

CFCR's Position on School Safety & Gun Violence

Recent events, including the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, and the insistent voices of student survivors, have renewed public debate about school safety reform and gun violence.

Council for Children's Rights unequivocally opposes all proposed solutions that include putting more guns in our schools; whether it is arming teachers or increasing the number of armed security officers. We applaud Mecklenburg County leadership, from CMPD to CMS staff leadership to the Board of Education, for quickly reassuring the public that arming teachers is not a tactic being explored.

CFCR recently signed on to a [Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America](#)¹ created by the Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence based out of the University of Virginia. This call outlines a public health approach that goes beyond increased security to focus on reducing risk. Key to this approach is creating a supportive school climate that protects students, faculty, and staff from bullying, discrimination, and assault.²

There are several reasons why we support a focus on school climate and adequate funding for support staff as mechanisms to reduce school violence and oppose the militarization of schools. Research shows that school characteristics-- such as student disconnection from school, gang presence, reports of bullying, and racial tension--are related to reports of serious violence and threats of attacks with weapons.³ When students feel supported and view discipline as fairly enforced, schools report less bullying and victimization.⁴ Schools that use proactive approaches to discipline (e.g., modeling appropriate behavior, peer education) instead of punitive techniques (e.g., suspension) report lower rates of disciplinary infractions.⁵ The balance between discipline and support centers on establishing clear boundaries and high standards along with proactive and consistent consequences.⁶

With our schools funded at pre-recession levels,⁷ they lack the appropriate support staff⁸ required to meet the increasingly complex needs children bring with them to school each day. Consequently, our

¹ <https://curry.virginia.edu/prevent-gun-violence>; <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/03/07/59087717/experts-say-here-s-how-to-prevent-the-next-school-shooting>

² Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence (2018). Call for action to prevent gun violence in the United States of America. Retrieved from <https://curry.virginia.edu/prevent-gun-violence>; Townsend, L., Musci, R., Stuart, E., Ruble, A., Beaudry, M.B., et al. (2017). The association of school climate, depression literacy, and mental health stigma among high school students. *Journal of School Health*, 87, 567-574.

³ Crawford, C. & Burns, R. (2015). Preventing school violence: Assessing armed guardians, school policy, and context. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 38(4), 631-647.

⁴ Gregory, A., Cornell, D., Fan, X., Sheras, P., Shih, T., & Huang, F.(2010). Authoritative school discipline; High school practices associated with lower bullying and victimization. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(2), 483-496.

⁵ Neese, R.T., McIntosh, K. (2016). Chapter 9 Do School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Not Exclusionary Discipline Practices. In Cook, B.G, et.al. (EDs.), *Instructional Practices with and without Empirical Validity (Advances in Learning and Behavioral Disabilities, Volume 29)* Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.175 – 196.

⁶ Weare, K. (2015). What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools? Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/ResourceFinder/What-works-in-promoting-social-and-emotional-wellbeing-in-schools-2015.pdf>; Gregory, A., Cornell, D., Fan, X., Sheras, P., Shih, T., & Huang, F.(2010). Authoritative school discipline; High school practices associated with lower bullying and victimization. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(2), 483-496.

⁷ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/a-punishing-decade-for-school-funding>

⁸ General Assembly Program Evaluation Division. (2017). Meeting current standards for school nurses statewide may cost up to \$79 million annually. Retrieved from <https://www.ncleg.net/DocumentSites/committees/JLPEOC/Minutes%20and%20Handouts/2018/01-22-18/School%20Nurses%20Report.pdf>; National Association for College Admission Counseling & American School Counselor Association. (nd).

teachers are asked to perform the roles of missing social workers, nurses, counselor, and psychologists. Adequate staffing and a coordinated response system positions schools to identify risk factors for violence and to intervene in an appropriate and timely manner.⁹

Research has also shown that high schools with access controlled doors and metal detectors have significantly higher rates of serious violence reports¹⁰, while some students report that metal detectors negatively affect their perceptions of school safety¹¹ and increase their sense of school disorder.¹² Further, some visible security measures such as cameras, metal detectors, and security personnel can negatively impact academic performance, particularly in schools that serve low SES students.¹³

It does not escape us that many threats to school safety are external and that school support staff may be ill-equipped to protect students from those external threats. However, CMS has robust policies in place, as Superintendent Wilcox described on *Straight Talk with Chief Kerr Putney* in February, that include requiring Photo IDs to enter schools, allowing for instantaneous background checks, and escorting visitors while they are on campus. We first need to ensure that these policies are routinely practiced in all schools across the district before considering allocating funds for new, visible school security tools such as metal detectors and increased surveillance.¹⁴

In addition, research on the efficacy of School Resource Officers (SROs) in reducing school violence is mixed, and research on the deterrent effect of armed security is lacking. In contrast, there is an extensive body of research demonstrating that schools with regular police presence are more likely to refer children to law enforcement, particularly for lower-level offenses, perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline.¹⁵ The public health approach hinges on understanding school safety as greater engagement, support, and prevention; not adding SROs for greater enforcement and certainly not more SROs enforcing routine disciplinary matters as Senator Marco Rubio (R- FL) [suggested](#). Extensive research shows that exclusionary discipline is associated with negative outcomes, including increased likelihood that students will engage in unwanted behavior. This cycle is reinforced when students believe that rules and consequences are not applied consistently to everyone.¹⁶

State-by-state student-to-counselor ratio report: 10-year trends. Retrieved from <https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/publications/research/state-by-state-ratio-report.pdf>; Helms, A.D. (2017). Good news for CMS: Raises for All. Bad news: Fewer new counselors, social workers. Retrieved from <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/education/article166158877.html>

⁹ Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence (2018). Call for action to prevent gun violence in the United States of America. Retrieved from <https://curry.virginia.edu/prevent-gun-violence>

¹⁰ Crawford, C. & Burns. R. (2015). Preventing school violence: Assessing armed guardians, school policy, and context. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 38(4), 631-647.

¹¹ Gastic, B. (2011). Metal Detectors and Feeling Safe at School. *Education and Urban Society*, 43(4), 486-498. doi:10.1177/0013124510380717

¹² Mayer, M., & Leone, P. (1999). A Structural Analysis of School Violence and Disruption: Implications for Creating Safer Schools. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 22(3), 333-356.

¹³ Tanner-Smith, E.E. & Fisher, B.W. (2016). Visible school security measures and student academic performance, attendance, and postsecondary aspirations. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 45(1), 195-210.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Nance, J.P. (2016). Students, police, and the school-to-prison pipeline. *Washington University Law Review*, 93(4), 919-987.

¹⁶ Gregory, A., Cornell, D., Fan, X., Sheras, P., Shih, T., & Huang, F.(2010). Authoritative school discipline; High school practices associated with lower bullying and victimization. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(2), 483-496.

In addition, many current conversations about school safety, mental health is scapegoated. This is particularly troubling and misleading because individuals with mental health needs are more likely to inflict harm on themselves than they are to engage in interpersonal violence.¹⁷ Nationally, approximately 1 in 5 young people struggle with mental health issues and many avoid treatment because of stigma.¹⁸ Locally, 31.8% of our high school students report feeling sad or hopeless every day and 17.2% report seriously considering suicide.¹⁹

Council for Children’s Rights advocates for a full continuum of mental health services implemented through a multi-pronged approach; however, we do not believe these issues should be subsumed under the school safety conversation. Further, we advocate for research-based approaches to keeping our children safe rather than an impulsive turn towards militarization of schools.

¹⁷ Swanson, J.W., Easter, M.M., Robertson, A.G., Swartz, M.S., Alanis-Hirsch, K., et al. (2016). Gun violence, mental illness, and laws that prohibit gun possession: Evidence from two Florida counties. *Health Affairs*, 35(6), 1067-1075.

¹⁸ Bowers, H., Manion, I., Papadopoulos, D., & Gaureau, E.I (2013). Stigma in school-based mental health: perceptions of young people and service providers. *Child & Adolescent Mental Health*, 18(3), 165-170.

¹⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). 2015 Youth risk behavior survey results Charlotte-Mecklenburg county high school survey.