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President

#NeverAgain

Parkland, FL. Oxon Hill, MD. Los Angeles, CA. Philadelphia, PA. Benton, KY. Italy, TX. Six communities impacted by school shootings with injuries or deaths. The numbers are sickening. Sixty-three casualties. Twenty people dead—16 students and four adults—just 45 days into 2018 ([Education Week, 2018](#)).

This past fall, one student was killed and three were injured in a school shooting at Freeman High School (Rockford, WA). And now, the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Parkland, FL) has reignited polarizing debates about gun rights and school safety.

These debates often include difficult questions about restricting access to weapons, arming teachers or administrators, increasing police presence in schools, improving access to mental health services and interventions, and investing in additional security measures such as metal detectors or panic button door lock systems and other possible remedies.

We should be careful about applying simple solutions to complex problems. From a policy perspective, as a nation, we tend to address symptoms rather than root causes. As the debates rage and we tinker around the edges of substantive change, more students, staff, families, and communities are impacted in devastating ways. Lives are lost, memories are marred, and families are destroyed. People feel outrage, sorrow, and disbelief.

Enough is enough. Our nation's children deserve better.

As educational leaders charged with the well-being and care of 1.1 million Washington State children, I believe it is time for us to lead on this issue. Regardless of our approach to a solution, we all can agree that the violence perpetuated on too many of our children and adults who serve them is horrific. We all know that “run, hide, fight” in response to an active shooter event still places students and staff at considerable risk. As a father with two children in Vancouver Public Schools, I struggle to get my head and heart around the callousness of it all.

To reduce school shooting violence demands a more comprehensive, whole-system, multi-faceted public policy approach that attends to the following: 1) cultivating supportive learning communities that meet the social-emotional needs of each learner and keep them free from bullying and harassment (e.g., additional school-based counseling services and staffing); 2) increasing access to mental health services and interventions for students and parents with need, especially trauma-impacted children and families; 3) increasing investments in school safety personnel and school-based community policing that focuses on relationships, partnerships, and preventative measures; 4) enacting sensible, more restrictive background checks and waiting periods that prevent mentally ill people, minors, and individuals with violent criminal records from purchasing guns, particularly military assault-style or bump stock-modified weapons; 5) increasing school modernization investments and capital budgets that create safe, secure, and inviting facilities that leverage new and emerging technology to protect our children, staff members, and patrons.

I'm not Pollyanna. I know that any person with a gun intent on wreaking havoc in a school will find a way to do it. However, these reasonable policy steps and investments would reduce the frequency and magnitude of active shooter events in this country.

I want to be clear: I am writing this message as a father, an educator, and a superintendent. We can and must take a stand. This is not an either/or debate; it is a both/and conversation. To polarize these events on the fringe creates paralysis. As we've learned in the 20 years since Columbine, paralysis results in more deaths.

We need reasoned moderation now more than ever. It is past time to find common ground that protects the common good and individual liberties. That's what our Founding Fathers intended for us, and that's what our nation's children deserve.