

Dear Senator Bye and Legislative Committee Members,

My name is Cathy DePorte and I am in my 17th year as an elementary school social worker. Being a school social worker today, like teaching, requires personal and professional skills that are both daunting and infinitely motivating. Our collective responsibility is nothing less than building a community designed to ensure that each child feels welcomed, connected, valued, and heard.

In its recently published guide to preventing school violence, The Safe and Responsive Schools Project at the Indiana Education Policy Center draws our attention to a pivotal fact in this complex endeavor:

"Nationally recognized researchers in the field of school violence have begun to look at what works and what doesn't in deterring school violence. Consistently, programs that effectively cut violence are proactive rather than reactive; involve families, students and the community; and include multiple components that can effectively address the complexity of school disruption and violence. Indeed, preventive programs, such as bullying prevention, peer mediation, or anger management, have far more data available to support their effectiveness than do technology-based fixes such as metal detectors or video surveillance cameras."

One of the bitter realizations to emerge from the violent school tragedies our nation has experienced, is that there can be a point when too late to help a child in distress. This is hard to accept. But, I think before that point comes, before a child locks out hope, plans or impulsively commits a violent, vengeful act, there are many things that can be done.

School social workers are passionately committed to being proactive. We teach children how to define and solve problems, how to understand their own feelings, and how to be empathetic. We teach them how to manage anger so that it doesn't build to the point of exploding or imploding. We lead peer mediation programs, which enable children to practice conflict resolution skills by learning how to listen and to guide without judging. We are at the forefront of assessing school climate and developing effective ways to identify and address bullying. We collaborate with our administrators to handle discipline with justice and compassion. We work with families, by listening to their concerns, their questions, their aspirations for their children, and by providing resources: community programs and activities, mentors, counselors, and books.

In order to create a safe environment (both in our schools and larger communities), to adequately address mental health concerns, and to recognize the potential for violence, we absolutely need a village. We need hundreds and thousands of villages. School social workers are trained to build communities. We come with tools, with experience in the trenches, and with a deep capacity to give. We know what is at stake. The well being of our children. Our future. We have no greater task.

Respectfully submitted,

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