



January 30, 2013

Members of the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety

As the largest and oldest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States, the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA) and in Connecticut, the Connecticut Parent Teacher Student Association (CT PTSA) with our legacy of influencing federal and state policy to protect the education, health and overall well-being of children have made an indelible impact on the lives of millions of children and families. Since our inception, PTA has championed every child and worked to address societal ills such as child labor, childhood diseases and the unfair and punitive treatment of children in the justice system.

CT PTSA provides parents and families with a powerful voice to speak on behalf of every child and the best tools to help their children be safe, healthy and successful in school and in life. CT PTSA advocates for the opportunity for all children to grow and achieve success through quality education, ensuring that all children reach their highest potential in a safe and nurturing environment.

CT PTSA believes that students in school are vulnerable to the pressures and problems of the society in which they are nurtured. Families need information, assistance, and support in raising children in a rapidly changing society. The failure to identify learning problems and difficulties experienced by young children may result in problems of greater magnitude and severity as they mature. The responsibility for providing appropriate educational programs, counseling, and coordinating services lies with state and local agencies and we encourage the development of a comprehensive guidance counseling plan which provides services for all children and has the capacity to counsel as well as just identify. Expanded counseling staff and services in our schools would provide much needed support for all students.

CT PTSA alongside the National PTA has long been committed to providing improved mental health programs and services to children and youth. All children and youth have the right to mental health treatment. Each community needs to make available mental health programs and services which will meet the needs of all children and youth. Sound mental health is essential to constructive family life and personal happiness and to the acceptance of civic responsibility. Conditions that cause children and youth to be at risk must be recognized, reduced, and eliminated.

CT PTSA also believes school safety is a crucial component of effective learning and a core tenet of its principles and values. The CT PTSA believes that the safety of children and faculty in all school settings is a fundamental right and has made it the utmost priority for our programmatic and advocacy work. The CT PTSA supports the inclusion of safety education in the curriculum at all levels of public schools and will advocate ensuring all schools are safe learning environments.

CT PTSA believes bullying in schools is a pervasive problem that negatively impacts school safety and infringes on the rights of students to learn in a safe environment without fear. According to PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, nearly one-third of all school-aged children are bullied each year upward of 13 million. Both bullying other children and being the target of bullies are considered risk factors for youth violence by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Bullies whose behavior goes unchallenged risk ending up as violent adults, engaging in domestic violence and future child abuse. Promoting a positive school climate has been shown to reduce these behaviors and enhanced the learning environment.

CT PTSA recommends:

Involve youth, parents, teachers and school professionals in the development of community-wide strategies to prevent bullying and promote a positive school climate.

Encourage district wide bullying prevention and positive school climate programs that include training of teachers, parents, students and school personnel to enforce school rules and policies.

CT PTSA supports the Second Amendment and recognizes the right to bear arms. CT PTSA believes that every attempt must be made to prevent and reduce violence in our schools, especially incidents involving the use of firearms. Families, educators, community members and government must prioritize this issue to ensure a safe learning environment for all students. CT PTSA believes that in order to achieve an effective school climate, schools must be completely gun-free.

CT PTSA recommends:

Promote programming to improve public awareness and education on firearm safety.

Require, prior to purchasing a firearm, a waiting period and background check.

Ban large-capacity ammunition feeding devices capable of accepting more than 10 rounds.

Ban the sale and possession of military-style assault weapons.

CT PTSA further believes that every attempt must be made to enhance school safety and reduce violence of any kind ranging from bullying in the schools to incidents involving the use of firearms. CT PTSA also recognizes the importance of parent involvement and representation on local and statewide committees addressing these issues. The CT PTSA believes parents should be represented in the decision-making process and in the development and implementation of school policies, including crisis response plans.

School safety is a crucial component of effective learning and a core tenet of the CT PTSA. The CT PTSA recognizes the importance of a safe learning environment and defines an effective school's climate as one with settings that are safe and encourage the highest level of student learning and achievement. In order to achieve optimal levels of learning, schools must have a gun-free environment and a positive school climate.

CT PTSA supports state efforts to protect children and youth and looks forward to working with the state legislature and other governmental bodies and committees to enact and implement reasonable school safety and gun violence prevention measures. This also includes the consideration of legislative solutions that provide safety training and comprehensive mental health services while keeping schools completely free from gun violence.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James L. Accomando". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

James Accomando
President, Connecticut Parent Teacher Student Association.