

## SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

A founding principle of National PTA's mission is to promote the safety and well-being of all children and youth. School safety is a critical priority for all parents, educators, students, and community members that cannot be taken for granted. Students and educators have a right to attend schools that are safe and conducive to learning and achievement, yet schools often experience critical incidents such as suicide, natural disasters, or a mass casualty event that have a devastating impact on students, parents, educators, and the community.

National PTA recognizes that school safety is a multi-faceted issue with no one clear solution for each community. All efforts to address school safety must involve all stakeholders, especially students, parents, and families and take into account a variety of factors including the physical and psychological safety of students. Our association promotes the implementation of evidence-based policies and practices articulated in [A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#).<sup>1</sup> Any decision regarding physical security measures must be locally determined, collaborative and specifically include input from students, parents, families, educators, school leaders and the community.

National PTA believes the most effective day-to-day school climate to be gun-free, which includes not arming teachers and administrators, but defers to local collaborative decision-making regarding the presence of law enforcement deployed in community-oriented policing and school building security.<sup>2</sup> If the decision is made to have a Student Resource Officer (SRO) or other security agency within a school building, there must be a clearly defined memorandum of understanding between the law enforcement agency and the school that articulates the role of the school resource officer.<sup>3</sup>

The association and its constituent bodies promote the establishment of, and support for policies and procedures that emphasize the following:

### Family Engagement

- Involve students, parents and families in the development, implementation and evaluation of all school safety plans, including emergency preparedness, crisis response, and threat assessment protocols, school discipline policies and procedures, and student health and wellness support services.
- Conduct regular and timely communication with families about safety policies and procedures including school evacuation plans and reunification protocols.

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<sup>1</sup> Cowan, K. C., Vaillancourt, K., Rossen, E., & Pollitt, K. (2013). [A framework for safe and successful schools](#) [Brief]. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

<sup>2</sup> National PTA. (2016). [Gun safety and violence prevention position statement](#). Alexandria, VA: National PTA.

<sup>3</sup> National PTA. (2016). [Positive school discipline position statement](#). Alexandria, VA: National PTA.

- School districts and schools must communicate clearly and regularly to all families regarding school safety matters in languages that are accessible to them. This includes two-way, meaningful communication on the types of safety drills conducted, what students and parents can expect for drills and in the event of an actual emergency, what physical and psychological safety measures are in place, and the role and responsibilities of any type of security personnel on school premises, if applicable.
- Establish ongoing opportunities for students and parents to provide input on the school environment and climate.

### **Adequate Funding**

- Investment from Federal, state and local decisionmakers for the necessary physical and psychological student supports and services, including locally determined physical safety measures, appropriate resources for health and wellness services, increased qualified, school-based health and wellness practitioners, and routine mental health screenings for all students.
  - Specifically, we urge Congress to fully fund Title IV-A, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant program under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) at its authorized level to support safe and healthy students through comprehensive school mental health programs, drug and violence prevention programs, training on trauma-informed practices, and other health and physical education programs.

### **School Climate and Student Support Services**

- Promote a positive school climate that encourages nurturing relationships, and mutual trust and respect among students, staff and families.
- Improve staffing ratios of school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses to provide school-based behavior, health and mental health services
- Provide the necessary resources and support to ensure students can receive a proactive continuum of behavioral and mental health services.
- Provide professional development for all school-based employees on youth mental health including early intervention, prevention and access to school and community based mental health services.<sup>4</sup>
- Distribute information on and connect students and families to appropriate integrated health and wellness services within the school and community.
- Integrate school wide multitiered systems of support (MTSS) and provide professional development for all school personnel on MTSS.
- Establish, clearly communicate and fairly implement policies regarding bullying, harassment and discipline that meet all federal, state and local requirements pertaining to investigations, recording, and reporting.

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<sup>4</sup> National PTA. (2016). [Early Identification and Interventions for Children with Mental Health Needs](#). Alexandria, VA: National PTA.

- School districts and schools should regularly examine these policies and procedures, and their impact on all groups of students.
- Develop and implement anonymous reporting and response procedures where students, staff, and families can report concerning behaviors or potential threats to promote access to support services.

**Physical Safety**

- Establish a clear and enforceable visitor/guest identification system and provide training for school staff to recognize and report individuals who are not properly identified.
- Examine on a regular basis the use, functionality, and effectiveness of all locally determined physical security measures.
- Evaluate access points to the school and surrounding property including parking lots, open spaces, playgrounds, and playing fields to limit access to non-school personnel during school hours
- Create a policy on the use of school facilities for non-related school activities and clearly communicate that policy to parents, families and the community

Adopted: by the 2018 Board of Directors