

Student Safety

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SEF Position

SEF supports making schools physically and emotionally safe environments for every student.

Background

A wide body of research suggests that children who feel physically or emotionally unsafe at school experience worse academic outcomes and face a higher likelihood of interacting with the criminal justice system during their lifetimes. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the overall safety of a school is directly connected to school-wide test scores, graduation rates, and attendance rates.¹ Following recent tragedies in Florida and Texas, however, student safety conversations have begun to focus more on the presence of firearms in schools rather than on proactive measures to curb and ultimately prevent physical violence and to help students feel emotionally safe in schools. As a product of gun-focused conversations, a number of southern states² have implemented policies that allow school personnel to carry a firearm on campus, even though an increased presence of weapons along with an approach more focused on policing than on nurturing students does little to aid in students' development. The presence of armed adults also leads to higher discipline rates, reduced graduation rates, and reduced college enrollment rates for students of color.³ The proliferation of firearms on school campuses represents an inequitable and ineffective method of improving school safety and demonstrates the need for tangible, long-term, and comprehensive solutions that can address the needs of a whole child.



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Benefits of Increased Student Safety

- Safe schools promote creative learning and social exploration, especially for younger learners. Safer schools can also have a positive impact on graduation rates; can help reduce racial and ethnic disparities in discipline; and can benefit the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all students.
- Safe schools allow students to build strong relationships with school staff and peers while feeling emotionally and identity-secure.
- Safe schools foster mental supports that include social-emotional learning, relationship-building, crisis counseling, and identification of exceptional emotional needs.⁴ Providing students with essential services, including but not limited to those listed, represents a proactive, student-centered approach to school safety.

SEF Recommendations



- Increase access to support services, such as mental health supports, by increasing funding for school-based counseling services, by strengthening existing statewide intervention programs, and by supporting schools in developing partnerships with community organizations.



- Prohibit any person attending, working at, or visiting school campuses from carrying firearms on school grounds.



- Ensure that educators have the knowledge and the skills to create safe and inclusive learning environments, where students feel physically-safe, emotionally-safe, and identity-safe in the classroom and school.



- Ensure that schools and districts with School Resource Officers (SROs) provide SROs with the proper training to make schools physically and emotionally safe for students, including training related to youth development, mediation, and implicit bias.

End Notes

1. National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2019). Safety. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety>.
2. Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. Concealed carry permit holders in Alabama and Missouri can carry a firearm in school.
3. Weisburst, E. (2019, Spring). Patrolling Public Schools: The Impact of Funding for School Police on Student Discipline and Long-term Education Outcomes. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. Vol. 38, Issue 2.
4. National Association of School Psychologists. (2016). School Based Mental Health Services: Improving Student Learning and Well-Being Retrieved from <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/mental-health/school-psychology-and-mental-health/comprehensive-school-based-mental-and-behavioral-health-services-and-school-psychologists>.