of the problem of school safety.

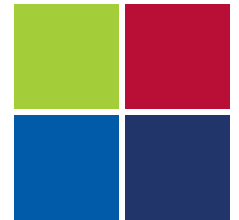




Arming vs. *Not Arming*

The argument **against** allowing civilians to carry concealed weapons in school buildings regardless of their licensing.

- Data shows that an increased number of weapons in any location, even if the weapons are carried by the “good guys,” increases the rate of gun injury and fatality. According to the Children’s Defense Fund, a gun in the home makes the likelihood of homicide three times higher, suicide three to five times higher, and accidental death four times higher. Putting weapons in the hands of school personnel may result in more fatalities than averted tragedies.
- We might imagine that if Dawn Hochsprung or some of her teachers had been armed, the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School would not have occurred. We can never know the answer to that question; we can only speculate. It is not appropriate to infer that armed staff would be a match for a criminal intruder, in their firearms, preparation, or intent to kill.
- By arming teachers and schools, we buy into the perception that schools are not safe places, and then make schools less safe in the attempt to protect our students. Kids need to feel safe to learn. By giving students the impression that school is a dangerous place, we make them less open and able to learn.
- The idea that more guns equates to a safer society is a fallacy. The United States has both the highest per capita number of guns and the highest per capita rate of gun homicide in the developed world. The causality between these numbers has been demonstrated by research, including a 2009 study published by a team from the University of Pennsylvania, which showed that people owning firearms were about 4.5 times more likely to be shot.
- Individuals who resisted a gun assault were more than five times more likely to be shot than an individual who did not carry a gun. In addition, being in possession of a firearm makes the holder more likely to suspect others have one too, as shown in a 2012 paper in the Journal of Experimental Psychology. Subjects, given either a replica gun or a neutral object, were much more likely to identify objects others were holding as a firearm when they were holding the replica gun. This erroneous assumption can have disastrous consequences, particularly in a school.
- With this data in mind, it’s difficult to argue that having more guns anywhere in the United States, let alone in schools, makes us safer. In addition, we may run the risk of “robbing our children of their innocence by turning their places of learning into an armed camp.”
- The cost of having armed school personnel may also be very high, particularly due to liability concerns of the school district. Indeed in the aftermath of the Dec. 14 mass shooting, the Newtown Board of Education discussed allowing armed citizens to patrol the schools but quickly dismissed the idea because the risk of accident would make the district uninsurable.



Arming vs. Not Arming

The argument in **favor** of states and districts allowing teachers to carry concealed weapons in schools.

- Criminals will carry weapons regardless of their legality. Responsible citizens, including teachers, should have the same advantages when it comes to protecting themselves and their students from an armed attacker. Allowing teachers and administrators to carry concealed weapons will cost less than additional personnel for security purposes.
- Legally concealed weapons have been shown to save lives in a number of attempted mass shootings.
- States that allow individuals with concealed handgun licenses into public schools without exception are as follows: Utah, Hawaii, and New Hampshire. Utah has allowed teachers to carry concealed weapons on K-12 campuses without specific permission from the district or administrators for 12 years. During this time, there have been no accidental or intentional shootings.
- There are 18 states that allow individuals to carry weapons onto school grounds with few conditions: Alabama, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Wyoming.
- While it is difficult to causally connect concealed handgun licenses with any changes in crime rates, federal data has suggested a correlation between a three-year decline in violent crimes committed with guns, included murders, aggravated assaults and robberies, and an increase in gun ownership.
- Teachers who choose to carry a concealed handgun at school must have a permit, and be accountable for maintaining regular training with their weapon. This training needs to be standardized as much as possible. Due to their proximity to children, teachers should be required to do at least 15 hours of training per year, including training in the areas of judgmental (decision-making) shooting, shooting while moving to cover, clearing malfunctions, and engaging multiple targets.
- Security precautions would be required to prevent students from accessing a teacher's firearm. Some examples are a biometric safe that could only be accessed by the teacher, or the teacher and principal; the loaded magazine being stored next to rather than in the firearm. The state/district should provide the biometric safes. They should be consistent across the state/district, so that teachers, administrators, security, and local police have a common understanding of what is in classrooms.
- To reduce the financial burden on school districts, teachers would be required to obtain and maintain a concealed weapon license and their firearm independently. A list of permissible weapons would be determined on the state or district level.



Conclusion

In the wake of an act of violence, the natural and practical reaction is to try to figure out what went wrong, and ask ourselves how we can prevent a similar tragedy in the future. What makes many acts of violence so tragic, however, is the frequent absence of a clear cause. The lack of a single, clear answer to the unanswerable question, why. This report reflects that inability to identify a single cause of violence; we do not believe violence has a single cause, and likewise it is not going to have a single solution. As such, we advocate for a multifaceted approach to school safety.

We propose examining the past conditions that both create violent individuals and make people vulnerable to acts of violence. We propose evaluating our school buildings and protocols to ensure we are housing our students and staff in safe environments, and we are properly equipped to respond if and when that environment becomes unsafe. We propose thoughtful consideration and research of the role of guns in schools, to ensure we achieve everyone's goal—to make our schools safer, not more dangerous. We propose putting character into the curriculum and valuing the whole child in order to foster students equipped to create a peaceful future. We propose working to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and improving the availability of treatment to help heal those who need it most. We propose fostering connections between communities and schools, so there is mutual communication and appreciation. Finally, we submit no single solution will be sufficient, but we will no longer tolerate ignorance of the issues that we educators are faced with every single day. Each year, teachers are presented with new initiatives aimed at improving students' academic performance; we hope that the same energy, passion and resources (human, financial, etc.) are dedicated to improving student safety.



THE VIVA NEA IDEA EXCHANGE

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Appendix

Potential Public Service Announcement Concepts

Concept One: To educate families on the dangers that occur when weapons are available in a home.

Data shows that if you have a gun in your home, your household may have a significantly higher rate of homicide (7 times greater), suicide (11 times greater), or unintentional shooting (4 times greater). If suicide is attempted with a gun, there is a 90 percent likelihood that it will be fatal. Compounding the danger, 40 percent of homes with both guns and children have unlocked firearms and 25 percent of all households with guns and children have weapons that are loaded.

Many people believe that guns make them safe in their homes. Paradoxically, the FBI reports there are about 200 legally justified self-defense homicides by private citizens each year. This is in contrast with 30,000 gun deaths each year.

PSA Scenarios:

- The camera zooms back in black and white from a close up on crime-scene tape around a typical house. Words appear on the screen: “The Leading Cause of Gun Deaths is Suicide.” Pause. Then words appear: “Do your children have access to your guns?”
- Police lights flash in the foreground. Audience hears a 911 call about someone being shot in background. Sound fades out. Words superimposed on screen: “In 2010, unintentional shootings wounded 14,675 people and killed 606.” Pause. Then the words appear: “Can your children get to your guns?”

Concept Two: To educate the public on the danger of high-capacity magazines and military-style weapons.

Of the 62 incidents of mass killings (defined as four or more people killed) between 1962 and 2012, 25 of them have happened since 2006, with seven happening in 2012 alone. High-capacity magazines were used in 50 percent of these mass killings.

There has been roughly one mass shooting per month in the U.S., since 2009. This gun violence in our communities has spilled over into the schools, where there have been a total of 50 mass shootings since 1982, resulting in 297 deaths. It is estimated the costs related to gun violence are around \$100 billion annually.

PSA Scenarios:

- Picture of a large screen with hundreds of generic photographs of kids. Words appear: “Eight children die by gunshot every day in America.” Pause. Words change to show, “January 1st.” Eight more children are crossed off the picture with a red “x”. Words change to: “January 2nd.” Eight more children are crossed off. Process continues and accelerates. Pause. Then the words appear: “There have been 62 mass killings in our schools since 1982 resulting in 297 deaths. Gun magazine size matters.” Then finally the words appear: “Our choices affect our children.”
- Grainy video of students running out of Columbine High School. Sound of a 911 call plays in background. Words appear overlaid on video: “The assailants were armed with magazines ranging in size from 10 bullets to 52 bullets. Gun magazine size matters.” Pause. Then the words appear: “Our choices affect our children.”

Members of the VIVA NEA Writing Collaborative

AMY BRUNS, a kindergarten teacher in Aurora, Colo., moved from England to the United States as a child. She studied in Germany, while attending the University of Pennsylvania. During her time at Penn, she taught preschool and worked for the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia collecting and analyzing data on children with Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder. The experiences Amy had working with parents and teachers, who were often frustrated by the lack of cohesion among those who interacted with and cared about children, inspired her to go into the field of teaching.

CHERYL COFIE is a third grade teacher at Nebo School District in Spanish Fork, Utah. Her path to the classroom began with providing home daycare for working parents. When her youngest child was in school full time, Cheryl went to work as a special education technician, which motivated her to go to college at age 37. She began teaching four years later, and says she cannot imagine a more fulfilling and rewarding way to make a living.

AMY GRAFF, a special educator for first graders in Framingham, Mass., got her first taste of teaching in fourth grade, when she skipped recess to assist a class of older students with special needs. In college, she would spend her vacations working in her former fourth grade teacher's class. In addition to teaching, Amy is a scoutmaster for a Boy Scout troop. She also enjoys photography, painting and crafting.

NANCY HAHN has been teaching for 15 years, and cannot recall a time since middle school that her life was not full of children. After years of babysitting, working at summer camps, teaching preschool, and raising babies, she knew it was time to return to school to finish her teaching degree. Today, she is teaching language arts, Read 180, and writing intervention to seventh and eighth graders in Jeffo, Colo.

LAURA HIRSHFIELD teaches English at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School in Acton, Mass. In the summer of 2011, she was awarded a fellowship to the Ahimsa Center at California Polytechnic University, Pomona, to study the journeys of nonviolence of Mohandas Gandhi and Cesar Chavez. Transformed by what she learned, Laura has dedicated herself to discovering ways to incorporate nonviolence into her curriculum. Last year, she helped to create a program for 50 K-12 teachers to travel to India for in-depth summer education in nonviolence, sponsored by the Center for Jain Studies at Claremont Lincoln University.

KATHERINE DOERR MOROSKY, a high school science teacher in Wilton, Conn., has always been passionate about chemistry. As a Ph.D. candidate and self-proclaimed "people person," she found life in the research lab a little too lonely, and decided she could better contribute to society by teaching high school chemistry and physics. Since the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, located just a few miles from where Katherine lives, she has become an impassioned advocate for school safety.

Members of the VIVA NEA Writing Collaborative

MICHAEL O'SHAUGHNESSY teaches high school physics, chemistry and physical science at Greene County Joint Vocational School District in Ohio. He became a teacher 15 years ago for two reasons: he feels he has a lot to offer as a positive role model for the young adults he teaches; and he knew being a professional educator would challenge him every day, as there are days of both extreme joy and extreme frustration. Michael thrives on the responsibility and privilege he has preparing youth to be productive members of society. When not teaching, he is finding ways to improve his teaching, such as writing STEM curriculum for the Dayton Regional STEM Center.

DEAN RAIZMAN, a teacher-librarian for Jefferson County Public Schools in Lakewood, Colo., says few things have as much existential meaning for him as teaching, especially the “ah-ha” moments his students experience. A teacher for 18 years, currently covering the library and technology, Dean also enjoys hiking in the mountains, reading, raising two boys, exercising, taking pictures, and listening to TED talks.

SONIA SMITH teaches AP English literature & composition and African-American literature to high school upperclassmen in Chesterfield County, Va. She is a proud third-generation educator, who became a teacher because she knew it was her calling and the classroom felt natural to her. As a teacher of mostly seniors, Sonia feels a sense of responsibility to foster personal growth and learning in our future leaders, as she is preparing them for the college experience and the real world. When not teaching, Sonia is active with her local Education Association, serving in leadership positions for the last four years.

SUZANNE SMITH is a National Board Certified teacher with more than 20 years experience. She currently teaches sixth grade inclusion math, social studies, and science in Grenada, Miss. As a child, she would come home from school and teach her younger sister what she had learned. Since that early age, she has never dreamed of doing anything else professionally, but is still quite busy outside of her classroom. Suzanne is entertainment /activities and ceremonies chair for Relay for Life, and co-chair of the Mississippi Tobacco Free Coalition of Grenada, Yalabusha, and Calhoun counties. She is also very involved in her church, as music director, a Sunday School teacher, and chair of the Youth and Children's Committees, among others.

CHRISTOPHER STARMER currently teaches seventh and eighth grade science and math at Jefferson County RE-1 in Golden, Colo. During his six years as a teacher, he has also taught all of the secondary grades, and coaches youth sports through all seasons, including flag football, basketball, lacrosse, and baseball. Chris became a teacher because of his own enjoyment of learning, his eagerness to stay connected to future generations as a positive role model, and the ability to spend time with his own family.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Put Character in the Curriculum

Proposed Solutions

1. Develop and offer professional development on educating the whole child.
2. Expose students to rules of etiquette to counter overexposure to violence.
3. Implement curriculum and practices to increase self-awareness.
4. Maximize the potential of peer pressure to increase social accountability.
5. Balance curriculum with exposure to nonviolence and nonviolent conflict.
6. Honor diversity.
7. Promote “Pro-Hero” (instead of “Anti-Bully”) curriculum.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Practice and Teach Effective Conflict Resolution

Proposed Solutions

8. Institute restorative justice practices.
9. Implement a “True Strength Walks Away” program in schools.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Treat a School as a Community

Proposed Solutions

10. Offer professional development to ensure staff recognizes and understands the effect of students’ struggles outside of school on growth and development.
11. Foster collaboration between schools and experts on community demographics.
12. Increase availability of enrichment activities before and after school.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Improve and Increase Mental Health Support for Students, Educators and Families

Proposed Solutions

13. Fund mental health programs to increase the number of counselors, social workers, and psychologists in schools.
14. Develop character education curriculum and teaching materials to reduce the social stigma of mental illness.
15. Provide direct mental health services for students in school.
16. Increase professional development to help identify at-risk behaviors and provide mental health services to at-risk students.
17. Establish collaborative support network for parents, educators, medical professionals, and mental health personnel.

RECOMMENDATION 5**Ensure the Security of School Buildings****Proposed Solutions**

18. Partner with professional law enforcement to develop security action plans and conduct school safety audits.
19. Make capital improvements to control access to school facilities.
20. Fund at least one School Resource Officer for every school that wants one.
21. Decrease average class size.

RECOMMENDATION 6**Strengthen Connections Between Schools and Communities****Proposed Solutions**

22. Improve positive relationships between parents and the school.
23. Create opportunities for staff and students to connect to community, and for the community to connect to the school.
24. Require community service as a part of the educational experience for graduation.
25. Establish national service requirement for publicly educated students.
26. Inform public opinion about the danger of guns and need for mental health services.

RECOMMENDATION 7**Change the Debate about Guns in Schools****Proposed Solutions**

27. Support common-sense restrictions on firearms and firearm accessories.
28. Increase the presence of School Resource Officers on school grounds.

New Voice Strategies

Action

New Voice Strategies is a nonprofit corporation founded by a group of seasoned professionals who believe in an individual's ability to make our world better, fairer and more productive. New Voice Strategies created WikiWisdom™ to offer leaders a new way to communicate with their stakeholders. Our innovation—the VIVA Idea Exchange, an online peer collaboration platform—plumbs the wisdom of committed people with front-line experience to create consensus on a variety of actionable recommendations. We believe in the power of authentic experience and provide committed people with an avenue to make a difference.

Our passion is to make their voices heard. In its first 18 months of operation, VIVA Teachers has engaged 5,000 committed classroom teachers in peer-to-peer collaborations. Along with 1,000 of their peers who joined our network, VIVA Teachers offers unvarnished insights into professional visions and priorities for strengthening America's public schools from coast to coast.

Board of Directors

JILL BASS taught in the Chicago and New York City public schools for 14 years. She has a master's in instructional leadership from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has been a professional developer, curriculum writer, educational consultant, and instructional coach. She is currently director of the Mikva Challenge's National Center for Action Civics, overseeing curriculum development and teacher training.

ANNA BURGER is an Advanced Leadership Fellow at Harvard University and served on President Obama's Economic Recovery Board. She was Chair of Change to Win and the first woman to head an American labor Federation. Burger retired as Secretary-Treasurer of SEIU, the nation's fastest growing union, after serving from 2001 to 2010. In 2006 and 2009, Burger was named one of Washingtonian magazine's 100 Most Powerful Women in 2006 and 2009.

TOM COSGROVE, ex officio, co-founder of New Voice Strategies, brings strong experience as a message and communications strategist to our work. He has designed and implemented successful communications and grassroots campaigns for more than three decades as an environmental activist, campaign manager, political media consultant and advisor to businesses and nonprofits.

ELIZABETH EVANS is the Founding CEO of New Voice Strategies. She has over 25 years of professional experience in community-based organizing and policy advocacy, strategic communications, law and policy. She is a recognized national leader for building unconventional alliances, gathering community-based input and bringing innovative approaches to solving difficult policy problems, focusing on education policy for the last 12 years. Previously, she spent 10 years as a courtroom litigator for the United States Securities and Exchange Commission.

JOHN HUSSEY is Chief Strategy Officer at Battelle for Kids. John provides organizational and strategic oversight for Battelle for Kids and the organization's clients in the area of innovation, technology, communications, development and strategic planning. Prior to joining Battelle for Kids, John enjoyed a 30-year career in education and technology. He previously served as the regional manager for SchoolNet, Inc., helping create Web-based products to help teachers access student data and curricular standards via the Internet for use in instructional planning. He was also a middle school science teacher and technology coordinator in several Ohio school districts.

KIPLUND "KIP" KOLKMEIER is of counsel to the Political Law and Government Relations practice groups of Perkins, Coie, LLC & Kolkmeier Consulting. His legal practice focuses on state legislative lobbying in Illinois, corporate and governmental ethics issues, administrative rulemaking and executive agency lobbying, PAC management, state and federal campaign finance issues, and association management. He previously was a partner at the following law firms: Sidley & Austin, Altheimer & Gray, and Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon.

ASHLEY WARLICK, Chair, teaches elementary school in the Cambridge, Mass., Public Schools. She has a concentration in teaching students with special needs and brings a strong interest in the arts to her work. She serves on the Board of Directors of her school's affiliated nonprofit organization, which brings urgently needed resources to the students at the school.



