

Dear Members of the Newtown Task Force,

I am writing as a member of the Newtown community, a parent and a lifelong educator. I have two children of my own, one who experienced extreme mental health issues while he was a student in the Newtown Public Schools. I am concerned about mental health and its link to school safety.

As a parent of a child who struggled significantly while he was a student in Newtown, I have to say that I am saddened by the testimony of Jennifer Haskel. I faced horrific resistance to my pleas for help while he was a student in Newtown (2002, and 2005-2011) that no parent of a child should ever have to endure, especially a parent who has a child who is struggling emotionally.

When I heard of the events of Sandy Hook, my heart sank. My first reaction when I heard there was a shooting was, "I hope this is not a special ed thing." This is because of the horrors I experienced as a parent and of the stories I listened to from other parents experiencing similar difficulties.

Former State Representative Chris Lyddy and State Representative DebraLee Hovey attempted to help by asking the state to investigate, but the state refused. I personally attempted to use the due process system twice and found it to be incredibly expensive, time consuming and unhelpful.

There needs to be ways that school districts are held accountable for their actions towards the neediest of students. Too often the excuse is "FERPA" and there is no way for the public to seek help even from the state when things are really bad.

I lie awake at night thinking this horrible tragedy could have been prevented. Adam Lanza was a student at Sandy Hook School. He started there in the first grade. It can't be a coincidence that he targeted first graders. Is this where his own personal horror began?

It was where my son's personal horror began- though his was at Hawley. I am grateful that I have found a way to remove my child from the Newtown Public Schools at my own expense. When I did so, he did a 180 degree turnaround in one week. Teachers at his new school and students have approached me asking me why my son is even at the school because they don't see that he has issues. Could it be that my son's issues were created by the environment of the Newtown Public Schools? I can't help but think that now that we are looking back on his journey.

My more urgent question is How many other Adam Lanza's are there? I approached the superintendent in June 2009 with concerns about the high rate of drop out of special education students in Newtown. I asked what has happened to these students. What I didn't know at the time was that Adam Lanza was one of these students.

Please help ensure that when communities are experiencing difficulties that their voices are heard. My only hope is that only good can come from this tragedy. Perhaps Newtown can become a model district for proactively monitoring and addressing the well-being of students. That is my dream. My only question is: How can I help?

Sincerely,

Laura Main
42 The Old Road
Newtown, CT