

NASB News Update--April 2018

News from the Association, Nevada, and Across the Nation



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**Supporting Success for All Students
through Local School Board Leadership**



A Message from NASB's President



In the February issue of this newsletter, I described NASB's current focus on school safety in all of its forms. This focus has a special meaning for me. During my first term on the Carson City Board, two seniors murdered 12 students and one teacher, injuring almost a dozen others, at Columbine High School. That incident shattered the world of school safety as we knew it. Things would never be the same. According to one source, as many as seventeen similar incidents have occurred thus far in 2018.

My heart grieves for the students and families impacted by this series of violence and tragedy. My prayers and thoughts continually go out to the schools and communities where these senseless acts have occurred and where it is the living who must respond—often with limited resources—to innumerable adjustments in the aftermath.

I am sure that you feel the same way...almost overcome with grief and feelings of incomplete knowledge in the face of what is so completely destructive to our sense of safety at school and unity in our communities.

I applaud many of the efforts of the students from Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School and elsewhere

across America. Students from Nevada schools have also been involved in walkouts and marches. As school trustees, we find it a positive sign that Governor Sandoval has met with our superintendents to discuss how to make our schools safer, and that he has established a School Safety Task Force. He has stated that he will make school safety a priority in the next budget. NASB is appreciative of the Governor's position on this issue and looks forward to working with him in these endeavors.

I have been impressed with the students from Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School. Although as school trustees we may not agree with all of their positions, it is difficult to deny their communication skills and passion about issues related to school safety. Their public education and co-curricular activities have prepared them to collaborate with and motivate those around them to actually take a stand against current and future school violence.

Marjorie Stoneman Douglas herself was an American journalist, author, women's suffrage advocate and conservationist known for her staunch defense of the Everglades against efforts to drain it and reclaim the land for development. Her most influential work was the book *The Everglades: River of Glass* (1947) which redefined the popular conception of the Everglades as a treasured river instead of a worthless swamp. Its impact has been compared to that of Rachel Carson's influential book *Silent Spring* (1962).

Douglas lived to 108, working until nearly the end of her life for Everglades restoration. One obituary stated that, "In the history of the American environmental movement, there have been few more remarkable figures than Marjorie Stoneman Douglas."

Against that historical backdrop, it seems fitting to me that these Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School students who have survived tragedy are now mobilizing themselves and other students around the country. Just as Marjorie Stoneham Douglas called out to her fellow citizens to save the Florida environment for their children and grandchildren, so are these students—and those who have mobilized with them—calling out to us to save our schools and to provide environments that are safe for learning and achievement.

Although we may hope we have done enough, there is every chance that we have not. That's why POOL/PACT and NASB are providing assistance for school trustees to become more proactive and more effectively prepared for the unthinkable, no matter its form. We have an outstanding program prepared for the School Safety Workshop.

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Our students depend on us to keep them safe at school. I look forward to welcoming those of you who have registered for the School Safety Workshop to Carson City on April 20 at The Plaza Event Center. On this the nineteenth anniversary of Columbine, let us reinvigorate our efforts to ensure that each of our students at each of our schools in Nevada is safe and able to learn and achieve.

Sincerely,
**Stacie
Wilke-
McCulloch**
NASB President



How Can We Stop School Violence?

School shootings are every parent's worst nightmare. Here is what to know about school safety and how you can help ensure your school provides a safe environment.

By Sarah-Jane Lorenzo



The horrific violence at a high school in Parkland, FL was, sadly, the eleventh school shooting of 2018. In the days that followed, there were three more

school shootings in Louisiana, Ohio, and Florida. [In addition, one more shooting at Great Mills High School in Maryland.] These heartbreaking incidents are the latest in what feels like a string of violent events taking place on school campuses, following campus shootings around the country, including in Kentucky, California, Maryland, and Texas.

According to the nonprofit Gun Violence Archive, which defines a school shooting as an incident that occurs on a school campus during school or extracurricular hours and results in a death or injury from gunfire, prior to the 14 school shootings thus far in 2018, there were 75 school shootings in 2017, 80 in 2016, and 55 in 2015.

Parents, schools, and communities want to do everything they can to ensure that students are safe, and parents can play a strong role in promoting schools' use of security measures and violence-prevention strategies.

To prepare to speak with children of any age in the wake of a school shooting or any violent act, parents can access the American Psychological Association's guidelines on communicating with and supporting children, the *New York Times*' list of resources for parents and teachers, Scholastic's guide for teachers and parents, and the article *Talking to Kids about Tragedy*.

Schools are the safest places for children

After a school shooting, it's understandable if you or your child feel that schools are unsafe. However, statistically, children are much safer in school than they are beyond school walls. "Children are far more likely to be shot in a residence, store, street, parking lot, shopping center, or a restaurant than a school," says Dewey Cornell, professor of education at the University of Virginia and director of the Virginia Youth Violence Project. "We cannot let the painful feelings of a tragedy distort our perception of schools."

Cornell notes that violent threats to children's safety are a nationwide issue. "National Vital Statistics show that we have more than 300 shootings every day in the U.S. where someone is killed or wounded," Cornell says. "Far less than 1 percent of shootings occur in schools. We have a gun violence problem, not a school violence problem."

Every year the federal government issues what it calls a snapshot of school violence. That report, called *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, compiles data from several government agencies including the FBI, the Center for Disease Control,

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and the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The report looks at victimization, bullying, student perceptions of school safety, and other topics relevant to school climates and security.



The latest school crime and safety report, released in 2017, uses data collected through 2016. The report indicates that:

- The percentage of students who reported being afraid of attack or harm at school fell from 12 percent in 1995 to 3 percent in 2015 (the most recent year for which data is available).
- The percentage of students in grades 9 through 12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property fell from 12 percent in 1993 to 4 percent in 2015.
- Students are more likely to be victims of violence outside of school than inside.
- As of 2015, school-related violence had not increased over the past two decades. However, as school shootings and other acts of violence continue to occur, there is still much work to be done to improve school safety.

What schools are doing to protect students

In 2012, schools responded to the deadly elementary school shooting in Newtown, CT with an emphasis on school security. Schools have also focused on preparedness in case of a shooting or other violent event. At last count in 2016, 95 percent of schools reported that they drill students on lockdown procedures, and 92 percent reported practicing evacuation procedures. Forty-two percent of all public schools (and 68 percent of public high schools) also employ school resource officers, who are sworn law enforcement officers trained to work in schools.

However, experts say that emphasizing school security is not enough. Cornell calls a singular focus on building security shortsighted. "We should place more emphasis on preventing shootings rather than preparing for them," he says. "Prevention must start before a gunman shows up at school."

Elizabeth Englander, director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center and professor of psychology at Bridgewater State University, agrees. "During school shootings, even when we're able to keep children from being harmed physically, the psychological harm is enormous," she says. "Once violence happens, the damage is done."

The latest trends in school violence prevention

Both Cornell and Englander recommend that schools and communities pursue programs focused on students' mental wellness. Innovative approaches across the country include Virginia's threat assessment program, which was mandated statewide in 2013 to proactively resolve student threats before violent acts occur. Threat assessment programs aim to keep schools safe while addressing underlying issues and helping troubled students. In Utah, a state-wide crisis tipline that's accessible through an app provides students with access to crisis counselors and a confidential means of reporting bullying, violence, and threats. Across the country, educational experts are encouraging schools to teach social and emotional skills and provide access to in-school counseling and support.

Englander says that while many schools do a good job of prevention, their efforts are bound by limited resources. "We need to sink more money into preventing violence in schools, by staffing schools adequately with mental health support staff and by offering training to all educators in violence prevention and social-emotional learning," she says.

Stan Adamson, a former mental health counselor and anger management specialist at The Door, a Manhattan youth development agency, says that a multipronged approach to violence prevention is best. "There should be no tolerance for serious infractions, but there should be a range of interventions available for behavior problems. A young person needs to learn how to use a social-skills response to a difficult situation rather than an aggressive response. When he experiences some success using these skills to deal with conflict, the student usually becomes motivated to learn more."



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In response to recent shootings, some have called for increased gun presence in schools in order to bolster security. Cornell cautions strongly against that approach. "Arming our teachers is unreasonable, impractical, and dangerous," he says. "Placing guards at every school entrance would cost an extraordinary amount of money that could be better spent improving our prevention services."

A move away from old-fashioned detention and suspension

Many schools have transitioned away from traditional punishments that remove kids from the classroom. In their place, schools are moving toward positive behavioral interventions and more comprehensive methods of student support. Old-fashioned suspensions and expulsions do not address the root cause of the behavior that landed the child in trouble to begin with. Ultimately, those punishments place students further at risk. Counseling and other positive student supports provide a more productive response to misbehavior.

The Every Student Succeeds Act and persistently dangerous schools

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, a school may be labeled as "persistently dangerous" if it meets certain criteria established by each state. If a school is designated as persistently dangerous, the district must inform the school community. Parents may then ask for a transfer to another school.

Few schools are identified as persistently dangerous each year. Of New York's 4,468 public schools, only two were classified as persistently dangerous for the 2017-18 school year. That number has dropped substantially in recent years, down from 47 schools in 2014-15.

What parents can do to improve school safety

Parents can powerfully impact the safety of their children's schools by being advocates for school safety and ensuring that they and their children contribute to the wellness of the school community.

"Parents should advocate that their schools do a better job of helping troubled youth, stopping bullying and harassment, and using threat assessment to evaluate students who threaten violence," Cornell says. "Parents and their children can have a direct role in preventing school violence by reporting troubling behavior when they see it."

"Parents should explain to their kids that there is a difference between snitching and seeking help to prevent violence and that threats of violence should be reported. Schools must build a community of

support and trust in their schools, so that they can identify and help troubled individuals before their difficulties take them down a path toward violence."



Components of safe schools

According to the U.S. Department of Education report *Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide*, a safe school will have three major components:

- A school-wide foundation for the well-being and success of all students.
- A system for identifying students with acute behavior problems.
- A system for providing interventions and therapies for at-risk students.

Early warning signs

Below are some of the warning signs that a student may pose a threat to the school. If you observe any of these indicators in a student, report your concerns to school staff. A potentially violent student usually exhibits more than one of the following behaviors:

- Difficulty eating or sleeping
- Abuse of animals
- Unusual attraction to violent entertainment
- Withdrawal from social interaction
- Feelings of rejection and/or persecution
- Unusually intense or frequent violent content in personal writings or artwork
- A pattern of bullying
- Intolerance or prejudice against certain groups of people
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Membership in a gang
- Threats of serious violence

Imminent warning signs

Imminent warning signs require immediate intervention and may include:

- Physical fighting with others
- Destruction of property

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- Intense anger for minor reasons
- Detailed threats of violence
- Possession of weapons
- Threats of suicide

As with any concern about a student, it is important not to judge or oversimplify. Helping the child, and the entire school community, should be the paramount concern.

[This article originally appeared online as a publication from Great Schools!, February 26, 2018: <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/stopping-school-violence-the-latest-trends/>]

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A 12-Year-Old Protester's Interview Went Viral. Here's His Story

By Kirk Slocum

This week, I walked down Pennsylvania Avenue with my friends as we all cheered and hollered, "End gun violence, no more silence!" I went to the student walkout in Washington on March 14. Students from all over Montgomery County in Maryland and Washington came out to the White House and the Capitol to march for gun control policies and new bans and laws.

At first, my parents said I could not go. I had already gotten caught up in a small school walkout back in February right after the tragic Parkland shooting. It ended badly. A couple of friends and I got lost, and it ended up with me just missing school. I got an "unexcused absence" and got no credit for the work I missed.

The night before the #NationalSchoolWalkout, my dad asked me why I wanted to go to this event. I explained to him that it meant a lot to me to be able to actively be a part of a walkout for gun control and that it would be an amazing and crucial experience to be able to be a part of group activism towards gun control. Also to physically meet the governors and senators that were supporting this movement.

Eventually, I got my parents to change their minds. The next morning my dad and I walked down to our local community center and met up with some of my other friends and the rest of the people from my school who were going to the student walkout.

We, the students, had a goal for our voices to be heard and for change to come with it. We arrived at the White House and started chanting.

As 10 a.m. came around, everyone turned their backs to the White House and stayed in silence for 17 minutes for the 17 people that died in the school shooting. After those 17 minutes, all the students got up and started chanting again. I was constantly screaming chants such as, "Hey Hey, Ho Ho, the NRA (National Rifle Association) has got to go!" and "Shame!" towards the White House, Congress-people, and the NRA.

It was very overwhelming. It was packed, it was cold, but I was so happy to be there. It was so amazing to be able to connect and fight with other people who I didn't even know to accomplish a goal.

As we walked down to the Capitol, a woman from MSNBC came to interview me. My dad and I explained why we were there that day to support gun control. After, I explained that I could not change laws and policy alone, but together the students could.

It was so crucial to have that experience, and it pains me that teachers were preventing students from coming to these rallies because they are so important. The group eventually made its way to the Capitol where we got to meet senators who supported gun control.

"It was so amazing to be able to connect and fight with other people who I didn't even know to accomplish a goal."

When I got home, I went straight to my computer to look at the comments from the post of my interview on Twitter. There were a few hate comments, but that will happen. But there were so many loving

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comments to me and to all students. Those comments warmed my heart and made me a bit teary.

I also got to shake hands with Senator Elizabeth Warren, which was very cool. On the way back home, my friends were telling me how my interview went viral, and it was all over social media and the news.

Although I was in an interview that went viral, and although my friends and I were on national television, the reason I came was to fight for change. Change will come. It was a truly remarkable experience, and I will remember it forever.

And remember, America is a democracy that works for the people. The people want gun control!
[Kirk Slocum is twelve years old and a seventh grade student in Montgomery County, Maryland. This article initially appeared in Education Week Online, March 16, 2018.]

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SCHOOL SAFETY OPERATIONS

