



Key points:

- **CEC opposes arming teachers, favors hiring more special educators**
- **Group says debate about arming teachers could stymie teacher recruitment efforts**
- **NCLD requests meeting with DeVos about school safety recommendations**

Special education essential to school safety conversation, groups say

The Council for Exceptional Children said it "strongly opposes" arming teachers and suggested several other measures for keeping schools safe, including hiring more special education teachers and specialized instructional support personnel who can address the various and complex needs of children and youth with mental health challenges.

"We want to take the focus away from the gun issue and look at the job teachers are hired to do -- helping our youth," said CEC President Laurie VanderPloeg, who is also the special education director at the Kent Intermediate School District, a regional educational service agency in Grand Rapids, Mich.

CEC said in a statement that it will continue to advocate for policies that address violence in schools but that those policies must have evidence-based solutions based on prevention and interdisciplinary approaches.

The systems of support must include trauma-informed practices, a systematic process for monitoring and providing interventions, and partnerships between education, juvenile justice, mental health programs, social welfare, law enforcement, and community engagement systems, CEC said.

"We want to be proactive and look at all the resources for the safety of students," VanderPloeg said.

One remedy to school safety CEC is also promoting is the hiring of more special educators. That goal conflicts with the push to train teachers to use guns when there is a threat at their school, VanderPloeg said. Promoting the arming of teachers can cause perspective teachers to reject entering the profession, she said.

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"In the mist of the current shortage, we don't want this issue [on arming teachers] to create more complexity in our effort to recruit and retain teachers," VanderPloeg said.

Several other school groups have spoken out against arming teachers, including the National Education Association and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Decisions about allowing teachers to have guns in schools are made by local and state officials.

Disability advocacy group requests meeting with DeVos

CEC's statement in opposition of arming teachers is a result of a national conversation on school safety after a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., took the lives of 14 students and three faculty members on Feb. 14.

That tragedy led to the creation of a federal Commission on School Safety, which is studying a host of school safety measures and issues, including training programs for arming teachers, youth consumption of violent video games, improvements to student mental health programs, rescinding school discipline guidance, securing school buildings, the integration of federal resources, and more.

U.S. Department of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos chairs the commission, which also includes the leaders of the departments of Health and Human Services, Justice, and Homeland Security. The commission has held one meeting, and DeVos has hosted a school safety listening session. Both were closed to the public.

Some disability rights advocates are concerned that the commission lacks transparency and diverse views. The National Center for Learning Disabilities has sent a letter to DeVos asking to meet with her regarding recommendations being developed by the commission.

"NCLD has a significant interest in the commission's work because these issues disproportionality impact students with disabilities, particularly those who are African American," the NCLD said in the letter signed by organization President Mimi Corcoran. "As more conversations take place surrounding safety, mental health, and discipline, students with disabilities must be appropriately included."

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During an interview with Lindsay Jones, NCLD's vice president and chief policy and advocacy officer, that broadcast April 19 on *live.Understood.org*, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Assistant Secretary Johnny Collett said OSERS is engaged in the conversation about school safety and is making sure the considerations of students with disabilities are part of those discussions.

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