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*provided to the:*

**COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR  
United States House of Representatives**

**Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education  
and Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities**

**Joint Hearing: “Strengthening School Safety through Prevention of Bullying”**

Wednesday, July 8, 2009, at 10:00am  
2175 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC

**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Chairwoman McCarthy, Chairman Kildee, Ranking Members Platts and Castle, and distinguished subcommittee members, thank you for dedicating your time and this hearing to the number one school concern of parents nationwide: The safety and security of their children.

My name is Kenneth Trump and I am the President and CEO of National School Safety and Security Services, Incorporated, a Cleveland (Ohio)-based national consulting firm specializing in school safety, security, and school emergency preparedness consulting and training. I have worked with K-12 school officials and their public safety partners in urban, suburban, and rural communities from all 50 states during my full-time 25 years in the school safety profession.

In addition to my consulting experience, my background includes having served over seven years with the Cleveland City School District's Safety and Security Division as a high school and junior high school safety officer, a district-wide field investigator, and as founding supervisor of its nationally-recognized Youth Gang Unit that contributed to a 39% reduction in school gang crimes and violence. I later served three years as director of security for the ninth-largest Ohio school district with 13,000 students, where I also served as assistant director of a federal-funded model anti-gang project for three southwest Cleveland suburbs. My full biographical information is on our web site at [www.schoolsecurity.org/school-safety-experts/trump.html](http://www.schoolsecurity.org/school-safety-experts/trump.html) .

I have authored two books and over 50 professional articles on school security and emergency preparedness issues. My education background includes having earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Services (Criminal Justice concentration) and a Master of Public Administration degree from Cleveland State University; special certification for completing the Advanced Physical Security Training Program at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center; and

extensive specialized training on school safety and emergency planning, terrorism and homeland security, gang prevention and intervention, and related youth safety topics.

I am honored to have this fourth opportunity to present Congressional testimony. In 1999, I testified to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee as a school safety and crisis expert. In 2007, I testified to the House Committee on Education and Labor. I also testified on school emergency preparedness issues in 2007 to the House Committee on Homeland Security.

My national work has included providing expert testimony to the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) Task Force on School and Campus Safety in 2007. In April of 2008, I was invited by the U.S. State Department to provide a briefing to teachers, school officials, and community partners in Israel on school safety, school violence prevention, school security, and school emergency preparedness as coordinated by the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. I was an invited attendee at the White House Conference on School Safety in October of 2006. I also served in 2006-2007 as the volunteer Chair of the Prevention Committee and as an Executive Committee member for Cleveland's Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative, one of six Department of Justice-funded federal and local collaborative model projects to address gangs through enforcement, prevention, and reentry strategies.

School districts and other organizations engage our services to evaluate school emergency preparedness plans, provide professional development training on proactive school security and crisis prevention strategies, develop and facilitate school tabletop exercises, conduct school security assessment evaluations, and consult with school administrators and board members on management plans for school violence prevention and improving school safety. While our work is largely proactive and preventative, we have increasingly found ourselves also called to assist educators and their school communities with security and preparedness issues following high-profile incidents of school violence. In the past several years alone, we have worked in a school district where a student brought an AK-47 to school, fired shots in the halls, and then committed suicide; in a private school where death threats raised student and parental anxiety; in a school district where a student brought a tree saw and machete to school, attacked students in his first period class, and sent multiple children to the hospital with serious injuries; and most recently in a school district experiencing student and parental school safety concerns after a student was murdered in a gang-related community incident.

My testimony provides unique perspectives on school safety. I am not an academician, researcher, psychologist, social worker, law enforcement official, or government agency representative. Instead, I bring a perspective of 25 years of full-time, front-line experience in directly working with public and private schools, their public safety and community partners, students, and parents on K-12 school safety, security, and emergency preparedness issues.

Most importantly, I am a father. Like most parents, I want my children to achieve academically at school. But even more importantly, I want them to be safe from harm and well protected in the hands of school leaders who have the resources and skills for creating and sustaining schools that are emotionally and physically safe, secure, and well prepared for preventing and managing emergencies. As members of Congress, I encourage you and your colleagues to make all of your school safety policy and funding decisions not only with the wisdom of skilled legislators, but also with the heart and concern of a caring and concerned parent.

## **THE STATE OF SCHOOL SAFETY 10 YEARS POST-COLUMBINE**

This past April 20, 2009, marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1999 attack at Columbine High School in Colorado. Our experience and analysis shows a mixed bag of lessons learned and implemented, with many glaring gaps and a lot of work remaining on school safety issues.

The good news is that progress made on school safety in the past decade has included improved school climates, better threat assessment protocols, enhanced physical security measures, and a heightened awareness of the importance of school safety. Schools have also created crisis plans and teams, added new drills, and enhanced relationships with first responders. In general, there is a greater awareness and recognition of school safety threats today than there was pre-Columbine, and school administrators deal more with safety issues now than in decades past.

The bad news is that while many schools have invested in security technology, they have been investing less time and effort in their people. Time and training for school safety and emergency planning is harder to come by than money in many districts. Limited investment on the people end of school safety has created a significant need to go back to the basic, fundamentals of violence prevention, security, and emergency planning. The first and best line of defense is always a well trained, highly alert school staff and student body.

Every adult has a responsibility for school safety. Too often many key adults, such as school custodians, food service workers, and secretaries, are missing from school safety training and crisis teams. Students and parents are key, but often missing, partners in school safety programs.

School safety officials continue to fight against complacency. Time and distance from high profile incidents breed complacency and denial. Too many people still believe, 'It can't happen here because it has not happened here'."

## **IMPROVE FEDERAL SCHOOL SAFETY POLICY BY STRENGTHENING SCHOOL SAFETY DATA**

### ***Overview***

There are serious gaps in federal data on school crime and violence. Federal data is primarily limited to a mixed collection of a half-dozen or so academic surveys and research studies. The data used by Congress, the Administration, and others to make policy and funding decisions lacks adequate incident-based data on actual crime and violence incidents in schools, and thereby increases the risks of flawed federal school safety policy and funding decisions.

The over-reliance on surveys with little-to-no data on actual school-based crimes results in a very limited, skewed, and understated picture of crime and violence in our nation's schools. Federal school safety data grossly underestimates the extent of school crime and violence, while public and media perception tends to overstate the problem. Reality exists somewhere in between these two parameters, but no one, especially at the federal level, can identify where in real numbers.

Congress can improve federal school safety data by incorporating incident-based data into federal school safety data collection. The Department of Education should continue to collect the currently reported perception and self-report academic surveys. The addition of incident-based data would provide a more accurate and comprehensive data picture upon which our elected officials can rely for making improved federal school safety policy and funding decisions.

### ***Recent Incidents Illustrate the Need for a Renewed Focus on K-12 School Safety***

Recent incidents of violence at school, as well as to and from school, have plagued a number of larger, urban school districts and their school-communities. School districts in Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia have repeatedly been in the news over the past three years for high-profile gang violence, school fights, violence against students and staff, weapons incidents, student shootings, and/or student deaths to and from school. These incidents continue, despite outrage and outreach by school and city officials.

In my monitoring of news stories on school safety incidents around the nation, in talking with school board members and administrators from across the nation at our workshops, and in email inquiries we receive, we are seeing a particular uptick in gang-related issues affecting schools and school communities in many parts of the country. This particularly appears to be the case in large urban school districts and in urban/suburban school communities.

School violence is, however, by no means limited to large school districts and urban areas. Recent higher-profile incidents illustrate that school-associated violence and safety concerns strike all communities: Urban, suburban, and rural. For example, just in the past three months:

- Detroit, Michigan: June 30, 2009 - Seven teens, the majority summer school students, were struck by gunfire after school at a bus-stop near a Detroit high school. Two weeks prior a 16-year-old female student was reportedly shot in the chest after leaving another city school in an unrelated incident;
- Parkersburg, Iowa: June 24, 2009 - A nationally-recognized, award-winning high school football coach was shot and killed, allegedly by a 24-year-old former student, while supervising a weightlifting activity at the school;
- Blauvelt, New York: June 9, 2009 - The school district's superintendent tackled and disarmed an irate 37-year-old father with a gun who barged into the district's middle school, angry over information the district put out about swine flu;
- Cleveland Heights, Ohio: June 1, 2009 – 11 students were arrested for aggravated rioting after a larger altercation that began during lunch hour and spilled out in the street;
- Thibodaux, Louisiana: May 18, 2009 – An armed 15-year-old male middle school student stormed into a classroom, fired a shot over a teacher's head, and then shot himself in the head in a school bathroom. He later died. Police report he had plans to kill four students and then himself;
- Sheboygan, Wisconsin: May 1, 2009 – A 17-year-old male high school senior received a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the abdomen while in the school's parking lot about 40 minutes after school dismissal. Over 100 students still inside the school went into lockdown;
- Waterloo, Iowa: April 29, 2009 – One day after the stabbing death of a high school student in a fight involving large groups at a community park, 400 to 500 parents went to

a district high school to remove their children from school following rumors and fears of gang retaliation violence;

- Silver Spring, Maryland: April 28, 2009 – Police arrested two high school juniors for allegedly setting three fires at their Montgomery County High School. Police also charged the males for conspiracy to commit murder after they discovered an alleged plot to kill their principal with a nail-filled bomb and set off a major explosion inside the school; and
- Rockford, Illinois: April 20, 2009 – A 14-year-old male high school student was shot in the leg across the street from the school while walking to school. Police subsequently arrested an 18-year-old suspect. Three area schools went into lockdown as a result of the shooting and parents.

These are only a sample of incidents. The list goes on and on. See our web page on School-associated Violent Deaths at [www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school\\_violence.html](http://www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school_violence.html) and our most recent sample listing of school year incidents (2008-2009 school year) at [www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school\\_violence08-09.html](http://www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school_violence08-09.html) .

***Federal School Crime and Violence Data is Limited Primarily to Surveys, Not Incident-based Data; Major Flaws Exist with Federal School Safety Data***

The sad reality is that most of the aforementioned incidents would never be reflected in federal data collected on school safety as the bulk of federal school safety data comes from academic type **survey-based** data and not **incident**-based data. Yet Congress and the Administration rely heavily upon the survey-based data presented by the U.S. Department of Education and other agencies to make critical school safety policy and funding decisions.

The truth is that there is no comprehensive, mandatory federal school crime reporting and tracking of actual school crime **incidents** for K-12 schools. Federal school crime and violence data consists primarily of a hodgepodge collection of over a half-dozen academic **surveys** and research studies. This data is often mistakenly perceived by policymakers, the media, and others as a reflection of the number of actual crime and violence incidents, and as credible trend indicators of school crime and violence occurring in our schools.

The primary source of federal school crime and violence data is the annual, “Indicators of School Crime and Safety,” report. The latest published report entitled, “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2008,” carries a cover date of April 2009 and was released on the web about two and one-half months ago on April 21, 2009.

The Executive Summary of this April 2009 report describes, in part, the sources and dates of the data as follows: “This report is the eleventh in a series of annual publications produced jointly by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), in the U.S. Department of Education, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in the U.S. Department of Justice. This report presents the most recent data available on school crime and student safety. The indicators in this report are based on information drawn from a variety of data sources, including national surveys of students, teachers, and principals. Sources include results from a study of violent deaths in schools, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the National Crime Victimization Survey

and School Crime Supplement to the survey, sponsored by the BJS and NCES, respectively; the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and the Schools and Staffing Survey and School Survey on Crime and Safety, both sponsored by NCES. The most recent data collection for each indicator varied by survey, from 2003–04 to 2007. Each data source has an independent sample design, data collection method, and questionnaire design or is the result of a universe data collection. All comparisons described in this report are statistically significant at the .05 level. In 2005 and 2007, the final response rate for students ages 12–18 for the School Crime Supplement (60 percent),<sup>1</sup> fell below NCES statistical standards; therefore, interpret the 2005 and 2007 data from *Indicators 3, 8, 10, 11, 17, 18, and 21*, with caution. Additional information about methodology and the datasets analyzed in this report may be found in appendix A.” For this summary and links to the report, see <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/crimeindicators2008/index.asp>

Page 4 of this report identifies eight surveys used in this report: National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS); The School-Associated Violent Deaths Surveillance Study; School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey; School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS); Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS); Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR); Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System Fatal; and Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS).

The authors state that, “This report presents the most recent data available on school crime and student safety.” The report also indicates that, “The most recent data collection for each indicator varied by survey, from 2003–04 to 2007.” While several surveys identify 2007 as their latest survey year, a number of last survey dates range in the 2003-2004 to 2005-2006 school year time period. This means data provided in the “2008” Indicators report (published in April of 2009) can be anywhere from two to six years behind the actual time the report is provided to legislators and the public. Even Table 1.2 on school-associated violent deaths (page 75) footnotes that the 2006-07 school death, “Data are preliminary and subject to change.”

The authors of the report are commended for their valiant effort to provide legislators, educators, and others a single point document on school crime and violence statistics. Readers who pay attention to the footnotes and disclaimers, however, will unfortunately find it difficult to easily make sense of the numbers, make meaningful comparisons, or identify long-term trends. Still, there is some value in continuing these surveys, and I support continuation of the surveys with the suggestion that the authors attempt to create some long-term stability in definitions, data comparisons, and trend analysis.

[As a side note, it is more important for local education agencies to conduct annual, ongoing surveys of students, staff, parents, safety officials, and others in their local school communities. These surveys should be developed to gauge key issues related to school safety threats and strategies, to identify local trends, and to develop prevention strategies. Federal funding for use in creating local and regional surveys on school safety and associated issues is encouraged.]

With respect to the federal Indicators report, the most important points in this annual document rest in the footnotes, appendices, and narratives describing the limitations of the data. The report is peppered with disclaimers and limitations of the data therein, including warnings such as:

“The report is not intended to be an exhaustive compilation of school crime and safety information...;”

“The dashed horizontal line indicates a break in trend due to a redesign of the methods used to measure victimization in the 2006 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Due to this redesign, please use caution when comparing 2006 estimates with estimates of earlier years;”

“Several indicators in this report are based on self-reported survey data. Readers should note that limitations inherent to self-reported data may affect estimates...These and other factors may affect the precision of the estimates based on these surveys.”

“Data trends are discussed in this report when possible. Where trends are not discussed, either the data are not available in earlier surveys or the wording of the survey question changed from year to year, eliminating the ability to discuss any trend;” and

“The combination of multiple, independent sources of data provides a broad perspective on school crime and safety that could not be achieved through any single source of information. However, readers should be cautious when comparing data from different sources. While every effort has been made to keep key definitions consistent across indicators, differences in samples procedures, populations, time periods, and question phrasing can all affect the comparability of results...In addition, different indicators contain various approaches to the analysis of school crime data and, therefore, will show different perspectives on school crime.”

These are only a sample of disclaimers. Appendix A to the document contains the data and report disclaimers. See more online at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/crimeindicators2008/pdf/2009022\\_app\\_a.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/crimeindicators2008/pdf/2009022_app_a.pdf)

Unfortunately, policymakers, educators, the media, and others looking at school crime and violence data and trends often fail to read the “small print” in the footnotes and appendices. Instead, due to the busy nature of their work, they typically take at face value quick facts or trends gleaned in a snippet from the report. The end product is policy and funding decisions made based upon extremely limited data and claimed trends, often with policy emphasis on issues that may not warrant such attention, and funding cuts to school safety programs where sustained or expanded funding may actually be what is needed on the front lines in our schools.

Many in Congress are also likely unaware that data from the Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) passed by Congress many years ago is limited due to loopholes in reporting. The GFSA requires local education agencies to report to their state education agencies the number of students expelled for gun offenses on campuses. The key words are “students” and “expelled.”

Schools do not have to report non-students (adults, trespassers, parents, etc.) arrested on campuses with firearms because they are not students. Reporting would also not be required for students who are already expelled due to other offenses but return to campus with a firearm. There are also questions as to whether special education students apprehended with firearms are all being reported under GFSA since their disabilities may technically not result in an “expulsion” from school, but instead may result in modified educational placements and services at home or elsewhere which do not technically constitute an “expulsion” per se.

This means that even the federal data from GFSA reports understate the actual number of cases of firearms cases occurring on our nation's K-12 school campuses.

School crimes are also underreported to police, states, and local school communities. It is commonly accepted by most school safety professionals that school officials have historically underreported to local police crimes which occur on campus. While this sometimes has occurred because school officials honestly fail to distinguish crimes from violations of school rules, it also has occurred far too often because school officials are concerned about protecting the image of their schools and believe they will draw adverse media and public attention to their school by reporting incidents to the police.

I conducted four annual surveys of over 700 school-based police officers per year, for each year from 2001 through 2004. In these four surveys, I found 84% to 89% of school-based officers indicating it is their professional belief that crimes occurring in schools have gone unreported to law enforcement. See [www.schoolsecurity.org/resources/nasro\\_survey\\_2004.html](http://www.schoolsecurity.org/resources/nasro_survey_2004.html)

We also know that school discipline and crime data is often inaccurately reported to state education agencies which require local districts to file such reports annually. While many local districts are quick to claim innocent misunderstandings of report definitions and problems with the reporting mechanisms, it is fair to believe that some intentional underreporting is occurring as well. For a number of investigative news stories and more background on school crime underreporting, see our web page at [www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school\\_crime\\_reporting.html](http://www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school_crime_reporting.html)

I have no desire to be alarmist or to overstate the extent of school crime and violence in our nation's schools. However, it is clear school crime is underreported in general, and federal statistics grossly understate the extent of crime and violence on our nation's campuses. Policymakers relying upon such data are at high risk of making faulty school safety policy and funding decisions.

### ***Congress Can Strengthen School Safety by Improving Federal School Safety Data***

Improved federal school safety data would improve federal school safety policy and funding decisions. We cannot accurately identify school crime trends, and in turn develop meaningful prevention and intervention programs, without more accurate data.

Developing accurate data has been a fundamental focus of establishing academic performance standards in No Child Left Behind and other educational discussions, and the same importance should also apply to school safety data.

If we do not have accurate and timely federal data on high-profile violent crimes in schools such as school-associated violent deaths, robberies, sexual assaults, weapons incidents (firearms, bladed weapons, etc.), how will we ever expect to begin collecting more accurate data to address lower-level aggression and violence in schools such as bullying, verbal threats, fighting, etc.?

Last session, H.R. 354, the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (The "SAVE" Act), was introduced by The Honorable Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy. I strongly encourage the Committee members and your colleagues to approve this type of act in the future. The SAVE Act called for meaningful and practical steps to improve accountability, accuracy, and transparency to our nation's parents and educators in the reporting of school crimes and violence.

It also called for much better guidance on reporting school crimes, tightening of loopholes in the Gun Free Schools Act reporting, and the use of incident-based data (instead of just perception and opinion-based data from surveys) in determining safe climates for academic achievement.

The SAVE Act would close the loopholes in the Gun Free Schools Act by including reporting requirements for students who are already expelled, removed or suspended from school, as well as non-students who may bring a firearm on campus or on a school bus. Current law only requires reporting on students who have been expelled. The Act also required certification that data is accurate and reliable, an important component for improving accountability of those who report school crime data who may otherwise be tempted to underreport.

The SAVE Act required states to use already available data from the FBI's National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) in determining what is now known as "persistently dangerous schools", a label that The SAVE Act would modify to "safe climate for academic achievement" options to remove the stigma of "persistently dangerous" which encourages underreporting by local schools. The introduction of NIBRS data into school safety policy and funding decisions would provide the first meaningful effort to shift the conversation on school safety from one based upon perception and opinion surveys, to incident-based data on real crimes that actually occur at our nation's schools. Congress, state legislators, and local educators could have a data source on school crime based upon real incidents occurring in our schools, rather than solely relying on the perceptions and opinions of a limited population tapped for academic surveys.

The SAVE Act required no new bureaucracies or overwhelming budgetary expenditures to collect school incident data. It simply called for breaking out existing data in a manner to identify crimes occurring at K-12 schools. It reflects no invasion of privacy, and focused on incident-based data, not individual-based data (a record of the number of incidents that occur).

## **COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL SAFETY POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND FUNDING**

### ***Framing a Comprehensive Approach to School Safety***

There is no single cause of school violence, nor is there any single solution. Too often, genuinely concerned individuals ranging from parents to legislators blame one particular factor for causing school violence (gangs, bullying, deficient home lives, etc.) and one particular solution (more metal detectors and security equipment, more anti-bullying programs, more prevention, etc.). High-profile incidents in the media often lead to "legislation by anecdote" and, corresponding policy and appropriation decisions of a single-issue and single-program focus.

Today's school administrators must be prepared to deal with a broad continuum of school safety threats. These threats to safe schools include bullying, verbal and physical aggression, and fighting on one end of the continuum, to weather and natural disasters, non-student intruders on campus, irate parent violence, spillover of community-originating violence, to-and-from school attacks on students, gang violence, stabbing incidents, school shootings, and terrorist threats to schools on the other extreme. Just as these threats span a wide, broad continuum, so must the scope and depth of school safety prevention, intervention, security, and emergency preparedness strategies to prevent and manage these threats.

Federal school safety policy, programs, and funding, just like that at the state and local education level, must therefore be based upon an approach and framework which is **comprehensive and**

**balanced.** Too often, school safety advocates call for “more prevention” **OR** “better security.” The real answer should be “more prevention” **AND** “better security.” Effective approaches to school safety include prevention, security, and preparedness measures, not a curriculum-only or security-only approach. An overemphasis and narrow focus on bullying or gangs alone is no more effective than an overemphasis on security equipment or more police in schools alone.

Approaches to school safety must also be comprehensive in looking at where threats to student and staff safety may arise. Crime and violence impact students and the entire school-community not only within the school campus boundaries, but also to-and-from school, on school buses, and at school-sponsored events. Too often we have seen education officials quick to point out which side of the school property line a student shooting occurred (across the street or a block away instead of inside the campus property line), yet shootings at the bus stop, incidents to-and-from school, athletic event violence, etc. has a profound disruptive impact on school operations due to student, parent, and staff anxiety and fear from the incident.

While our discussions herein focus on K-12 settings, we must also recognize that a growing number of pre-school, Head Start, and other early childhood programs face safety threats. Non-custodial parent issues, stranger danger, and other threats to our youngest of children warrant consideration in school safety prevention, security, and preparedness planning. Many early childhood programs operate within elementary and secondary school buildings where regular classes are occurring, in separate K-12 school district stand alone buildings, and in community-based sites such as former businesses and store-fronts with challenging physical facilities, poor physical security measures, and no emergency preparedness training or plans.

We cannot have rollercoaster school safety policy and funding at any level of government. Throwing money at school safety after a high-profile incident is no wiser than is cutting school safety funding when there is not a tragedy in the headlines. School safety policy, programming, and funding must be ongoing, sustained, and reasonably funded for the long haul.

### ***Bullying, Discipline, and School Climate***

Bullying is a serious issue worthy of reasonable attention, awareness, and action. Bullying is one of many factors which must be taken into consideration in developing safe schools prevention, intervention, and enforcement plans. Bully-prevention efforts and initiatives are one of many strategies that should be included in a comprehensive school safety program.

Anti-bullying strategies should include prevention and intervention programs, and also adult supervision and security measures. Dr. Ronald Pitner, Ph.D., assistant professor of social work at Washington University in St. Louis, concluded in a bullying study that schools must focus on the physical context of the school. Dr. Pitner noted that bullying and school violence in general typically occur in predictable locations within schools, specifically unmonitored areas such as hallways, restrooms, stairwells, and playgrounds. He found schools can cut down on violence if they identify specific "hotspots" within schools where students feel violence is likely to occur.

"Although this approach will not completely eliminate bullying, research has shown that it would at least cut down on the areas where violence is likely to occur," he was attributed as saying. His recommendation: "This focus underscores the importance of viewing school bullying as both an individual- and organizational-level phenomenon."

There is also a relationship between anti-bullying efforts and school discipline. In a study conducted by psychiatrists at The Menninger Clinic in Houston, nearly half of elementary school teachers admitted to bullying students. Most attributed it to a lack of classroom discipline, according to one news report on the study. While I absolutely do not believe that our teachers are intentionally harming or intimidating students, the reference to classroom discipline warrants recognition as one important contributor in providing emotionally and physically safe schools.

In the past decade, we have heard of “zero tolerance” policies which result in the administration of questionable disciplinary action against students in our schools. No one can dispute that there have been a number of anecdotal cases of questionable discipline where students have been given extreme disciplinary consequences (suspensions, expulsions, criminal prosecution referrals, etc.) for what appear to be relatively minor offenses. The vast majority of school principals, assistant principals, deans, and related administrators I have met in my career strive for firm, fair, and consistent discipline applied with good common sense.

It is impossible to legislate common sense. We must also be careful not to foster environments where educators fear administering reasonable discipline out of pressure to keep their disciplinary statistics low and their image on the high. Therefore, we must insure that schools have well designed and clearly published due process mechanisms for students and parents to engage to challenge questionable disciplinary action. Effective school due process/appeals measures, along with our courts of law, will be the most logical forum for questionable discipline to be challenged.

Legislative bodies can, however, help improve school discipline and prevent extreme disciplinary actions by supporting professional development training for school administrators on school discipline, student behavior management, violence prevention, proactive school security, and crisis preparedness issues. There is substantial turnover in school principals, assistant principals, and deans today due to a wave of career school administrators who are retiring out. New school administrators cannot simply be handed the building keys, a two-way radio, and a student handbook, and told, “Go for it.” They need professional development training, coaching, and support to be the most effective and fair administrators possible.

“Bullying” often refers to verbal, physical, or other acts committed by a student to harass, intimidate, or cause harm to another student. The behaviors attributed to bullying include verbal threats, menacing, harassment, intimidation, assaults, extortion, disruption of the school environment, and associated disorderly conduct. In defining bullying, the focus should be on specific inappropriate *behaviors* rather than a generic, undefined label of bullying.

The vast majority, if not all, schools in the nation have disciplinary policies to address behaviors such as making verbal threats, harassment, assaults, intimidation, extortion, disruptive behavior, etc. School policies, parent/student handbooks, and related student conduct codes typically outline such inappropriate behaviors and corresponding disciplinary consequences.

Schools nationwide have also implemented school climate, prevention and intervention programs, and other school improvement strategies to prevent and manage bullying behaviors and improve overall school climate, especially post-Columbine. In many school districts, superintendents and principals are required to submit school climate, school safety, and school improvement plans each year which are included in their annual performance reviews. Anti-

bullying and school climate strategies are emphasized in the vast majority of schools we work in each school year.

The aforementioned studies, along with my 25 years of experience in school safety, reinforce that having firm, fair, and consistent discipline enforcement in our schools reduces the likelihood of crime and violence, including bullying. School climate and improvement plans should also include anti-bullying strategies. Discipline and school climate strategies, combined with balanced and reasonable security measures targeting "hot spots" where bullying occurs, can create a safer and more secure climate. This can in turn reduce the likelihood of bullying, disciplinary violations, violence, and school crime.

We must also invest in providing better physical and mental health support to our students. Two recently released books, one by Dr. Peter Langman, a Pennsylvania child psychologist, and another widely cited book by journalist Dave Cullen, emphasize that mental health disorders were largely attributable to the Columbine shooters and other school violence perpetrators. One lesson learned from many of the school shootings and other acts of school violence is that the perpetrators often have undiagnosed and/or untreated mental health issues.

Children also cannot be expected to focus on academics if they have unaddressed physical health issues. Thus, the importance of our school counselors, psychologists, and nurses must be reflected in school support service staffing. Their services are directly related to providing safe schools. Too often these professional support personnel are grossly understaffed and spread so thinly across school districts that it is nearly impossible to provide the scope and depth of services needed to reasonably serve students.

### ***Elements of a Comprehensive School Safety Program***

Elements of a comprehensive and balanced school safety program include:

- School climate strategies stressing order and structure, respect, trust, diversity, school ownership, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and related characteristics
- Incident-based data collection and analysis of discipline, crime, and violence incidents, supplemented by student, staff, and school-community survey-based data
- Firm, fair, and consistent discipline
- Adult supervision, adult visibility, and positive adult relationships with students
- Effective prevention and intervention programs
- Mental and physical health support services
- Strong academic programs with diverse extracurricular activities
- Student-led school safety involvement and safety training
- Parental and community involvement and networking, and parent training
- Professional development training for teachers, administrators, and school support staff (secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, food service staff, security and police staff, etc.)
- Proactive security measures (physical security measures, security technology, security/police staffing, crime prevention policies and procedures, awareness training, etc.)
- Emergency / crisis preparedness planning, exercising, and training
- Strong partnerships with police, fire, emergency medical services, emergency management agencies, mental health providers, public health agencies, local and regional public officials, and other key community-based organizations.

Security technology can be a helpful component of a comprehensive school safety program. However, any security equipment must be a supplement to, but not a substitute for, a more

comprehensive school safety approach. The first and best line of defense in school safety will always be a well-trained, highly-alert staff and student body.

Federal school safety policies, programming, and funding must reflect a framework which is comprehensive and balanced. An overemphasis on any single approach will detract from productive, sustained, and meaningful long-term school safety policy.

### **HOW CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION CAN IMPROVE SCHOOL SAFETY**

This Congress and Administration have a unique opportunity to stimulate a renewed priority and redefined approach to federal school safety, security, and emergency preparedness policy, programming, and funding.

Before discussing what schools need, it worth noting what schools do NOT need related to school safety. School and public safety officials do NOT need more studies, manuals, guides, templates, web sites, and regurgitation of best practices. They also do NOT need more centers, institutes, or federal contracted technical assistance providers.

Best practices in school safety, security, and emergency preparedness are well documented. Schools need the limited federal resources for school safety to be channeled directly to local education agencies to help them implement these best practices. While schools cannot look at school safety as a grant-funded luxury and should incorporate prevention, security, and preparedness measures into their operating budgets in the long term, federal and state grants provide the seed money to stimulate school safety programs which otherwise may not be developed in a timely manner in many school districts.

Congress and the Administration can further strengthen school safety, security, and emergency preparedness by:

1. Providing school administrators with specific guidance from the U.S. Department of Education on how federal stimulus funds may be used for school safety, security, and emergency preparedness needs. Discussions and documents on the education stimulus funds to date have focused on academic achievement and school operations.
2. Improving federal school safety data by incorporating more incident-based data into federal school safety data collection and by filling gaps and loopholes as described above in this testimony (see The SAVE Act and related recommendations). Improved federal school safety data will lead to improved federal school safety policy and funding.
3. During the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB):
  - a. Address the unintended consequences of the “persistently dangerous schools” component of the original version of NCLB, which has encouraged the non-reporting of school crimes. “Persistently dangerous” has promoted crime underreporting, and puts forth a punitive label with no resources for improving school safety in those schools receiving this label.
  - b. Incorporate strong and supportive school safety, security, and emergency preparedness components into the reauthorized NCLB. Aside from the

“persistently dangerous school” component, the original NCLB contained nothing significant about safe schools.

A reauthorized NCLB should include reasonable requirements and resources for comprehensive school safety, security, and emergency preparedness programs. School safety is directly related to academic achievement. Students cannot learn and teachers cannot teach at their maximum capacities if their thoughts and environments are consumed with concerns about safety. A strong school safety component in a reauthorized NCLB would benefit the whole child and would in turn strengthen opportunities for improved academic achievement.

4. Ensure federal school safety policies, programming, and funding reflect a comprehensive and balanced framework designed around a continuum of threats to school safety and a corresponding continuum of comprehensive school safety strategies.
  - a. Avoid single-cause, single-strategy legislation.
  - b. Create a permanent interagency working group of representatives from the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, and Homeland Security to establish a formal structure for communication, planning, policy, and funding decisions combining their respective expertise areas and disciplines related to school safety, security, and emergency preparedness. A periodic conversation or meeting, or a joint publication from these agencies is not enough. While each agency may in itself have a number of good school safety initiatives, coordination across agencies can lead to a more coordinated, comprehensive, and balanced federal approach to school safety. A permanent interagency working group, supported by state, local, and front-line experts in K-12 school safety, security, and emergency preparedness, can improve federal policy, program, and funding decisions on school safety and preparedness issues.
  - c. Encourage coordination, collaboration, and cooperation on school safety issues by the Congressional Committee members and staff overseeing Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and Justice legislation and oversight.
  - d. Increase requirements for federal school safety grant recipients to form partnerships, protocols, training, and joint planning among schools, first responders, mental health, public health, and other community partner agencies.
  - e. Require education agency representation on federal, state, and local Homeland Security and emergency management advisory and coordinating committees. Schools and first responders must plan, prepare, and practice together.
5. Provide improved support for existing federal school safety programs which work and, modify or replace programs deemed ineffective with new programs. When we identify ineffective programs, it is in the best interest of our students to replace them as soon as possible with programs that do work. We have a responsibility to prioritize school safety funding and ensure that our students benefit from effective programs.

- a. Two federal programs with very comprehensive approaches to school safety are the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) program (formerly Emergency Response and Crisis Management, ERCM), and the Safe Schools/Healthy Students program. The Department of Education is involved in funding of these programs. These programs encourage prevention, security, and preparedness strategies, long-term sustainability plans, and multi-agency collaboration on school safety, in their awarded grants. They have been well received by local school district recipients who have made meaningful progress under their grant awards. Funds for both programs declined over the past decade and should be considered for enhanced Congressional appropriations.
- b. The Secure Our Schools (SOS) grant under the Department of Justice has proven to be helpful to recipient school districts to address school security and emergency preparedness equipment and related needs. Congress should continue to support this program.
- c. Other helpful federal school safety funded initiatives have included School Resource Officer staffing and training programs (Justice); school transportation security (Homeland Security); and other drug and violence prevention programs (Education and, Health and Human Services) not referenced above.
- d. While Department of Education school safety programs funded under the “National Programs” component provide useful direct resources to local school district recipients, they can also unintentionally limit the access to federal school safety funds by smaller, rural and suburban school districts that do not have full-time professional grant writers or the resources and/or ability to contract professional grant writing services for pursuing national program competitive grants. Larger, urban school districts, and those more affluent school districts with professional grant writing resources, often have a skewed advantage over smaller, rural and suburban schools. Methods for leveling the playing field should be explored if Congress, the Administration, and the Department of Education continue to add competitive national programs over other types of funding.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Parents will forgive school and other public officials if school test scores go down. Parents are much less forgiving if something happens to the safety of their children which could have been prevented or better managed if it does occur. School safety is perhaps the only education priority over academic achievement in the eyes of parents, who understand that children must first be safe in order to learn.

Congress and the Administration have a wonderful opportunity to reinvigorate and redefine federal school safety, security, and emergency preparedness data, policy, and programming. Congress and the Administration are well positioned to reverse a decade-long trend of reduced funding for school safety programs. I encourage you to act swiftly on school safety.

I thank all of you for the honor of your invitation to present at this joint hearing today. I appreciate your leadership in holding this hearing, and would especially like to recognize

Chairwoman McCarthy for her extraordinary leadership efforts and ongoing genuine commitment to school safety issues.

I stand available to answer any questions now or in writing subsequent to this hearing.

Respectfully,  
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