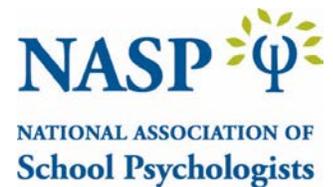


Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Preventing Mass Violence Requires Access to Mental Health Services and Reduced Inappropriate Access to Firearms

Bethesda, MD—The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) joins the nation in shock and grief over the shooting at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas. There have been 22 school shootings in 2018. This reality in our country is totally unacceptable. Out of all developed countries, the United States is the only nation that continues to experience gun violence on a daily and pervasive basis. We need to do more as a nation to address the underlying causes. This includes improving our mental health system and examining our existing—and the potential for more effective—gun legislation. John Kelly, President of the National Association of School Psychologists, stated “there is a clear sense of urgency, and policy makers at all levels have the obligation to quickly enact meaningful and evidence-based policy to prevent another tragedy from happening.”

As the nation looks to understand and respond effectively to this tragedy, it is imperative that we stay focused on facts and on what we know works to prevent violence and keep our children and youth safe. Particularly important to understand is that the majority of people with mental illness are not violent; in fact, individuals with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence. To conclude that the presence of an issue like depression predisposes someone to commit this type of violence perpetuates an incorrect stereotype and maintains a stigma that often creates a reluctance to seek treatment.

Homicidal behaviors are the result of a complex combination and interaction of risk factors that may be environmental, biological, or both. A known risk factor for homicidal and suicidal behavior is access to weapons—such as high-powered firearms—which we know is highly associated with increased risk of injury and death among youth. We need effective laws and policies that keep guns out of the hands of those who would hurt themselves or others, limit access to weapons intended to cause mass destruction in a short amount of time, and ensure that the only armed persons at schools are school resource officers who maintain ongoing and appropriate firearms training.

Schools play a critical and irreplaceable role in keeping students safe and supporting mental health. While schools remain one of the safest places for children, we acknowledge that students, staff, and parents may experience significant distress regarding their safety following such significant events of school violence. Providing ongoing access to mental health services promotes school safety by helping students feel connected to their school community, which supports the mental health and

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well-being of all students and helps to identify students who may need more intensive services or who require immediate law enforcement intervention when the potential for violence is identified. In these cases, collaboration among school staff members, community members, students, and their families is essential to ensuring that children receive care and effective interventions. We need to continue to take steps to interrupt an individual's pathway toward violence. Improved access to mental health services in schools and continued efforts at building strong relationships and connections at school are critical factors in preventing and responding to both violent acts directed at schools and the necessary school crisis response following exposure to trauma.

Our nation must engage in a serious discussion about how we can improve our efforts to provide for the mental health needs of our children and youth—not just to prevent horrific acts of violence, but to support their well-being, academic achievement, and success in life. Speculating or circulating misinformation about the context of violent events before facts are verified can be harmful and distracting to the mission of providing a safe school environment for our children. Simultaneously, we must promote real action to reduce inappropriate access to firearms and their potential use against our nation's children and schools as vulnerable targets.

RESOURCES RELATED TO SCHOOL CRISIS AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

- [Framework for Safe and Successful Schools \(www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework\)](http://www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework)
- [PREPaRE Training Curriculum \(www.nasponline.org/prepare\)](http://www.nasponline.org/prepare)
- [NASP Resolution on Efforts to Prevent Gun Violence \(www.nasponline.org/nasp-resolutionprevent-gun-violence\)](http://www.nasponline.org/nasp-resolutionprevent-gun-violence)

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