



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS

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NASP Calls for Comprehensive School Safety Policies

Bethesda, MD—The United States of America has no greater responsibility than safeguarding the well-being of our children. Ensuring safe schools and communities is paramount to this responsibility.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has long been a leader in promoting safe, supportive learning environments that protect both the physical and psychological safety of students and staff. We applaud President Obama on committing to identifying concrete and comprehensive strategies to ensure that we meet this responsibility for every school, child, family, and community in the country. His charge to members of his cabinet and members of Congress to work with national safety experts to craft solutions will improve this process. We strongly agree that such strategies must include addressing mental health and believe they should reinforce collaborative efforts between schools, families, and communities. We also appreciate the President's acknowledgement that effective policies should be built upon known evidence-based strategies and practices.

With the President's announcement comes the urgency to not allow the light shed on this issue by the tragedy in Newton, CT to dim without our leaders taking real, meaningful action. NASP is committed to helping guide policies that lead to increased physical and psychological safety in schools by providing the recommendations outlined below and endorsing the efforts of other allied organizations and experts, such as [the December 2012 Connecticut School Shooting Position Statement](#) released yesterday by the Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence.

Our goal is to highlight common ground, of which there is a great deal among school safety experts. Further, we strive to ensure that our focus moves beyond the historical practice of primarily increasing school building safety measures (e.g., metal detectors, armed security guards, surveillance cameras) and instead focus on addressing the continuum of needs and services that lead to improved safety, well-being, and learning for children and youth. Effective school safety is a day-in, day-out commitment that infuses every aspect of school life. Our challenge is to not let increased anxiety over this horrible tragedy obscure the proven fundamentals of violence prevention. Instead we must become more unified, vocal advocates for policies that support what schools *can* do effectively, which in turn supports our schools' primary mission of learning.

A Call to Action

NASP calls on President Obama and Congress to enact legislation that addresses the following primary areas of need for improved policy and practice:

1. **Increasing access to mental health services and supports in schools.** Only a fraction of students in need actually receive mental health services, and among those that do, the majority access those services in school. Nevertheless, the availability of school-based mental health professionals remains inadequate to meet the mental health needs of our children and youth. Increased access to mental health services and supports in schools, including the infusion of social-emotional learning in our classrooms, is vital to improving the physical and psychological safety of our students and schools, as well as academic performance and problem-solving skills. Additionally, close collaboration between school-employed (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers) and community-employed mental health services providers (e.g., professional counselors, clinical psychologists, and clinical social workers) is critical to meeting the range of mental health needs.
2. **Developing safe and supportive schools.** Despite the horror that we all feel after the shooting in CT, schools remain one of the safest places for children in the United States. We need to continue to focus on how we build and maintain safe school environments that promote learning, psychological health, and student success. We need to ensure that adequate learning supports and policies are present to provide a continuum of services that respond to the needs of *all* students. Critical to this is enhancing school connectedness and trust between students and adults as well as reinforcing open communication and the importance of reporting concerns about someone hurting themselves or others.
3. **Improving screening and threat assessment procedures to identify and meet the needs of individuals at risk for causing harm to themselves and others.** Schools must provide the infrastructure to develop and maintain active school safety and crisis teams that focus on efforts year-round to promote a safe, positive school culture while minimizing the impact of school crises when they occur. This entails a multitiered approach consistent with other school systems of support—which includes universal mental health screenings and interventions as well as more intensive approaches for students deemed at risk. School mental health professionals, in collaboration with families and educators, remain central to helping identify students at risk for violence to themselves or others, and identifying interventions and supports to help minimize those risks. Effective screening and assessment also requires interagency collaboration and communication across education, health, mental health, and law enforcement.
4. **Conducting a national campaign to reduce stigma around mental illness and to promote mental health on par with physical health.** Too much stigma about mental health exists in our country. This stigma reduces the likelihood that families and students will seek out and receive the mental health supports and services needed to learn and thrive in school and throughout life. Given the natural interaction between physical and

mental health, the importance of caring for an individual's mental health needs must be on par with the importance of physical health.

5. **Improving policies that limit exposure to media violence among children, youth, and vulnerable populations.** The negative effects of exposure to violence on children and youth are well documented and include increased risk of trauma and academic and behavior problems. While families, communities, educators, and law enforcement must continue to work together to reduce children's exposure to violence in their homes and neighborhoods, our society and the entertainment industry must also recognize and respond to the negative effects that media violence is having on individuals. To ensure the psychological safety of our children and youth, policies must regulate and limit exposure to media violence among children, youth, and other vulnerable populations.
6. **Reviewing and revising as needed current policies and legislation addressing access to firearms by those who have the potential to cause harm to themselves or others.** We must prevent the misuse of weapons by people who are intent on causing harm to themselves or others. Experts on the research related to the prevention of violence, and specifically school violence, should be charged with offering substantive recommendations to our elected officials on how our current laws might be improved so that tragic events like the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting do not ever occur again.

Responding effectively to these priorities will also require policies that promote education, training, and research. Effective approaches will take into account the mission and purpose of schools, and how schools and communities can work together to fulfill them. We must create and pass legislation and funding to reduce and prevent violence while also promoting the learning and well-being our children and youth.

About NASP: NASP represents more than 25,000 school psychologists in the United States and abroad. School psychologists work with families, educators, and community providers to create safe, supportive schools; promote students' academic success; and support students' healthy behavior and development. They also serve on school safety, crisis, and mental health teams and are often leaders in helping to develop comprehensive school safety plans. NASP's longstanding leadership in school safety and crisis prevention and response includes helping to build capacity at the local level through our PREP_aRE School Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training Curriculum (www.nasponline.org/prepare) and providing direct support and resources for families and schools in the event of major crises through our website and our National Emergency Assistance Team (www.nasponline.org/safety_crisis).

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