



June 11, 2018

Re: School Safety

Dear Senator/Representative,

The shock and fear generated by the recent succession of school shootings at Parkland, Florida, and Santa Fe, Texas, as well as other violent acts in schools have led our organizations to jointly work together in a concerted effort to support change that can help protect our students. Schools in Pennsylvania are intensifying their efforts and abilities to identify and prevent potential threats, and to respond to all threats swiftly and safely. Preventing injury of our students is not only an ethical responsibility, it is also a legal obligation. Without question, children need to feel safe to be attentive in school and to achieve academically. It is our responsibility to ensure that our schools remain safe and that children may learn without fear of danger. There is no doubt that legislators care deeply about this issue and want to affect policy from the state level to assist schools. Our associations jointly support common sense efforts to help our schools respond to both internal and external threats to the students of the commonwealth.

Protecting our students means that we need to consider external factors, such as people and natural, structural, technological, and other disasters that come from outside of our school community bringing harm to our students, teachers, and administrators. Conversely, it is also necessary for districts to assess and implement solutions to internal threat factors such as school climate, bullying, student violence and other behavioral issues to promote school safety.

PSBA and PSEA are member-driven organizations. We respect the expertise and experience of those in our public schools because they are on the front lines, are the first responders, and are those closest to students who may become adrift. Both associations would support the following measures that the state legislature can support schools with:

1. **Increase funding for school safety grants by \$50 million.** These grants are administered by the Department of Education and support the critical need for school resource officers and school police officers. Grants are also used by schools as they choose to fund programs and security-related equipment that addresses school safety and violence. We encourage this funding to be utilized in three areas:
 - a. Physical improvements such as equipment to secure entrances, panic buttons, door jammers, even streaming video shared directly with a police station
 - b. Active shooter training programs

c. School resource officers

2. **Focus on mental health and support school counselors.** Mental health screening can play an important role in helping to identify students so that they can receive the services they need. Districts need legislation that complies with current timelines of health screenings, is not burdensome to school administration but is effective in encouraging screening of students. Legislation like House Bill 2095 and Senate Bill 1181 if aligned with school programs could add an additional tool to assist students.
3. **Provide an Act 1 exemption for school district safety.** Funding school resource officers, hardening buildings and performing training all require significant additional funding. Local school districts who work with their communities toward security investments via an Act 1 exemption should be permitted to pay for these important projects locally.
4. **Protect school security plans from those who would use them for harm.** School districts need the ability to discuss school safety in executive session as introduced in House Bill 2327 and Senate Bill 1078. We believe that broad community involvement is essential to school safety, but making exact school security and safety plans available to the public puts schools at risk to savvy intruders seeking opportunities to cause harm to our children.
5. **Increase the availability of avenues for students to report threats via an anonymous tip line** as in Senate Bill 1142. Responding to student concerns and identifying individuals who exhibit behaviors that may indicate mental instability or affinity toward violence are important aspects of a school district's threat assessment and safety plan. Having more information of potential threats will aid school districts in responding to those threats.
6. **Support threat and school safety drill assistance.** The State Police of Pennsylvania have an excellent program that assists school districts in performing threat assessments, training and drills. This program is underfunded for the demand that is present in the Commonwealth and additional funds are badly needed.
7. **Provide flexibility for school districts in addressing all threats – not just school safety.** School districts must perform fire drills and now have the option of performing an active shooter drill. We ask that the legislature ensure that every school perform an active shooter drill in place of one fire drill and have the option of switching out an additional fire drill with additional safety drills such as weather and emergency evacuation drills.
8. **Facilitate schools in establishing crisis teams** made up of school counselors, resource officers and administrators that can help predict and prevent tragedies—from school shootings to self-harm and suicide. Additional funding that would assist all districts in performing threat assessments and developing these teams would provide a strong foundation for active prevention in Pennsylvania.

These are some of the ideas on which both of our organizations are actively working for legislative changes. As you know, each of our organizations has testified with broad positions on this topic, and we are working with other organizations that have similar goals. If you have any concerns or

questions on these specific recommendations or any other policies related to school safety, please reach out to our Associations any time.

We look forward to working with the legislature on these and other efforts that can have a positive impact on public schools in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Mains', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nathan Mains
Chief Executive Officer
Pennsylvania School Boards Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Vaughan', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jim Vaughan
Executive Director
Pennsylvania State Education Association

