



For Immediate Release

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Educators Call for Interdisciplinary, Multitiered Framework to Improve School Safety and Access to Mental Health Supports for Students

Bethesda, MD: Leading education organizations have called on Congress and the Administration to enact school safety policies that will genuinely support the well-being and learning of students over the long term, rather than reactive strategies that may cause more harm than good. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) released [Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#), their joint recommendations for improved school safety and access to mental health services for students.

"Principals know the key to preserving the health, well-being, and safety of students is building strong, collaborative school/community relationships necessary for implementing effective prevention and intervention programs," said Gail Connelly, Executive Director, NAESP. "Instead of guns, schools must be armed with multidisciplinary strategies resulting in a positive and nurturing school climate proven to prevent threatening or violent behaviors. Federal lawmakers can rely on this powerful framework to craft policies that will provide meaningful and long-term solutions to keeping our schools and our students safe."

The groups caution against excessive emphasis on overly restrictive security measures, such as armed guards and metal detectors, which do not necessarily improve safety and can undermine the school climate and learning. They oppose arming school staff and reiterate that, if a school determines the need for armed security, school resource officers (commissioned police officers trained to work in schools) should be the *only* armed school personnel of any kind.

"At a time when resources are tight, we need to be focusing on those strategies that will create a school climate where students want come ready to learn," noted NASSP Executive Director JoAnn Bartoletti. "We have to ask ourselves not just 'will this really work' but also 'is this the best use of our resources'".

Within the *Framework*, the education groups emphasize the importance of establishing policies and practices that are comprehensive, integrated, and multitiered; facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration across school teams and among school and community providers; make most effective use of school personnel; and are sustainable. More than 100 education and children’s mental health groups and experts have endorsed the recommendations.

“Every adult in a school building has a responsibility for keeping our children safe, creating positive school climates, and facilitating students’ personal and social development,” said ASCA Executive Director, Richard Wong. “In fact, all members of the school community, including teachers and other school staff, families, community providers, and emergency responders, play a vital role in creating safe, successful schools. We need evidence-based policies and practices that enable us to work together effectively.”

A key component to the recommendations is fully integrating mental health and learning supports into the school process through multitiered systems of supports (MTSS). “Mental health is central to children’s learning and life success,” notes NASP President Amy Smith. “Schools are uniquely positioned to promote mental wellness, identify children at risk, provide interventions and counseling, and coordinate with community providers as needed. These efforts can be exponentially more effective when they are appropriately integrated into the learning environment.”

Other recommendations include: allowing for blended, flexible use of funding streams to address school climate, safety, crisis response, and mental health needs more cohesively and effectively; improving staffing ratios of school-employed mental health professionals to allow for the delivery of a full range of services and the support of effective school–community partnerships; employing effective school discipline that promotes positive behavior; and integrating ongoing school safety and crisis and emergency preparedness and response teams, training, and planning.

The full report is available at: <http://www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework>

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