

## **NASP Calls for Comprehensive School Safety Measures and Common Sense Gun Violence Prevention Efforts**

**Bethesda, MD**—Five years ago, 26 children and educators lost their lives in the tragic shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Since then, their loved ones and other caring individuals and organizations, like the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), have committed to transforming heartbreak into action by working to keep our schools and communities safe.

NASP has long been a leader in promoting safe, supportive learning environments that protect the physical and psychological safety of students and staff. We also strongly support efforts to reduce community violence, including gun violence, that undermines the well-being and learning of so many of our children and youth.

“It is important to keep in mind that gun violence in schools is rare, even in the face of tragedies like Newtown and most recently Aztec High School,” says NASP President John Kelly. “While some school environments present challenges for some students; schools in general are among the safest places for children and youth. Our challenge is to avoid ineffective sound-bite fixes, such as arming school staff, and stay focused on proven effective approaches to reducing violence.” To truly improve school safety and reduce violence, schools must:

1. **Create welcoming, supportive learning environments.** Students need to feel connected and included in their school communities. It is critical to enhance school connectedness and trust between students and adults, as well as to reinforce open communication and the importance of reporting concerns about someone hurting themselves or others. School psychologists play an integral role in working with administrators and teachers to ensure that building systems and policies are conducive to safe and supportive conditions for learning.
2. **Increase access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health services and supports in schools.** Only a fraction of students in need of mental health services actually receive them, and among those that do, the majority access these services in school. Schools are an ideal place both to promote mental wellness and to identify and support students struggling with mental health issues. School-employed mental health professionals, like school psychologists, can help guide school-wide prevention and intervention mental and behavioral health services, provide direct services to students in need of support, help teachers and other school staff understand the warning signs that individuals may be at risk of causing harm to themselves or others, and provide appropriate threat assessments and supports to identified students.

3. **Implement school safety initiatives that balance psychological and physical safety.** Effective school safety efforts should utilize evidence-based practices to ensure the well-being of all students in addition to their physical safety. Reasonable building security measures, such as secure doors, lighted and monitored hallways, and check in-check out systems for visitors, are important. However, an overemphasis on extreme physical security measures alone, such as metal detectors and arming school staff, will not improve school safety and, in fact, may undermine student perceptions of safety and schools' ability to ensure an effective learning environment.
4. **Establish trained school safety and crisis teams.** Schools and districts need trained school safety and crisis teams and plans that are consistently reviewed and practiced. Training should encompass ongoing prevention and early intervention as well as response and recovery in the event the unpreventable occurs. This includes conducting effective lockdown drills and collaborative planning with community responders. A primary goal should be to reinforce learning as well as safety.
5. **Enact and uphold gun laws that prevent access to firearms by those who have the potential to cause harm to themselves or others.** According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 34,000 people die as a result of gun violence each year, approximately two thirds of which are the result of suicide. NASP supports measures that will reduce access to firearms by individuals who intend to harm themselves or others and are in line with existing public safety measures designed to protect American citizens across a range of products and activities in this country every day. This includes eliminating inappropriate youth access to guns; keeping guns out of the hands of individuals deemed at risk of hurting themselves and others; improving awareness of safe gun practices, including secure storage of firearms; restricting the presence of guns in schools to only commissioned school resource officers; and funding public health research on gun violence.

"Among those who lost their lives 5 years ago was Mary Sherlach, Sandy Hook school psychologist and a NASP member," notes Kelly. "Like all school psychologists, Mary cared deeply about her students and was committed to their personal well-being and successful learning. NASP remains committed to working to make more universal the policies and practices that we know enable ALL children to thrive in school, at home, and throughout life."

#### **Relevant NASP Resources**

- [A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#)
- [PREPaRE School Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training Curriculum](#)
- [Best Practice Considerations for School Armed Assailant Drills](#)
- [NASP Position Paper of School Violence Prevention](#)

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