



April 4, 2018

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

We write to applaud your commitment to engaging communities as part of the Federal Commission on School Safety's efforts to keep our nation's students safer, and to offer our *Together for Healthy and Successful Schools* initiative as a resource as you develop your recommendations. Our three nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations are working to help states and communities create safe and supportive learning environments for all students.

Our work is based on research showing that students are most successful and feel safest when schools use comprehensive approaches to address students' needs. By helping schools better support student mental health, physical health, and social and emotional development, we can greatly reduce the risk that students will engage in violent behaviors. Accordingly, our initiative will provide education stakeholders with tools to better understand how to successfully integrate such comprehensive approaches into schools, communities, and policies.

Here are some examples of the work underway:

- An analysis of school health and safety policies—including policies regarding weapons, bullying, and mental health—across all 50 states, Washington, DC, and 480 school districts
- Development—in partnership with two St. Louis, MO, area districts and community partners—of a toolkit to aid school districts in the implementation of a comprehensive approach to school health called *Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child*.
- Deep support to a handful of communities that are focusing on implementing whole child health practices and policies in schools to make school environments safer for young people to learn and develop.

According to your 2017 Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report, our nation's schools have become safer over the last two decades. It is imperative, then, that the Commission's work to prevent school shootings and other forms of violence leverage what has worked in school communities. For example, many states, districts, and schools have worked to replace punitive, discriminatory, and ineffective approaches with evidence-based approaches that equip teachers to prevent violence. For this reason, we are concerned that recent proposals—including school security measures such as school resource officers and the rescinding of guidance on the disparate use of school disciplinary practices—will come at the cost of more comprehensive efforts and may actually increase harm to students.

We would welcome the opportunity to inform the Federal Commission on School Safety about our work and about how best to make our schools healthy, successful, and above all, safe.

Sincerely,

/s/

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CC:

The Honorable Jefferson Sessions, Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice

The Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security