



How the NYS Legislature can help School Districts with School Safety

The School Districts in Monroe County place a high emphasis on student, staff, and campus safety. We collaborate with community agencies to ensure we are able to provide the most comprehensive and appropriate safety measures available given our fiscal constraints. Regular review of policies, procedures, and practices as well as staff development and drills are some of the ways we mitigate emergency situations. To that end, the NYS legislature must consider the following:

<p>Current Mandates for Safety</p>	<p>Schools districts already are mandated to have and annually review, safety plans developed to provide appropriate lockdown and/or evacuation responses to a wide variety of threat conditions. These plans are developed with the involvement of local police, fire and emergency agencies to ensure coordinated and rapid response to any situation. These plans are continually evaluated and tailored to meet the needs of the local district and their community. School districts should be allowed to make all security decisions beyond those currently mandated.</p>
<p>Campus Safety Preparedness</p>	<p>Schools must be available and accessible to the communities that support them as well as the students who attend them. It is impossible to prepare for every eventuality where large groups of people gather both inside and outside of those buildings. However, schools need the financial resources to put systems into place that will allow increased campus security. The state should support regional training efforts that take advantage of local resources.</p>
<p>Gaps that exist in the NYS Penal Law</p>	<p>Currently there is no statute that prevents people from possessing ammunition in any quantity on school property. The legislature needs to develop new penalties for the possession of gun magazines and ammunition brought onto school campuses.</p>
<p>Effective Services for identifying and treating people diagnosed with mental illness.</p>	<p>There are many barriers that currently impede both school districts and the agencies that provide coordinating services from providing early intervention, research-based social emotional learning models, and support services for students and families. The Governor’s Council of Children and Families should study this issue and come forward with recommendations on a model of best practices and resources to resolve this and also allow schools to have the ability, should they choose, to offer on site mental health services and have it funded.</p>
<p>Funding Gaps that undermine social service efforts to help those at risk</p>	<p>Funding for behavioral intervention models has been cut even as the state has highlighted the importance of such programs. Schools need both training and technical assistance in order to consistently and effectively put early intervention systems into place. Developing and maintaining mental health partnerships at a time when social service agency budgets have been decimated is a challenge. Schools have also had to eliminate counselors and school psychologists in order to implement reform measures. Current funding constraints have left areas that support the critical needs of students and their families overwhelmed and less able to be effective.</p>

Supporting Data

Despite the recent frightening events, schools are the safest place children gather. Children are shot and killed or wounded in alarming numbers in our society and only rarely do these tragedies occur in schools.

In 2008-09, 5,740 children and teenagers were killed by guns in our nation, and another 34,387 received nonfatal gun injuries (source: Children's Defense Fund).

Since 2009 New York State has cut state funds for mental health by \$1.6 billion. This has left the support system for persons with mental illness grievously underfunded. Even as we recognize the need for greater access to services, the state has begun closing state residential institutions and transferring people with severe emotional difficulties to non-secure less structured residential facilities where they will have less supervision and reduced services.

The Office of Children and Family Services is currently reducing the placement of juvenile delinquents in secure residential facilities and instead placing juvenile delinquents with severe and persistent emotional disturbances close to home in non-secure settings under section 4047 of Social Services law.

Despite budget reductions, the Governor's own agencies are calling for more social service supports.

The Governor's NYS Education Reform Commission cited the importance of helping social service agencies work with schools to better integrate services and provide supports for needy children.

The Governor's NYS Council on Children and Families promotes the well-being of children and families through interagency coordination. One product of their work is The Children's Plan which asserts that the promotion and maintenance of mental health is a universal concern for all individuals, as it is directly linked to future physical health, well-being, and longevity.

Schools lack the resources to increase their own social service supports for students. In the same period that the state had reduced support for social services, school districts have had to deal with costly new mandates. The new teacher and principal evaluation system, the introduction of the Common Core Curriculum with its need for new classroom materials and staff development, the rising contributions to the state pension system far in excess of inflation, and now, the hardware and Information Technology needs for the upcoming transition to online testing are all costly innovations.

These demands have paralleled constraints on revenues including the expectations created by the property tax levy cap, the Gap Elimination Adjustment, and the tying of total state aid to the average growth in income.