

SCHOOL SAFETY WORKING GROUP

Minutes of the 4th Meeting of the 2018 Interim

August 13, 2018

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 4th meeting of the School Safety Working Group (SSWG) was held on Monday, August 13, 2018, at 2:45 PM, in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Max Wise, Co-chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Legislative Members: Senator Max Wise, Co-Chair; Senators Alice Forgy Kerr, and Johnny Ray Turner; Representatives John Blanton, George Brown Jr, and Brandon Reed.

Ex-Officio Members and Consultants: Dr. Joe Bargione, Ms. Nasim Mohammadzadeh, Commissioner Alex Payne, Dr. Jon Akers, and Major General Jerry Humble.

Guests: Christina Weeter, KDE; Cathy Hobart, Mom's Demand Action; and Stacey Russell and Linda Tyree, KSCA.

LRC Staff: Yvette Perry, Christal White, and Lauren Busch.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion from Representative Reed and a second from Senator Turner, the minutes of the July 9, 2018 meeting were approved by voice vote.

Senator Wise announced the SSWG will hear from a panel of students, teachers, and counselors from various schools throughout Kentucky.

Testimony from Students, Teachers, and School Counselors

STUDENTS

Student representatives were Cameron Wyatt, Corbin Independent High School; Haven Wolfe, Pendleton County High School; Josh Griffin, Russell High School; Zoe Carby and Nathaniel Morgan, Fairdale High School; Craig Hensley, Whitley County High School; and Nasim Mohammadzadeh, Paul Laurence Dunbar High School and a member of the SSWG.

Ms. Wolfe expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of the work group. She said schools have been preparing students, staff, and teachers for decades on what to

do in the event of a natural disaster, continually fine tuning the plan. With random gun violence becoming unpredictable and devastating in schools across Kentucky, it is vitally important for work groups such as the SSWG to continue to look for meaningful solutions, keep an open dialogue, and exchange ideas to help Kentucky in protecting our students, our future.

Mr. Griffith said Russell High School's administration talks frequently with the local police department to assess weak spots in the school. Specifically, Russell High School has ground level windows and has implemented measures to prevent visibility from the outside into classrooms. The school has also changed the manner in which they conduct fire and lockdown drills in order to better handle those situations. He questioned the impact of banning one type of weapon as an appropriate measure since another type of weapon could then be used.

Ms. Carby, a senior at Fairdale High School, said the presence of police officers who build trusting relationships with students will ensure important communication when dangerous situations are present.

Ms. Mohammadzadeh, a junior at Dunbar, said it is not only important to have secure and defensive measures, but also important to implement measures that target the softer side of schools. She said more legislation is needed to keep guns out of the wrong hands and at the same time to get to the core of the issue. Ms. Mohammadzadeh said while having metal detectors is a short-term solution, a bigger issue relates to mental health and a shortage of school counselors. Students must have an outlet with a trusted adult within the school.

Mr. Morgan is enrolled in the law enforcement program at Fairdale High School, and provides training in school shootings and mass casualties. Fairdale profiles students to determine if there is an issue. The program has a School Resource Officer (SRO) with whom the students build trust, a crucial element in school safety. He said guns are becoming a huge issue and a strategic evacuation plan should be implemented to keep staff and students safe.

Cameron Wyatt, a senior, said for the past two years Corbin High School had random bag checks as students arrived, which greatly improved the school safety atmosphere. This year they did away with backpacks entirely in an effort to increase school safety. The school also waits five seconds after the fire alarm has sounded to confirm it is legitimate and not someone attempting to cause disaster. In response to a question from Senator Wise, Cameron said that because students arrive during a 45-minute span, the inspections of backpacks did not create a delay of starting classes except for a couple of times, but never more than a few minutes.

Craig Hensley said Whitley County High School (WCHS) has a student population of over 1,100 and metal detectors and bag checks can become problematic in creating efficient ways to secure the facility. Because the school was originally built to accommodate 600-700 students, WCHS found it was a difficult task to organize students. Mr. Hensley said a selected pathway for students to exit in an organized and efficient manner is extremely important. WCHS increased supervision with teachers throughout the school after receiving a threat last year. In response to a question by Senator Wise, Mr. Hensley said he and other students observe student character traits and report to staff if anything seems amiss. They also meet with student government leaders and student representatives were responsible for keeping their peers apprised.

In response to Dr. Bargione's question regarding the sources of strength program, Mr. Hensley said WCHS has no students on the school safety committee but agreed representation is needed. Ms. Wolfe said she has contributed suggestions to the school safety committee, but is not part of the actual board.

Dr. Bargione suggested having a student safety work group to identify issues in rural vs. urban climates. In response to his question, Ms. Mohammadzadeh said administrators and parents should know that student's opinions are as equal as theirs.

In response to a question by Senator Kerr, the students agreed that if an unsecured gun owned by an adult was used in a school shooting, the adult should bear some liability and be held accountable, but the penalties should not be criminal. Students agreed that the ultimate fault should be on the person who committed the offense and focus should be placed on how shootings can be prevented. The group of students agreed guns should be kept in safe places and believe everyone should realize the danger of having loaded weapons accessible to underage students, students with mental health issues, or those who have not had fire-arm training. In response to Senator Kerr's question, the students said local news outlets or town magazines are the best way to communicate safe gun storage.

In response to a question by Representative Reed, the students acknowledged that none of their schools participate in a sources of strength program. Representative Reed suggested lobbying school administrators to add this powerful program, which has made a positive difference in Trigg County.

Responding to a question by Dr. Akers, Ms. Mohammadzadeh said it is important that every student has at least one teacher to whom they can talk, whether about issues at home, mental health, or a threat by another student. Ms. Wolfe said Pendleton County uses a tip hotline. In response to Dr. Akers' question, Ms. Mohammadzadeh said Paul Dunbar High School has an on-line tip hotline on their webpage that is very efficient and completely anonymous. Another avenue is a tip drop box.

Responding to a question by Representative Brown, Mr. Griffin said he is unaware of the cost of adding new windows which allow students to see outside but prevent outsiders from seeing in. Representative Brown said with budget cuts the cost needs to be considered but it is critical that our most valuable resources, our children, are protected.

In response to a question by Representative Blanton, Mr. Morgan said teachers should be allowed to carry firearms to neutralize a threat by providing quick reaction and keeping students safe. Mr. Griffith said only teachers with a conceal-carry permit should be armed and any firearms on the premises must be tracked. Ms. Mohammadzadeh said teachers should not be forced to carry a firearm, but should be allowed if they are willing. Mr. Hensley said arming teachers would have to be implemented with careful thought and planning and agrees if teachers are willing, they should be allowed to be armed but only after extensive training. Mr. Wyatt said there should be a large focus on informing the public that teachers in the local schools are armed. Representative Blanton expressed concern with arming teachers due to safety, giving students and staff a false sense of security, and accidental discharges. He is concerned about how teachers would respond and react in dangerous situations without extensive training.

In response to a question by Dr. Bargione, all students know at least one other student attending their school that has had issues with mental health or has had suicidal thoughts. Ms. Mohammadzadeh said resources are available but are not always utilized. Mr. Hensley said the loss of a student just two days prior shows the importance of students being comfortable with counselors and teachers.

In closing, Mr. Morgan said an SRO provides a high level of security. All panelists said they have at least one SRO in their schools. Ms. Mohammadzadeh said to attain a safe society in which students can learn, the climate must be welcoming and students must feel safe.

TEACHERS

Representing teachers were Jennifer Stone and Heather Evans, Bardstown Independent; Mike Farley, Corbin Independent High School; and Steve Sears of Whitley County High School.

Ms. Evans, a special education teacher certified in learning and behavioral disabilities, has seen a major increase in severe behaviors. Research shows that social development instruction increases academics and decreases behaviors. She said universal screeners could be used to conduct a small survey that will enable teachers to identify students who internalize their feelings and need counseling. She said parents need to be held accountable for student behaviors, as many teachers are teaching manners in school that are not being taught at home. Ms. Evans believes arming teachers is very dangerous.

Ms. Stone said holding children accountable is crucial and when parents deny their child has issues, they don't seek the help necessary. It is a teacher's responsibility to address safety concerns both inside and outside of the school through monitoring, counseling, and follow-up. Whether a child is experiencing trauma from being in a single parent home, being abused, or not being fed, teachers must pay attention and be proactive rather than reactive.

Mr. Sears, ROTC instructor and an Army retiree, said discipline incidents in Whitley County decreased from 1,250 students in 2014 to just under 400 in 2017. He attributes the decrease to teacher presence, supervision, and passive interrogation. The principals and teachers maintain positive student interaction and climate and are cognizant of possible indicators that may cause concern. He said staff and principal communication is an important component when an indicator is noticed.

Mr. Farley, ROTC instructor, said Corbin Independent conducts random backpack checks at a random time. With the help of local business owners, they secured funds to add protective coverings on all outside windows. He said student and teacher relationships and discipline is essential. Phone use is banned at Corbin High School which encourages students to engage with each other personally. Mr. Farley said all students do not have a good home life.

Ms. Stone said there is a great need for mental hospitals for young children so they can be treated at an early age, as many five, six, and seven-year old children have already been diagnosed with mental issues.

Senator Kerr said 80 percent of the nation's school shootings involved an unsecured gun owned by an adult in the family. In response to a question by Senator Kerr, Ms. Stone said adults should be held legally responsible when unsecured guns are used in a school shooting. She said all guns should be protected and locked away. Ms. Evans asked if a student stole a family vehicle and ran into a crowd and killed people if the parents would be held responsible. Mr. Sears said he is not only a responsible gun owner but is also responsible for prescription medication, a riding lawn mower, and vehicles. He believes it comes down to gun safety education in school. Mr. Farley said he is a hunter and gun owner but ensures his weapons are secure. He feels if a child steals a weapon the parents should not be held liable, but agrees it is a tough call.

Responding to Senator Wise's question, Mr. Farley said he would have to think very seriously about wanting to carry a firearm in school, even with his extensive training, due to concerns about accidental discharges. He has proposed the city increase the presence of SROs from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., since most school shootings happen during that time. Mr. Sears said not everyone with a conceal carry permit needs to have a gun. He agrees that more highly trained SROs are needed. Ms. Stone said Bardstown Independent grades K through 2 do not have an SRO. She is opposed to carrying a firearm.

In response to a question by Senator Wise, Ms. Stone said an officer who was conducting law enforcement training stated he did not agree with teachers carrying weapons. Whitley and Corbin have also received training. Mr. Farley said students must have the foresight to fight back or they become sitting targets.

Representative Brown said even the best trained marksmen are successful only 12 percent of the time in an active shooting engagement, which means an 88 percent chance that an innocent child could be shot. Responding to a question by Representative Brown, Mr. Farley said many parents in Eastern Kentucky are not being raised by biological parents that care for, love, support, and provide for them. He said a majority of students are being influenced by cell phones without face to face interaction, bullying, and inappropriate pictures. Emergencies were a parental concern if active phones were not allowed. Whitley County requires the students to power all cell phones off upon arrival but in the case of an emergency they would have if needed. A student caught with their phone powered on faces consequences which include visits to the school by guardian, staying after school, or expulsion.

In response to a question by Ms. Mohammadzadeh, Mr. Sears said Whitley County has a group of students that have a normal, solid family while a mix of other students have absent parents. He said he and Mr. Farley take on the role of a father figure when teaching life lessons. Mr. Farley agreed that some parents do not want children to be held accountable, even when video camera proof clearly details the wrongdoing. Mr. Sears said many children are being raised by a grandparent and they may not have the energy to deal with such issues. Mr. Farley added that phone or computer technology is sometimes over the grandparents' heads.

Responding to a question by Dr. Bargione, Mr. Farley said struggling families are offered Advise, Instruct, and Mentor (AIM), a 15-minute daily program relating to grades and relationships. Mentors work on establishing relationships based on family backgrounds. Students are mentored through these relationships that last the entire four years of high school. Mr. Sears added that relationships can be built by participating in a sports program, drama, band, ROTC or other extra-curricular activities. Ms. Evans said she started a behavior program three years ago that required students to check in with their mentor when they arrive at school and also check out with their mentor at the end of the day. This system along with a universal screening system helped identify target behavior in students who may otherwise not be a point of focus.

Mr. Farley said kids are mentally broken without parental relationships and are not being taught work ethic. He said every child needs love, discipline, and to know their worth.

Representative Brown said we are five generations out in terms of discipline, values, and morals with children. His hope is for society to begin having discussions and start planting these characteristics in children again.

COUNSELORS

The panel of counselors was comprised of Linda Tyree, Butler County; Nancy Wyatt, Corbin Independent High School; Al Ysidro, Whitley County High School; and Stacey Russell, Camp Ernst Middle School, Boone County.

Ms. Tyree is an elementary school counselor with 30 years of education experience and current President of the Kentucky School Council Association (KSCA).

Ms. Russell, a middle school counselor, has 12 years of education experience and is currently serving as past president of the KSCA and the Director of Advocacy.

Mr. Ysidro, an assistant principal, has had 24 years in education and has been an assistant principal for 13 years.

Ms. Tyree said now is the time to look at how mental health can be supported in schools and the vital role school counselors could provide.

Education uses a multi-tiered system of supports. In Tier 1, the universal component, KSCA measures if student needs are being met. In Tier 2 and Tier 3, if students are not showing improvement, KSCA must determine how those needs can be met. School counselors would like to see social and emotional learning as their primary responsibility; however, they realize they may also be required to do scheduling, test administration, ARC meetings, and various other roles.

While counselors provide social and emotional learning, mental health support, and soft skills, building relationships with students is vital for success. The universal component is preventative and proactive.

KSCA recommends school counselors use a comprehensive school counseling model, such as the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) model used by Butler County. Although Kentucky's student-counselor ratio is one counselor for every 452 students, the ideal ratio is one counselor for every 250 students. KSCA would like to see a lower ratio but realize it is a higher priority to see someone in every building whose primary responsibility is mental health.

As a counselor, Ms. Tyree performs informal screenings to determine which students need to be in a small group, areas that need to be pinpointed, or services needed.

School counselors use a comprehensive school counseling model, mental health screeners, positive behavior intervention systems (PBIS), youth mental health first aid, and sources of strength. PBIS provides an avenue to pinpoint a student's strengths.

While students are required to provide schools with proof of vision, dental, hearing, and health screenings, the counselors said the need for mental health screening is crucial. Many schools are reluctant to perform mental health screenings because once problem areas are pinpointed, the school must show what is being done to address them. Ms. Tyree said counselors need support in finding screeners to be used on an on-going basis. She said the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) report is helpful for counselors to gain insight into potential issues.

In the 2018 Regular Session of the General Assembly, Senator Coursey introduced a trauma-informed bill which KSCA backed. They wanted a bill mandating that every school have trauma training, especially after reviewing ten areas and having found students with several ACES. Ms. Tyree said when looking at the cumulative effect, the child is seen through a totally different lens. One concern with the bill was that while it mentioned Tiers 2 and 3 meeting the mental health needs for students who had been identified, it did not mention the universal component of how they are identified.

Ms. Tyree presents gun control to all elementary students as part of the universal component education that every student receives. Once the universal component is presented to 100 percent of the students, assessments take place to determine in which areas the students need more support. Tier 2, secondary supports, identifies at-risk students who will be granted small group counseling, check-in/check-out system, and mentoring. This group is around ten percent of a school's population.

Tier 3 includes about five percent of the school population and helps identify students who need more help even after Tier 2 interventions. Ms. Tyree said partnering with school psychologists and outside agency therapists is crucial for mental health professionals to review the targeted group. When focus is placed on school safety and mental health, students with mental health issues must be identified. Tier 3 students are ones that have already been identified.

Ms. Tyree said she uses Solution Focused Brief Counseling in school settings since she does not have the resources, time, or training to provide mental health services beyond this. She said a mental health professionals can then step in as contractors through the school system or as outside providers, those referrals must be accompanied by data to support the request.

Ms. Wyatt said the entire school staff should make connections with students to create a positive school climate. Every student needs the influence of a positive adult relationship and feel comfortable to express concerns about school or personal safety.

Corbin High School has implemented an Advise, Instruct, and Mentor (AIM) program, which is a homeroom lasting all four years of high school. This allows the teachers to see the student on a daily basis from year to year and become aware of any changes, including mental health, home life changes, academics, and attendance.

The Youth Mental Health First Aid Program provides help for distressed students until a school counselor or a mental health counselor can become involved. All staff are trained to provide this care and should be alert to signs of distressed students.

Ms. Wyatt suggested creating a safe, supportive, and encouraging school climate where students feel loved, cared about, and feel like they can do their best. Programs such as Sources of Strength help look at school climate and how the mental health needs of the students are being met.

Ms. Russell said school counselors can contribute to school safety if they are utilized in a manner conducive to their training. Research shows schools can expect to see a decrease in discipline and suspension rates, fewer students being bullied or teased, and an increase in coping skills if schools are using a comprehensive school counseling program, reviewing the data, and designing interventions to support those deficiencies. If students are better prepared to handle the emotional stressors of life and can deal with negative emotions in a positive and healthy way, students will feel safer at school.

Ms. Russell said her previous job had a ratio of one counselor to 550 students, creating a difficult task to make meaningful connections with students while also doing additional tasks required.

For several years, the Colorado Department of Education partnered with their General Assembly to create a full counseling core by awarding school grants which would increase the number of school counselors in all buildings from elementary to high school. This program helped prevent 1,000 students from dropping out and saved the tax payers an estimated \$319 million in lost taxes, incarceration, welfare, and health care, equating to \$20 in savings of taxpayer money for every \$1 spent on a school counselor.

Ms. Russell said the heart of school safety is creating relationships and a safe environment for students, and now a way needs to be figured out to allow them to work more toward this goal.

Responding to a question by Senator Kerr, Mr. Sears said although there may be liability issues, he does not agree with holding a parent criminally negligent if their child steals their unsecured weapon.

In response to a question from Senator Kerr, Ms. Tyree said training must be preventive and proactive. The American School Counselors Association (ASCA) recommends 80 percent of a counselor's day should be with students and 20 percent performing administrative duties. She said those numbers have been reversed for the last few years in her position and counselors often stay late to complete paperwork so they have more time with students during the day. Ms. Tyree said she would feel responsible if she did not teach the skills students need to be successful, including gun safety.

Senator Wise referred to Ms. Tyree's comment about a House Bill that did not make it through last session which lacked the universal component. Ms. Tyree said Representative Carney will be looking at a comprehensive school safety bill, which will hopefully include a mental health component and school counselors.

In response to a question from Mr. Payne, Ms. Tyree said counselors are most likely spending about 75 percent of their time on administrative duties which prevents them from being with students, especially at the middle and high school levels. Ms. Tyree said if a day is 100 percent spent with students, it is most likely a reactive day. Counselors never know what is in store on a given day, such as what happened the night before or what happened before school that could affect their day. Ms. Russell said some schools are reassigning administrative duties to allow counselors more time with students. Ms. Tyree reiterated research shows providing social and emotional learning interventions create academic and behavioral gains.

Senator Wise announced the next meeting of the SSWG will be held in Glasgow at Barren County Area Technology Center on Monday, September 10, 2018.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.