



House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE HEARING

Topic: School Safety

Hughes Public Library – Stroudsburg PA

August 21, 2018

AGENDA

5:30 p.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks

5:40 p.m. Panel One:

- Marcus Brown
Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of Governor Tom Wolf
- Derin Myers
Acting Executive Director, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime & Delinquency
- Lieutenant Joseph Sparich
Troop N Stroudsburg Station Commander, Pennsylvania State Police
- Trooper Kevin Jancewicz
Bureau of Criminal Investigation and Risk & Vulnerability Assessment Team Member, Pennsylvania State Police

6:20 p.m. Panel Two:

- Jill Shoemith
Educational Director, Evergreen Community School
- Sarah Henry
Student, Evergreen Community School
- Olivia DeRosa
Member, The Acceptance Project
- Taha Vahanvaty
Member, The Acceptance Project

6:50 p.m. Panel Three:

- Dr. Donna Hamilton
CEO and Chief Wellness Officer, Manifest Excellence
- Helena Tuleya-Payne
Coordinator of School Psychology Program, Millersville University

7:20 p.m. Closing Remarks

Governor's School Safety Task Force

Initial Findings

Students perform their best when they are able to learn in classrooms and school environments that are safe, supportive, and healthy. In recent years, incidents of school-based violence, including school shootings, have called into question the notion that schools are safe havens, and have demanded a more coordinated response from national, state, and local education, public health, law enforcement, emergency management, and community leaders. Since the February 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members have demanded action to keep students safer. In response, Governor Tom Wolf, joined by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale, answered those calls in March by creating the Governor's School Safety Task Force in Pennsylvania.

About the School Safety Task Force

The School Safety Task Force brought together multiple stakeholders from across Pennsylvania to discuss how to improve school safety, including:

- Students;
- Parents;
- Teachers and administrators;
- Certified school nurses and healthcare professionals;
- Government officials;
- Statewide education organizations;
- Law enforcement and public safety officials; and
- Community members

Governor Wolf and Auditor General DePasquale co-chaired the task force, with Marcus Brown, director of Pennsylvania's Office of Homeland Security, serving as the governor's designee.

The co-chairs led the six task force meetings along with five vice-chairs:

- Bonita Allen, Pennsylvania Parent Teacher Association president,
- Dr. Mark DiRocco, Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators executive director,
- Dolores McCracken, Pennsylvania State Education Association president,
- Judy Morgitan, Pennsylvania Association of School Nurses and Practitioners past president, and
- Derin Myers, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency acting executive director.

Each vice-chair was responsible for inviting multiple participants each meeting, creating a total of over 40 community participants in each regional discussion.

Five members of the Wolf Administration also supported the work of the task force:

- Education Secretary Pedro Rivera,
- Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine,
- Labor and Industry Secretary Jerry Oleksiak,
- Acting Pennsylvania State Police Commissioner Lt. Colonel Robert Evanchick, and

- Human Services, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Deputy Secretary Lynn Kovich.

Task Force Meetings and Format

From April through June 2018, the School Safety Task Force hosted six meetings throughout the commonwealth. Task force meetings were held at schools in South Central, North Central, Northeast, Northwest, Southwest, and Southeast Pennsylvania. Each meeting was set up as a listening session allowing for the co-chairs, vice-chairs, and state officials to hear concerns and recommendations from school and community members. At each meeting, attendees were asked to respond to the following three questions as a guide for discussion:

- *How can we help prepare school staff, students and first responders to address and respond to mass shootings and threats?*
- *How can we strengthen efforts to address the health (both physical and mental) needs of students?*
- *How can we help ensure school buildings are secure and appropriate training is conducted for students and staff?*

In addition to the task force meetings, the governor invited the public to share their ideas and thoughts on these important topics through an online feedback form. As of June 20, 2018, the Governor's Office received 743 comments from Pennsylvanians through this survey.

Listening Observations: Common Themes

This report provides a summary of the comments and concerns heard from community members during regional roundtable discussions as well as through the online feedback form. They are organized by theme, including the Task Force's specific recommendations, and identify barriers and opportunities. Common themes include the need for Pennsylvania to:

- Improve communication and information sharing;
- Enhance social and emotional learning for students;
- Increase the number of certified school nurses and mental health professionals in schools;
- Increase access to mental health services;
- Strengthen school security;
- Build connections to the community;
- Integrate law enforcement and school police/resource officers;
- Provide guidance and information to help schools determine priorities;
- Provide more resources to schools; and
- Utilize Training

Improve Communication and Information Sharing

Lack of communication was identified as an issue at all task force meetings. Attendees spoke of a need for more and better communication in three main capacities: among stakeholders; among students, schools and communities; and among students themselves. The task force identified a number of barriers to communication, including confidentiality requirements, lack of relationships among students and adults, and a culture of peer harassment and cyberbullying, isolation and fear of reprisal. Students

consistently raised the concern of not being heard and the importance of student voices leading the safe schools conversation. Many individuals pointed toward the need to enhance existing information sharing efforts to ensure that adults are able to provide appropriate, coordinated supports for students who may be struggling, and to identify red flags before they result in more serious consequences. There is a need for information sharing efforts between schools, mental health agencies, social agencies such as county children and youth agencies, probation, and local law enforcement. Often, many of these entities are working with the same students and families, but do not communicate with one another, mostly due to stringent confidentiality laws. Students and others who participated in the meetings overwhelming called on the need to ensure students voices are at the table and that their opinion is an essential component to all conversations.

Enhance Social and Emotional Learning for Students

Task force participants called for prioritizing social and emotional learning at an early age. Participants reported that students are struggling with stress and anxiety and are often not equipped with the necessary skills to manage emotions. By teaching these skills at an early age and reinforcing those skills consistently with a comprehensive K-12 program, students will be better equipped to handle challenges throughout their lives and build resiliency that will allow them to deal with challenges in a healthy way.

Increase the Number of Physical and Mental Health Professionals in Schools

Every task force meeting included requests from multiple participants to increase the number of both professionals in schools who are able to respond to the physical and mental health needs of students. Task force participants specifically requested additional Pennsylvania certified school nurses, social workers, psychologists, and counselors in schools to help meet the health needs of all students. School personnel frequently cited low ratios of physical and mental health professionals to the student population as a barrier to students receiving necessary support and treatment. Participants and stakeholders also called for increased funding and supports from the state to ensure that all schools – including those in low-income and remote communities – are able to provide necessary services and supports to all students.

Increase Access to Mental Health Services

The most consistent concern raised throughout the listening sessions related to the growing — and often inadequately addressed — mental health needs of students. The task force called for increased access to mental health services within both schools and communities. Task force participants identified barriers to treatment including stigma, wait time after referrals, and consent. By providing screening services, early intervention and treatment programs, schools and communities can better help address students' mental health needs.

Strengthen School Security

Task force participants identified the need for a number of physical security changes within schools to keep students safe from people trying to enter schools as well as from individuals within the school environment. Students mentioned adding secure vestibules at entrances, locks on all classroom doors and metal detectors. Participants also noted the need to empower current staff to identify potential challenges and strategies to improve school climate. Both existing schools and new construction should consider designs that promote security just as they have historically considered factors such as fire safety. These recommendations were called for with the acknowledgment that additional funding and

resources would be needed from the state. However, there were also discussions that were not limited by funding including having trained community volunteers to serve as additional security monitors within schools. Students stressed the importance of security personnel being properly trained to work with children and young adults.

Build Connections to the Community

The importance of establishing connections to the community was frequently identified as part of the solution to creating safer schools. Community participants can create safety nets for students facing a number of challenges. Task force participants suggested opening communication to the community to help identify safety concerns, and utilizing the community as a necessary support system for students and as a referral source and treatment option for students with mental health needs. Participants highlighted some current best practices including “Communities in Schools” where the school district invites community agencies into the schools so students can access community services during the school day.

Integrate Law Enforcement and School Resource Officers

Across the commonwealth, task force participants emphasized the role of school resource officers within schools. Participants emphasized the need for school resource officers and local law enforcement to be properly trained to work in educational settings with students, including students of color, students with disabilities, English Learners, and other historically marginalized populations. Officers must understand child and adolescent development, be aware of bias and community norms, and know how to effectively communicate with students, parents, and community members.

Provide Actionable Guidance and Information to Help Schools Determine Priorities

Task force participants, especially school administrators and personnel, called for state agencies and in particular the Pennsylvania Department of Education, to provide guidance to school districts regarding resources, best practices, and other information that could aid in shaping decision-making at a local level. With a growing list of federal and state mandates and community and student needs, schools must decide which competing priorities receive the greatest level of time and attention. Participants also noted that many school districts – especially those that lack financial and human capital resources – often spend money on programs and initiatives that do not yield the best results because they are unaware of more cost-effective, high-quality programs and services that are already available through state and other initiatives.

Increase School Funding

Across the state, participants called for additional funding to implement school safety measures appropriate to their school’s individual needs as well as to increase access to mental health services. Participants cited the growing number of mandates and expectations placed on schools that are too often unaccompanied by the resources necessary to make those changes. Educators and administrators specifically stated that schools often know what they need to do to improve safety, foster a more inclusive and supportive school culture, and increase access to needed services, but they are often not able to make those changes due to inadequate funding.

Utilize Training

In addition to the above common themes, training was identified as a need related to many of the themes. From training for teachers and school staff in the area of social and emotional learning to

regular hands on training of students and school staff on what to do if there is an active shooter to training for school resource officers, it was clear that school staff and students would be interested in additional training.

Next Steps

This document outlines the initial findings and overall themes that the task force members heard from participants during the six regional meetings as well as individuals who submitted thoughts through the online feedback form. The themes outlined in this document will be utilized to outline specific recommendations. The next steps will be the compilation of data and the formulation of the final report. The final report will include specific recommendations for communities, parents, students, state and local government and other stakeholders. The final report will be completed this summer before the start of the 18/19 school year.



**House Democratic Policy Committee
Public Hearing on School Safety
August 21, 2018**

**Testimony of
Mr. Derin Myers, Acting Executive Director
Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). I am Derin Myers, and I am the Acting Executive Director of PCCD.

PCCD is a state agency that is governed by a 47-member board, consisting of cabinet secretaries from multiple state agencies, judges, district attorneys, victim advocates, county probation and parole administrators, juvenile justice administrators, members of the General Assembly, and many other related stakeholders in the criminal justice field. Since 1978, our mission has been three-fold: 1) to enhance the quality, coordination and planning within the criminal and juvenile justice systems; 2) to facilitate the delivery of services to victims of crime; and 3) to increase the safety of our communities.

Over the past few months, PCCD has participated in Governor Wolf and Auditor General DePasquale's Task Force on School Safety. Historically, our role in school safety has been:

- To provide school districts with an opportunity to ascertain their own school climate and safety needs through the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS);
- To staff the Office of the Safe School Advocate in the Philadelphia School District;
- To provide statewide technical assistance and resources for the implementation of evidence-based prevention programs, such as the Communities-That-Care model, and to support those programs through the Prevention Research Center at Penn State University;
- To provide training to law enforcement through Virtual Training Network (VTN) curriculum opportunities, such as the "Responding to Trauma Victims," and Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), which is responding to individuals with mental illness; and
- To offer advocacy and services for victims impacted by crime and/or violence.

On June 22, 2018, the role of our agency was expanded a bit further with the passage of Act 44 of 2018. Amending the Public School Code of 1949, the Act contains multiple provisions for school safety and security preparedness effecting several state agencies and local school districts. These provisions include:

- Mandating the appointment of School Safety and Security Coordinators by school entities;
- Expanding the PA State Police's Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Team (RVAT) unit;
- Establishing mandatory school safety training for school entity employees;
- Establishing standards for school police, school resource officers, and school security guards;
- Establishing the Safe2Say Program within the PA Attorney General's Office; and
- Creating a School Safety and Security Committee within PCCD, which is tasked with:
 - By September 30, 2018, developing criteria to be used to assess school safety and security;

- By October 31, 2018, establishing a registry for vendors who may conduct school safety assessments;
- By October 31, 2018, issuing a survey to school entities to review school security preparedness; and
- Administering \$60 million in funding via grants for both school safety and security and community violence programs.

On July 23, 2018, the Committee held its first meeting to discuss the requirements of the Act and adopt a general framework to meet the Act's timelines. Over the past month, workgroups comprised of Committee members and subject-matter experts have been meeting to develop preliminary criteria to be used to assess school safety and security. The Committee is scheduled to have its next meeting at the end of August and each month thereafter, in order to meet the requirements of the Act. More information on this can be found on our website at www.pccd.pa.gov under the "School Safety and Security" tab at the top of the screen.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE TESTIMONY

HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

SCHOOL SAFETY

AUGUST 21, 2018



PRESENTED BY

LIEUTENANT JOSEPH M. SPARICH

STATION COMMANDER

PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE- STROUDSBURG

Good evening, Chairman Sturla, Vice Chairs, and members of the House Democratic Policy Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this very important discussion about keeping students and staff members safe in our schools. My name is Lieutenant Joseph Sparich and I'm the Station Commander for the Pennsylvania State Police Stroudsburg barracks. With me here this evening is Trooper Kevin Jancewicz, of our Risk & Vulnerability Assessment Team, or "RVAT". The Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) is committed to protecting all Pennsylvanians and has been actively engaged in a variety of programs intended to counter the threat posed by active shooters and improve response to critical incidents in our educational facilities.

The training of law enforcement officers to rapidly and effectively respond to an active shooter event to end the threat is critically important and can have a substantial impact on the ultimate outcome of the event. PSP members initially received training for these types of incidents in the early 2000s after the Columbine High School shootings and it continued thereafter. Over a two-year period between 2012 and 2014, all PSP first responders received updated Active Shooter Response training which included realistic scenarios and role players. Additionally, all PSP cadets receive this training in prior to their graduation from the Academy. The PSP Bureau of Emergency and Special Operations members have also provided the training to municipal officers across the commonwealth.

PSP stresses the importance of community involvement and engagement as part of a holistic approach in school safety. PSP's Community Service Officers (CSO) visit churches, businesses, and other organizations, such as educational institutions, to discuss issues relevant to safety and overall security. In 2017, Community Services Officers and other PSP members conducted 364 presentations for thousands of attendees about school safety. The presentations included recognition of warning signs that might be indicative of someone progressing toward violence and guidance about what actions to take if an active shooter enters their facility. Most of these presentations were given specifically to educators and school district administrators. As Station Commander, I regularly attend or send a representative to Township and Borough meetings within our coverage area so that the citizens we serve can ask questions or seek our input on a variety of issues, including school safety or cyberbullying. Furthermore, each Trooper on patrol understands the importance in developing strong relationships within the communities they serve. PSP's Troopers routinely volunteer for details such as Camp Cadet, Shop with a Cop, or Coffee with a Cop so that young people have opportunities to interact with members of law enforcement in a positive environment.

Another service PSP provides to schools and school districts is the RVAT team. The RVAT team consists of specially-trained Troopers who tour a school, house of worship, sports venue, or other critical infrastructure. They assess physical security, explosive effects on structural design, threat analysis, and practical target hardening techniques and provide a confidential report on ways to improve security. These recommendations are based on their training, established industry standards and include best practices utilized by other schools. Since January 2016, PSP has completed over 150 RVAT assessments; the vast majority of those facilities were schools.

Regular interaction and sharing of information between law enforcement and school district administrators is essential to protect our schools. In the field, PSP stations, including Stroudsburg, conduct annual response drills and tabletop exercises with schools in within their respective coverage areas to prepare for critical incidents. In addition, PSP recently partnered with the Pennsylvania Trauma Systems Foundation (PTSF) to provide life-saving 'Stop the Bleed' tourniquet training to its Troopers. Stop the Bleed training involves educating Troopers on how to stop bleeding using gauze and tourniquets. Each Trooper also receives a combat application tourniquet to carry on duty which was provided by a grant funded by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC). This will enable Troopers to act quickly to save a life in the event of a traumatic injury like those experienced in school violence incidents.

The commonwealth's primary designated intelligence fusion center, the Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center or PaCIC, maintains a full-time Critical Infrastructure & Key Resources (CIKR) protection unit to share threat and crime information with private and public-sector entities, including schools. Through this collaboration, PaCIC regularly sends written briefs and alerts to partners in hundreds of schools across the commonwealth, answers requests for information from school administrators and assists law enforcement with their investigations in those facilities.

The PSP will continue to work with school officials and partners across all disciplines to ensure that children and staff members will be safe in our schools. I look forward to answering any questions the committee might have for us.

Testimony
Helena Tuleya-Payne, D.Ed.

Good Evening. I am Helena Tuleya-Payne, Professor and Coordinator of the School Psychology Program at Millersville University, a certified school psychologist and a licensed psychologist. I have been asked to address the role of counseling in promoting safe schools. My remarks will focus on mental health service delivery in the schools of which counseling is a part.

A position statement developed by school violence prevention experts in 2012 emphasized the need of mental health services among the multiple interventions to address school shootings. These interventions include: (a) enhance physical security (e.g., locked doors, buzzer entrances), (b) build universal, positive behavior support approaches across the school community to improve school climate; (c) develop strong education and extracurricular programs; and (d) provide evidence-based instruction to promote positive social, emotional, and behavioral development.

In a 2013 article entitled "Improving mental health in schools" the authors cite research indicating that more than one of five students at some point experience a serious mental health disorder. At the secondary school level, many of these students suffer issues in thinking, mood or behavior. Most will not receive the help they need due to poor access and stigma associated with seeking services.

The authors also make the point that schools are for many communities the largest de facto provider of mental health services. In fact of the students who do receive mental health services, 70 to 80% of them initially received those services at school. Schools as a point of access make sense because students spend six hours a day in school. Adults in the schools have regular contact with students. They can help create relationships, develop trust, and monitor students over time. The access to school-based mental health services is enhanced and stigma is reduced.

It is the position of many school and safety organizations that comprehensive mental health services are needed to promote safety. In 2013, *A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools* was co-authored by the following groups:

American School Counselor Association
National Association of School Psychologists
School Social Work Association of America
National Association of School Resource Offices
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals

What do we mean by mental health services in the schools? It is my experience that when people speak about these services in the schools they envision a one-to-one counseling session between a counselor and a student who is experiencing some

level of mental distress. Although this intense level of service is necessary for some students, it lies at one end of the continuum of mental health delivery.

At the other end of the continuum is mental health services delivery for all students sometimes called universal wellness promotion or primary prevention- i.e., prevention of the development of mental health problems. Schools with this model provide an environment that is both physically and psychologically safe for all children with programs that promote resilience, positive behaviors and safety. Mental health services delivery for all students sometimes called universal wellness promotion focuses on promoting resilience, positive behavior and safety. Students learn three to five expectations of the school such as “be responsible”, “be respectful” and “be safe” in all areas of the school, from bus, to classroom to cafeteria. Effective primary prevention involves all school staff and emphasizes skills development in both students (to perform expected behaviors) and staff (to respond to student needs before they result in unhealthy behaviors). This is sometimes called a Tier 1 level of service.

The vast majority of students respond well to universal programs but these services are not sufficient for developing social and emotional skills for perhaps ten to 15% per cent of the student population who need more targeted interventions known as Tier 2 level of service. At this targeted level of intervention or secondary prevention, mental health services are delivered to small groups of students who, for example, may need assistance with anger management or non-compliance issues. An evidence-based program to help children develop the social and emotional skills that motivate and support friendships is the *Fast Track Friendship Group*. A team of researchers that included several faculty members from Penn State University developed this intervention.

About five per cent of students have chronic, entrenched mental health problems that benefit from intensive interventions that may include counseling and collaboration with community services. This is known as tertiary prevention of Tier 3 level of service.

Pennsylvania has developed a framework to provide research-based social, emotional and behavioral services at different levels of need. In 2002, the Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support Network (PAPBS) was formed to promote school discipline and appropriate student behavior and learning. In 2011, 12 commonwealth schools were recognized as meeting fidelity on set criteria at the Tier 1 level. In 2018, over 300 schools were recognized at one or more Tier levels (1, 2 and 3).

Who are best positioned to provide mental health services in the schools? The authors of the *Framework* make a strong case that the school psychologists, school counselors and school social workers are trained and positioned to provide these services. These school-employed mental health professionals offer a variety of services to schools that help keep schools safe. Across these professionals you will

see the following areas of expertise: child development, knowledge of schools as systems that can shape a child's behavior, understanding of classroom dynamics and the capacities and pressure on teachers in implementing behavioral and mental health interventions, knowledge of evidenced-based interventions to support appropriate behaviors in students, consultation skills with school personnel and parents, and data-driven decision making to assist in determining the appropriate levels (Tier 1, 2 or 3) of intervention. Their training with assessment and mental health issues makes them ideal to be members of threat assessment teams. These school professionals are often underutilized in providing mental health services. It is understood there may be times when a student with entrenched mental health issues may need community mental health services. Effective schools develop linkages with community resources to facilitate those services when needed.

Before leaving this discussion, I wanted to say a few more words about the importance of positive school climate. School culture is how schools do things and school climate is how students and staff feel about the way things are done at school. A positive school climate is essential for safe schools. In regards to school shooting incidents, Dr. Peter Langman describes a warning phenomenon known as "leakage." This is when others, often associates of the shooter, know of plans ahead of the event or at a minimum are aware of troubling actions or statements. In these cases it is important that students trust school authorities to inform them of potential plans. A positive school climate involves a level of trust among members of the school community so that when "leakage" occurs, authorities are informed. School mental health professionals are important to school teams who address school climate.

Submitted by,

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References

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