

A Real School Safety Conversation

The latest school shooting in Santa Fe, Texas was the 22nd in the United States this year, an average of one per week, contributing to a school shooting rate that is more than 50 times that of other major industrialized nations. While horrific, in addition to the sorrow and fear, our response is also to hold policymakers at all levels of government accountable for changing this trajectory. While events like school shootings bring school safety into the forefront, every day children and youth in schools or elsewhere face violence and other adverse experiences that, without an appropriate response and support, can affect their emotional and physical responses throughout their lives.

We are glad these tragedies have prompted some meaningful talks on school safety around the country and in Lansing. The recent Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference indicated that state revenues will be up about \$300 million in the next year over earlier projections. There is growing, bi-partisan support to invest some of these funds in efforts to ensure the safety of all children and youth at school in Michigan and we have recommended some strategies for addressing safety that are based in evidence, good practice and lived experience.

So far, most proposals focus primarily on installing metal detectors and other safety devices in school buildings by and neglect systematically addressing research and evidence about what stabilizes young people, what creates better school climates where people feel they are supported and cared for, or what creates safer communities in which kids travel to and from school. We know that students will not feel safer in their schools unless they believe they are listened to and have allies in adults and other students, which student support professionals can help facilitate. Michigan's Children is helping lead the call for investments in effective supports and services for students as a part of any school safety package.

Currently, just one plan positions school support professionals as a key pillar to the school safety solution, the Michigan School Safety Reform Plan. This plan was developed by Michigan's law enforcement community, school leaders, and school mental health professionals as a comprehensive approach to school safety. Items in the plan are a step in the right direction and should be strongly considered by the Legislature and Governor as a worthwhile investment of these revenues. The plan also expands the use of school resource officers, and connects schools and local law enforcement. Training and support for law enforcement, including SROs, to recognize the impacts of trauma and other factors that students deal with daily, methods to develop trusting relationships with students and staff, and knowledge to appropriately refer students for additional help, are necessary additions to ensure the plans' success.

Young people, who have grown more engaged, would also assist in building safer environments at school and in communities. They are willing and able to lend their expertise. We support and urge passage of recommendations for advisory committees or task forces that make room for those expert voices in on-going efforts to address these issues. In addition to building safety, investment in student support services, including for trauma and mental health, and SROs who are trained to identify and support students who are struggling are wise choices in policymaker efforts.

Matt Gillard is the President and CEO of Michigan's Children.