

July 30, 2018

Secretary DeVos, Attorney General Sessions, Secretary Azar, and Secretary Nielsen:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Federal Commission on School Safety's recommendations on how we, as a nation, can do better to keep students safe at school.

We are a diverse community of teacher leaders, principals, and other education leaders who are affiliated with New Leaders, a national nonprofit organization that develops transformational school leaders and advances the policies and practices that allow great leaders to succeed. We serve educators, children, and their families in more than 30 cities across the country, reaching half a million students annually.

We are united by a deep commitment to providing all students, especially students of color and those from low-income families, with an education that prepares them for success in college, career, and citizenship. And we are dedicated to making our schools safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments for teachers and students, alike.

Yet we know that school leaders alone cannot prevent the unspeakable violence that has taken place in classrooms and communities across the country. While there is much we can and must do to support students' social, emotional, and physical well-being (along with their academic success), too many of our students experience the lasting effects of violence, other trauma, and toxic stress.

The federal government is uniquely positioned to advance and enact laws that reduce violence and its effects in and around our schools. Further, we believe the federal government can marshal resources to our schools and communities in ways that enable educators, families, and other community partners to proactively promote students' safety and well-being and identify and intervene with appropriate supports when a student or school community member presents risk factors associated with future violence against self or others.

For years, students, especially those affected by acute or chronic violence, have been calling for changes to policies that, directly or indirectly, enable such dangerous, distressing activity to occur. With support from their teachers, principals, and families, young people continue to lead critical efforts to put a stop to such violence and promote positive practices in their schools and neighborhoods. In the process, they exemplify the strong, moral leadership we know is so crucial for transforming schools, communities, and lives.

We support our nation's students and call on the Federal Commission on School Safety to develop—and ensure effective, timely execution of—school safety recommendations that are based on scientific evidence, informed by the experiences and needs of educators, students, and families, and free from partisan politics.

In particular, we ask that you:

**(1) Message clearly that guns have no place in our schools.** Further, promote research-based, common-sense restrictions on access to guns, including bans on assault-style weapons, high-capacity ammunition clips, and products that modify semi-automatic firearms to enable them to function like automatic firearms.

**(2) Maintain federal guidance and resources on school discipline** designed to reduce exclusionary practices and foster positive social, behavioral, emotional, and academic success for students. Elevate examples of schools and school systems successfully implementing alternative approaches, such as Restorative Justice and Positive Behavior and Intervention and Support (PBIS) practices.

**(3) Provide guidance on creating safe, supportive, inclusive learning environments for all students,** with a particular focus on upholding civil rights laws with respect to immigrant students, LGBTQ students, and other vulnerable children. Such guidance can bolster state and local policies that ensure all students are treated equally and with dignity at school, which are essential for their personal and academic success.

**(4) Call for robust funding of schools** so that all children can have access to outstanding teachers, principals, and other school leaders along with counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, among other necessary supports. Develop guidance on how states, districts, and schools can use existing funding sources (e.g., flexible Title II-A and Title IV-A dollars under the Every Student Succeeds Act) to invest in evidence-based strategies and staffing models that support student safety and well-being.

**(5) Proactively plan to engage with the public during implementation** to understand what's working and what can be improved as the Committee's recommendations are adopted in the months and years ahead. Be sure to gather input at such times and in such locations that a diverse array of educators, students, and families can participate.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Federal Commission on School Safety's recommendations.

Sincerely,

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