

SCHOOL SAFETY



INTRODUCTION

The continued gun violence in our schools has refocused Americans on the question of how to best protect children in our schools. Parents send their children off to school in the morning, trusting that they will return home at the end of the school day. Yet recent events demonstrate that more attention and more resources to improving school safety must be considered thoughtfully and sustained over time.

Puget Sound Educational Service District believes all children have the right to live and learn in a safe and nurturing environment. Research demonstrates that learning is enhanced when children feel safe and have their physical and emotional needs met in a healthy school environment. This includes access to healthy foods, opportunities for physical activity, clean air to breathe, and access to preventive care and health services, including mental health. These are issues that we must face as a community and work together to solve. Schools play a critical role in helping students feel safe and supported, and in providing students more intensive services and supports as necessary.

A comprehensive approach is necessary to prevent future school violence. School districts cannot independently solve this problem. Congress must act by directing resources to states and districts for school safety enhancements and passing more common-sense gun safety legislation.

Schools remain the safest place for children and the significant decline of non-gun related violence in schools continues in a 30 year trend. Despite fervent efforts by school districts to protect students from non-gun related crimes, since 2018, there have been 119 shootings in American schools that resulted in death and injury of children and staff. Each day, 12 children die from gun violence in America and another 32 are shot and injured. Guns are now the leading cause of death among American children and teens. A comprehensive solution to prevent the killing of innocent youth cannot be the sole responsibility of the school community.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

PSESD asks Congress to take the following steps to enhance school safety:

- Increase funding for Title IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Schools and states pay billions of dollars annually to address the results of substance abuse, school violence and unaddressed mental health needs through local and state funding. Title IV represents a critical, sustained federal investment in successful prevention and intervention efforts.
- Increase funding for the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools grants designed to help schools prevent and manage emergencies.
- Increase funding for the STOP School Violence Act Grants, which distributes grants for security equipment, school hardening related purchases, school resource officers, professional development programs for school staff to identify and address student violence against themselves and others, school threat assessments and threat assessment teams, crisis intervention teams and technology that addresses anonymous reporting.
- Increase identified funding for mental health counselors and services in schools. Access to these services is a crucial component of any effort to prevent/respond to a school emergency.
- Support standalone funding for higher education institutions to partner with LEAs to build up the school mental health personnel pipeline and to place these critical specialized support staff in hard-to-staff schools.

- Support continued federal funding for research to identify the root causes of gun violence, the impact of school safety strategies on school shootings and the prevention of gun violence in schools.

PSESD implores Congress to pass more gun safety legislation that will:

- Increase enforcement of existing gun laws
- Reinstate the ban on the sale, import, transfer, and ownership of assault weapons
- Ban large-capacity magazines
- Require thorough background checks for all gun purchasers
- End the “gun-show” loophole
- Prevent individuals convicted of violent crimes from being able to purchase guns
- Prevent individuals with mental health issues from purchasing or owning a gun (18 U.S.C. 922 (g))
- Punish irresponsible gun owners

We cannot make our schools armed fortresses. The decision to bring police officers into schools should be determined on a school-by-school basis. We oppose efforts to bring more guns into our schools by arming teachers and administrators. Recognizing the importance of emergency exit safety, American schools are large buildings with many doors. It is not reasonable to operate on the premise that a school resource officer will always be able stop a determined shooter bearing an assault weapon with a large ammunition magazine. Eliminating easy access to weapons and increasing opportunities

for mental health care are essential steps towards mitigating the horrific reality of recurring murders of educators and children.

If we hope to prevent future tragedies at schools, we must comprehensively address both school safety and gun safety. Increased mental health services, community supports for youth, and new attitudes about violence in our entertainment must all be part of this approach. Sustainable changes require the investment of both time and resources. Federal funding is critical to ensuring schools remain the safest place for children. Now is the time to address school safety.

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