

Resolution Supporting Efforts to Prevent Gun Violence

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is a nonpartisan association committed to advocating for research-based policies and practices that ensure children’s safety, well-being, and ability to thrive at school, at home, and throughout life. The work of NASP is grounded in its mission, professional standards, position statements, resolutions, policies, and advocacy platforms, all of which are guided by research. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 34,000 people die as a result of gun violence each year, approximately two thirds of which are the result of suicide. CDC data also show that for every person killed by gun violence, two more people are injured (CDC, 2017), and that the rate of gun deaths increased notably in 2016 (Ahmad & Bastian, 2017). NASP aspires to protect children from gun violence by encouraging and supporting solutions that create safer, healthier schools, homes, and communities. By working with partners of all beliefs and backgrounds who value the protection of children, NASP seeks to support meaningful actions that will prevent gun violence and stop the tragic loss of life.

WHEREAS, Principle IV.1 of the NASP *Principles for Professional Ethics* (NASP, 2010; p. 12) states that “school psychologists use their expertise in psychology and education to promote school, family, and community environments that are safe and healthy for children”; and

WHEREAS, NASP is dedicated to advocating for the rights, well-being, and educational and mental health needs of *all* students, and is committed to ensuring that all students attend schools and live in communities that are safe, supportive, and free of bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence; and

WHEREAS, NASP promotes efforts to foster safe, secure, and peaceful schools and communities that are free of the destructive influence of violence in *all* of its forms, to improve students’ readiness to learn, and to build school climates characterized by positive civil engagement; and

WHEREAS, exposure to gun violence in the community can result in anxiety, depression, antisocial behavior, and a decline in students’ capacity to meaningfully engage in academic tasks (Garbarino, Bradshaw, & Vorrasi, 2002; Sharkey, Tirado-Strayer, Papachristos, & Raver, 2012); and

WHEREAS, while there is a complex interaction of risk factors, warning signs, barriers, and mental states that leads to violence (Reeves & Brock, 2017), access to firearms is highly associated with increased risk of injury and death among youth (Hemenway, 2011; Siegel, Ross, & King, 2013) and exposure to gun violence is highly associated with diminished social, emotional, and academic well-being among youth, (Garbarino, Bradshaw, & Vorrasi, 2002; Heinze, Stoddard, Aiyer, Eisman, & Zimmerman, 2017; Kirk & Hardy, 2014); and

WHEREAS, multiple research studies have shown a clear connection between local availability of guns and gun-related violent behaviors, with estimates of close to 2 million children and adolescents having access at home to loaded, unlocked guns (Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence, 2012); and

WHEREAS, having a gun stored in the home is associated with a threefold increase in homicide and a fivefold increase in suicide in urban areas in the United States (Kellerman et al., 1992, 1993); and

WHEREAS, although gun violence in schools is extremely rare, research indicates that the majority of youth homicides are by a firearm, nearly half of youth suicide deaths involve the use of a gun, and most school-associated homicides involved a firearm (CDC, 2014; Modzeleski et al., 2008); and

WHEREAS, the rate of firearm-related deaths (homicide, suicide, unintentional deaths) in United States is 10 times higher than other high income countries, and, for youth ages 15–24, the gun homicide rate is 49 times higher than in other countries (Grinshteyn & Hemenway, 2016); and

WHEREAS, research demonstrates that gun laws that restrict access to high-powered weapons that are capable of mass destruction in a short period of time reduce gun related deaths; and

WHEREAS, increased access to mental health services in schools and communities is needed to support children’s learning and well-being; however, this is separate from and not a substitute for gun safety measures. Longitudinal research has concluded that:

- the vast majority of people with mental illness are not violent (Elbogen & Johnson, 2009);
- less than 5% of the gun-related killings in the United States were perpetrated by people diagnosed with mental illness; and
- less than 3–5% of U.S. crimes involve people with mental illness (Metzl & McLeish, 2015); and

WHEREAS, school psychologists, pediatricians, and other mental health practitioners routinely screen for access to guns in the home when doing a suicide or threat assessment, because this practice is key for successfully intervening with at-risk youth; and

WHEREAS, NASP supports policies that take a holistic approach to decrease the potential for the injury or death of students, staff, and other community members on school campuses, on the way to/from school, and when participating in school-sanctioned events; and

WHEREAS, efforts to reduce violence in schools and communities at large must include strategies for eliminating inappropriate youth access to firearms, strategies to keep guns out of the hands of those who would harm students, and school policies which ensure that the only armed persons at schools are highly trained professionals, such as school resource officers;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that NASP supports approaches that protect children, as they are particularly vulnerable when it comes to gun violence both as direct victims and as being traumatized by the exposure to the deaths of family members, friends, neighbors, and community members. This includes:

- rigorous enforcement of existing gun laws;
 - eliminating inappropriate youth access to guns;
 - improving awareness of safe gun practices, including secure storage of firearms;
 - restricting the presence of guns in schools to only commissioned and trained school resource officers;
- and

- ensuring greater protection to keep guns out of the hands of individuals deemed at risk of hurting themselves and others.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that NASP supports legislation, regulation, and public policy intended to reduce gun violence including, but not limited to:

- Comprehensive background checks for *all* gun purchases.
- Extreme risk protection orders that allow family members or police officers (when notified by school/family or when responding to an incident) to petition the court to remove someone's access to weapons when they are deemed a threat to self or others.
- Bans on weapons that can do mass destruction in a short period of time (e.g., fully automatic assault weapons).
- Evidence-based threat assessment policy and practice; mental health evaluations and re-entry plans, including ongoing mental and behavioral health support for students identified as being of imminent threat to themselves or others; and enhanced student access to mental health supports in schools and communities.
- Elimination of the Dickey Amendment, which prohibits the use of federal funds to conduct comprehensive scientific research about gun violence.
- Increased investments for rigorous research on gun violence.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that NASP opposes legislation, regulation, and public policy that promotes arming teachers or permits citizens with open and/or concealed carry permits to bring weapons onto school campuses.

IN CONCLUSION, many education and mental health organizations with missions aligned with NASP's work have explicitly called for increased gun safety measures like those mentioned above. NASP supports the U.S. Constitution and, like these organizations, believes that effective laws and policies can reduce gun violence and fatalities without undermining the Second Amendment. Advocating for effective policies to reduce gun violence is necessary to helping all children thrive at home, in school, and throughout life.

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