

**MCCPTA Resolution Gun Violence Prevention and School Safety**

APPROVED December 4, 2019

Gun violence in our schools is a too often occurrence in the United States. Montgomery County can be a national leader in establishing comprehensive, evidence-based actions to keep our school communities safe. The State of Maryland and Montgomery County Public Schools have taken a number of significant steps to protect our schools, but there is more work to be done. This will require a concerted effort by everyone in the school community.

The data on school-based gun violence is remarkable in its clarity. There are three critical facts about school-based gun violence. First, shooters often have a connection to the school – nearly 80 percent of school shooters were school-aged and current or former students.<sup>i</sup> Second, school shooters showed warning signs that concerned others around them, or told their plans to other people, most often peers. Third, firearms used in school attacks most often come from homes in the community. Research studies prove these points, including:

- The Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center report on targeted school violence incidents from 2008 to 2017 found that 100 percent of the attackers showed warning signs and 77 percent told another person of their plans.<sup>ii</sup>
- A Secret Service and Department of Education study of targeted school violence incidents from 1974 to 1999 found that 73 percent of the shooters obtained firearms from their home or that of a relative. A study of incidents from 2008 to 2017 found that 76 percent of the firearms were obtained from the home of a parent or close relative (48 percent of which were unsecured).<sup>iii</sup>
- A study of school-associated homicides and suicides from 1992 to 1999 found 79 percent of the firearms came from the home.<sup>iv</sup>
- Everytown for Gun Safety's analysis of incidents of gun violence on school grounds from 2013 to 2018 found that 78 percent of shooters under the age of 18 obtained their guns from their own home, a relative's home, or from friends.<sup>v</sup>

Unsecured guns in the home pose a risk to students beyond gun violence in schools. Every year, nearly 350 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else, and nearly 77 percent of these incidents take place inside a home.<sup>vi</sup> Another 590 children die by gun suicide each year. More than 80 percent of teens who die by gun suicide used a firearm that belonged to someone in their home.<sup>vii</sup>

One study showed significant parental misperceptions about children and firearms. Though parents believe their firearms are well hidden, 87 percent of kids know where their parents' guns are kept, and 60 percent report having handled them.<sup>viii</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) concludes that the absence of guns from homes is the most reliable and effective measure to prevent suicide, homicide, and

unintentional firearm-related injuries to children and adolescents.<sup>ix</sup> If there are guns in the home, AAP notes that storing guns unloaded and locked, with ammunition kept in a separate place, can mitigate the risk of child firearm injury.<sup>x</sup>

The data are clear and show that we need evidence-based responses. There are common sense approaches that have been proven effective and can help to prevent shootings before they happen. There are also some necessary practices that must be implemented with care in order to protect the well-being of our students and the climate of our schools. The Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA) strongly urges Montgomery County Public Schools to take immediate, concrete actions to protect the students in its care. We specifically ask that:

- The Board directs the Superintendent and staff to update the Student Handbook to include information about parents' legal obligation related to gun safety: “a person may not store or leave a loaded firearm in a location where the person knew or should have known that an unsupervised child would gain access to the firearm” (Md. Code Ann., Crim. Law § 4-104);
- The Board directs the Superintendent to create an appropriate letter, in all languages used by MCPS, to parents, guardians, and all staff, explaining the importance of secure gun storage and the specific legal obligation to protect minors from accessing irresponsibly stored guns. This letter should be posted online, included in annual registration materials at each school site, and require a parent/guardian signature acknowledging awareness of secure gun storage responsibilities;
- The Board and the Superintendent continue to work with local law enforcement agencies, health agencies, and non-profit organizations to inform district parents of their obligations to safely secure firearms;
- The Board and the Superintendent ensure the proper implementation of evidence-based threat assessment programs and anonymous reporting systems throughout the county and maintain appropriate staffing levels, including sufficient mental health professionals, to identify students who may be in crisis, evaluate risk, and implement appropriate interventions;
- The Board and the Superintendent evaluate whether the threat assessment program is having the intended effect and monitor any disproportionate impact to students of color or students with disabilities;
- The Board and the Superintendent direct schools to provide information to students, parents, guardians, and all staff about the use of anonymous reporting systems and other preventative resources, specifically in situations involving firearms;
- The Board and the Superintendent ensure that schools are aware of, and that MCPS counselors and mental health professionals are trained on Maryland’s Extreme Risk Protection Order law (Md. Code Ann., Pub. Safety § 5-601, et seq) to temporarily

remove access to firearms from a student at risk to themselves or others, and instructed in the appropriate circumstances for when it should be used;

- The Board and Superintendent review the procedures, protocols, providers, and effects of the state-mandated active shooter drills. At a minimum, the Board and Superintendent will ensure that (i) drills never involve simulations, (ii) drills are never unannounced, (iii) sufficient information and notification is provided to parents about the tone, content, and dates of any drills for students, (iv) drill content is trauma-informed, created by a multidisciplinary team, designed to be age-appropriate in tone and content, and incorporates feedback from students, (v) active drills are coupled with restorative and trauma-informed approaches to directly address student well-being as standard practice, and (vi) data is tracked about the efficacy and effects of the drills.

MCCPTA will work with MCPS to uphold Maryland’s emphasis and commitment to school safety and will actively work with and encourage the Board of Education to take proactive steps to ensure gun violence prevention is effectively addressed while providing all children in our schools with a safe and welcoming environment to learn.

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<sup>i</sup> The New York Police Department specifically analyzed active shooter incidents from 1966 - 2016. Analysis finds that 79% of active shootings in schools involved shooters who were under 18; and were a current student or recent graduate of the school. New York City Police Department. Active shooters: Recommendation and analysis for risk mitigation. 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> National Threat Assessment Center. (2019) Protecting America’s Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence. U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security.

<sup>iii</sup> *Id.*; United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education. (2002) The final report and findings of the safe school initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States.

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Source of firearms used by students in school-associated violent deaths, United States, 1992-1999. *MMWR Weekly*. 2003; 52(09): 169-172.

<sup>v</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety, American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association. (2019) Keeping Our Schools Safe: A Plan to Stop Mass Shootings and End Gun Violence in American Schools.

<sup>vi</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety. (2019) Not An Accident Index. Analysis includes homes of the shooter, the victim, relatives’ homes, friends’ homes, and “other” homes.

<sup>vii</sup> Johnson RM, Barber C, Azrael D, Clark DE, Hemenway D. Who are the owners of firearms used in adolescent suicides? *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*. 2010;40(6):609-611. Study defined children as under the age of 18.

<sup>viii</sup> Baxley F, Miller M. Parental Misperceptions About Children and Firearms. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2006;160(5):542–547.

<sup>ix</sup> Council on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention Executive Committee. Firearm-related injuries affecting the pediatric population. *American Academy of Pediatrics*. 2012;130(5):e1416-e1423.

<sup>x</sup> *Id.*