

Interim School Safety Committee

Public Comments: 10/31/19

Name	City	Organization	Comment
Loloff Cooper, Wendy	Denver	Generation Schools Network	<p>Teaching Social-Emotional Skills is Key to Prevention By Wendy Loloff Cooper (Published in the Denver Post)</p> <p>Last Tuesday, I joined a club I never wanted to be a part of-the club of parents whose children have experienced a school shooting. As a STEM School Highlands Ranch parent, I am still in shock, incredibly grateful that my daughter is safe, grief stricken for those experiencing loss and pain and desperately wanting people to understand that we can do more to protect our children from violence at school.</p> <p>While we don't yet know the motivation behind Tuesday's shooting, we do know that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most gun violence is committed by people who lack mental wellness. (Sandy Hook Promise) • 95% of attackers were current students. (FBI) • Prior to their attack, 93% of shooters engaged in behavior that caused others concern. (FBI) • 75% of shooters felt bullied, persecuted or threatened by others. (FBI) • The number one protective factor to combat at-risk behaviors in youth is having a safe relationship with a caring adult. (Search Institute) <p>In response to school shootings, we rightly talk about common sense gun reform, installing metal detectors, changing safety procedures and addressing mental health. However, we talk about the latter as an illness to treat, rather than a capacity to develop. Social-emotional skills-the kind of skills that help kids cope, resolve conflicts and manage anger-can be taught intentionally as a mitigation strategy.</p> <p>Bullying can be both prevented and addressed using these same skills. Schools can be intentionally designed to group students with a caring adult who sees them, hears them and supports them, and who can alert others to warning signs, allowing for early intervention to address potential threats. This approach promotes belonging, strengthens school communities, and shows great promise to moderate destructive behaviors.</p>
Loloff Cooper, Wendy (cont.)			<p>I believe in this so strongly that for nearly a decade, the organization I lead has been investing heavily in helping dozens of schools and districts across Colorado to implement a program where teachers go beyond simply advising individual students to guiding students in safe peer groups to develop social-emotional skills and to build resilience. Teachers become advocates for their students and help them learn to advocate for themselves, and, importantly, for one another.</p> <p>So, let's not stop at gun laws, metal detectors, response coordination and increasing access for mental health supports, but intentionally integrate social-emotional learning and advocacy for every student in Colorado schools now. Removing barriers to belonging, providing students with safe spaces for personal development, teaching skills like self-regulation and managing emotions, and making necessary referrals for greater support are no longer optional, but critical to preventing further tragedy.</p>

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Boyd, Kim

PEYTON

El Paso County School District 49

I am a school psychologist, clinical psychologist and Board Certified Behavior Analyst-Doctoral and have worked in schools for over 20 years. I am currently the Director of Community Care in District 49, Colorado Springs and have been overseeing the suicide risk assessments, threat assessments and abuse/neglect reporting for our district. I also support our schools in mental health initiatives and Social/Emotional Learning.

Threat assessments and Suicide assessments are two sides of the same coin; emotional dis-regulation. When a student is emotionally dis-regulated they may turn that emotional distress inward with suicidal ideation or outward with threats and homicidal ideation. Yet, the root cause is distress. We really need to address the root causes of the issue. School safety is a Mental Health issue! And there are significantly more suicide attempts than there are mass shootings, yet, we aren't addressing that issues.

Adding security officers, adding metal detectors and other safety measures may harden the target, but the issues inside the school remain the same: emotional distress, trauma and anxiety. Can we please make having a full time counselor or mental health provider required on EVERY campus including CHARTER SCHOOLS! There is a huge disconnect in our community that wants to spend thousands and millions on hardening of schools as a target with bulletproof film, armed security, alarm systems, and metal detectors but won't take that money and instead provide quality mental health services for our students and staff!

It would also be helpful if schools were required to have an actual SEL (Social/Emotional Learning) curriculum for each campus that addresses the state SEL standards. Most educators and even principals are unaware there are SEL standards (found in Comprehensive Health AKA PE standards) for each grade level. There is no measurement of these standards and so they are neglected and overlooked. Other states are looking to have high stakes testing of SEL standards just as they do reading, writing and math to ensure that these standards are being addressed. It is not enough to have a school counselor periodically do a character lesson in a class. Teachers must be incorporating these standards into their lessons and modeling the behaviors taught in an actual SEL curriculum on a daily basis. Kansas, Michigan and other states are leading the way. Don't let Colorado fall behind!

Thank you,
Dr. Kim Boyd, PsyD, BCBA-D
Director of Community Care, D49

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<p>Whitaker, Michael</p> <p>Boulder</p> <p>0</p>	<p>My wife and I - parents of a third grader and a first grader in Boulder - are increasingly concerned that in pursuit of school safety, we are creating a lockdown drill environment that is traumatizing our children. I'm going to share an email that I sent our principal yesterday after a lockdown drill left our child terrified. I realize that school officials, police, and legislators are all trying their best to protect children, but I fear we aren't having an honest discussion about balancing the mental toll of the drills themselves against the likelihood of an event and looking hard for less traumatizing ways to convey information and test technical and personnel response systems. Here's the email. I'd welcome the opportunity to continue the discussion: My wife and I are really concerned with the direction of lockdown drills at the school. We understand that drills were conducted yesterday and that our kindergartner was terrified and crying. Being scared during the drills was the first thing he mentioned when getting off the bus last night. It's disturbing that the first time he is seriously traumatized at school is the result of a drill that on the surface is meant to keep him safe. The research is increasingly suggesting that these drills may do more mental harm to children (including increased anxiety) than the benefits they bring for safety. Also, my understanding is that research hasn't yet proven that more realistic drills do more good than detailed verbal instruction on what to do or clearly announced drills in advance.</p> <p>Here are a few articles discussing the topic: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/03/active-shooter-drills-erika-christakis/580426/</p> <p>https://www.forbes.com/sites/evangerstmann/2019/09/07/why-schools-should-end-active-shooter-drills-immediately/#7deea1d82a92</p> <p>https://www.npr.org/2019/06/05/730057542/a-look-at-the-impact-of-active-shooter-drills</p> <p>Is there a real conversation happening at the state, district, or school level about the appropriate balance between preparedness (making sure all people understand what to do in various emergency scenarios) and the mental toll on the children? Knowing what to do in an emergency is important - I had earthquake drills growing up and knew to get under the desk and hold on; my wife had tornado drills and knew where the safe areas of the building were.</p>
<p>Whitaker, Michael (cont.)</p>	<p>However, these were done in a way that wasn't traumatic - information was conveyed, we knew what to do if needed, and hoped it wouldn't be needed.</p> <p>I hope the school can find the right balance here because whatever happened yesterday terrified our kindergartner. We're happy to talk through this further with you or anyone else who needs to be involved in the conversation and you are welcome to circulate the email.</p> <p>(In a follow up email, I went on to suggest potential parental notification guidelines - could it be recommended that schools notify parents a day in advance so that parents can better prepare their children for what they may experience the next day? Currently we only receive notification after drills have been conducted).</p>

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Miller, Ami	Denver	0	<p>I am grateful for your committee. I believe all Coloradans want safe schools. I have emailed all of you the non partisan "Keeping Schools Safe" report with evidence based recommendations. NONE OF THIS WILL MATTER WITHOUT COMMON SENSE GUN LAWS. We have ERPO in place but need further legislation to hold gun owners accountable for storing their guns responsibly as well as more funding for school counselors and SROs. Please consider partnering with police departments to provide free gun locks to households with at risk youths as well as having extensive public education events about safe gun storage. Please continue to base your decisions and recommendations on the extensive expert testimony you have heard. Our children's lives are in your hands. Thank you for your service!</p>
Bowar, Ann	Littleton	0	<p>I have three children who were present during the school shooting at STEM Highlands Ranch this past spring as well as an exchange student who was staying with us from France that month. Several of their friends were injured, and as I'm sure you know, we lost one of the kindest seniors at the school. My kids continue to think (and I agree) that mental health challenges are a significant factor behind so many of these tragedies. I'm sure there are multiple issues at play, but more resources to reach kids who are obviously struggling could never hurt. Please continue to support our schools with the mental health and counseling staffing they deserve. Thank you.</p>
Gross, Patricia	Denver	0	<p>However well-intended, gun-free zones do not work. Mass shooters have overwhelmingly elected to carry out their attacks in gun-free zones. Eliminating the demonstrably ineffective gun-free zones would serve as a deterrent to those that would harm our children.</p>
Sheinman, Deborah	Colorado Springs	0	<p>Please do not arm teachers. I am a teacher, not a soldier. I never thought that I would ever have to kill anyone in order to teach. It is abhorrent to me. I am here to help children, not fight on a battlefield created by uncaring, extremist politicians. Turning teachers into soldiers is not the solution to school violence. Tightening up further on gun safety laws and fully enforcing our gun laws are absolutely essential. Universal background checks, outlawing military grade weapons, and our new ERPO law are the solutions to this epidemic of gun violence. Smaller class sizes, increased numbers of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists for school support groups and school therapy groups are also needed responses to gun violence as is more funding for mental health services in this state. Stop listening to the extremists and start listening to teachers and others who truly care about children.</p>
Taylor-McNally, Vicki	Colorado Springs	0	<p>I'm disturbed by the support for arming teachers. If teachers are allowed to be armed, I will pull my children out of school at Colorado Springs District 11 and homeschool them, and I will quit my job as a substitute teacher for that district. Instead, I support proven programs for school counselors, adequate funding for support staff, proven risk assessment programs and coordination across the state to address school shootings.</p> <p>I also would like to have mandatory training provided do all District 11 teachers and substitutes about how to conduct and talk children through the various drills so there is not verbage that's too aggressive, but also tips on where to place students in the safest spot.</p>