



Federal Commission on School Safety Listening Session
Council for Exceptional Children Comments
June 6, 2018

Good morning Secretary DeVos and Commission members. My name is Deborah Ziegler and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Council for Exceptional Children. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the professional association of educators dedicated to advancing the educational success of children and youth with exceptionalities that accomplishes its mission through advocacy, standards, and professional development. Learn more about CEC at www.cec.sped.org. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to the Federal Commission on School Safety.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) strongly opposes arming teachers and other school personnel in schools. Arming teachers has no empirical support and is an ill-conceived and counterproductive idea that has potential for making schools less safe. CEC believes the possession of a firearm in schools should be limited to carefully selected, specially trained school resource officers.

All children and youth are entitled to a safe and positive school climate and environment conducive to learning without fear. Likewise, teachers and school personnel have the right to safe working environments free from violence. Arming teachers is not the answer to ensure the safety of our nation's schools, children, youth, and educators.

This nation must come together to enact comprehensive policies and practices that support school and community safety and protection and commonsense gun violence prevention measures. CEC supports an approach to school and community safety that addresses both prevention and response; is rooted in research and evidence; addresses mental health services for children and youth and confronts the stigma of mental health challenges; and ensures an adequate number of personnel who are trained to address the complex needs of children and youth with mental health challenges.

School safety policies must:

- Use an interdisciplinary approach that reinforces a partnership between education, juvenile justice, mental health, social welfare, law enforcement, and community engagement systems.
- Require implementation of evidence-based practices that address prevention and response while ameliorating the stigma associated with mental health challenges.
- Focus on the impact of mental health challenges on children and youth's social, educational, and employment outcomes.
- Confront and remedy the national shortage of special educators and specialized instructional support personnel who are trained to address the complex needs of children and youth with mental health challenges.

CEC stands ready to continue to advocate for policies and meaningful actions not only to address violence in our nation's schools and communities but to create evidence-based solutions that are rooted in safety, prevention and an interdisciplinary approach.

The nation's children and youth deserve nothing less.

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