



NURTURING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Policy Recommendation for Legislators:

Implementing Effective Programs to Reduce School Violence

Policy White Paper

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A collaborative research report prepared by We Oppose Violence Everywhere Now (WOVEN) and Creative Response to Conflict (CRC), two 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations based in New York.

The contents of this document do not represent an endorsement from any individual member of the *We Oppose Violence Everywhere Now*, Inc. and *Creative Response to Conflict* team or any school districts and partners associated with the NICE program. For more information about any of the recommendations or programs contained in this document, please contact us at:

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I. Executive Summary

Sixty years ago, a teacher's primary focus and concern was helping students acquire knowledge, competencies, and relevant educational values to help support a student's success in their academics and to prepare them for life. Disciplinary issues involved relatively minor offenses that could easily be adjusted by school staff members and parents. These minor offenses included running in halls, talking back to authority, dress code violations, and chewing gum (Franklin, 2016). This is a stark contrast from today's dark reality of school violence.

In the current school climate, teachers are dealing with far more serious and life-threatening transgressions. Educators and students are enduring incidents of physical and verbal violence, mental health issues, and in some schools, drug abuse, robbery, assault, and murder(odd word – perhaps death). The result is that teachers spend an excessive amount of time and energy managing classroom conflicts more than they do on actually teaching the curriculum.

Behavioral issues that interfere with teaching and learning have notably worsened, according to an astonishing 62% of teachers who have been teaching in the same school for five or more years. The results were reported in “Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on the Teaching Profession,” or italic depending on style guide. published in 2012. The report, released by *Scholastic* and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, reveals the increased level of behavioral problems has been seen across grade levels: 68% of elementary teachers, 64% of middle school teachers, and 53% of high school teachers attest to the same. The problems affect the student's emotional and academic success and the entire classroom. Over 50% of the teachers surveyed said they wish they could spend less time on discipline issue throughout the day.

In addition to behavioral disruptions, as of May 2018, there have been a total of 23 school shootings where someone was hurt or killed, which averages out to more than one school

shooting per week (Admed & Walker, 2018). This makes this year the deadliest and most violent year of school violence in the history of the United States. As school violence increases, legislative pressure for gun control policies to ensure safe schools has dramatically increased. With legislators in an ideological gridlock over gun control, schools are struggling to find alternative solutions to best protect their school community.

This white paper will offer the following alternative approaches to:

- 1) Examine violence in society and how it affects school-aged children to better understand the need for school-based violence prevention programs. **Here I think it would be best to focus on the cause of violence That is mental health and other issues? There is a difference between the affect of violence on children and what caused the original violence.**
- 2) An overview of the NICE program, an innovative program that integrates conflict resolution with social emotional learning techniques to create a comprehensive violence prevention program, with findings being observed by researchers at Columbia University.
- 3) Policy recommendations for Federal, state and locally based initiatives to implement a nationwide model for teachers to help create a safe school environment.

II. Background and Problem Statement

Youth Violence in the United States

It's not your imagination; incidents of school violence are on the rise. By mid-year 2018 halfway there were more student injuries and deaths than all of 2017 and 2018 is on track to significantly surpass 2017 in terms of overall fatal school incidents. The National League of Cities reports that 33% of their member cities had a significant increase in school violence, where a student was killed or seriously injured, and that school violence increased 55% in large cities and 41% in cities of 100,000 or more. In addition, they report that 10% of teachers and nearly one-fourth of students in public schools reported that they have been the victim of a violent offense in school.

Aside from violence on school campuses around the country, there has been reported offenses of violence among young people outside of school. As for adolescent homicide rates, the firearm-related death rate fluctuated slightly between 2000 and 2006, before decreasing to 10 deaths per 100,000 in 2014 (Child Trends, 2015). In 2016, law enforcement agencies in the U.S. made an estimated 856,130 arrests of persons under age 18, 58% less than the number of arrests in 2017 (OJJDP, 2017). Males between the ages of 15-19 are six times more likely to be victims of homicide and eight times more likely to be involved in a gun-related death than females of the same age (Child Trends, 2015).

School Shooting in U.S. Schools

According to data from the Gun Violence Archive, a non-profit that provides free online public access to accurate information about gun-related violence, showed that school shooting deaths and injuries of students in grades K-12 are up compared to 2017. In all of 2017, there were 44 shootings in elementary and secondary schools, resulting in 25 deaths and 60 injuries. So far in 2018, school shootings have resulted in 40 deaths and 66 injuries and are on pace to nearly double the numbers of school shootings and deaths reported. A recent nationwide study of mass shootings from 2009 to 2016 revealed that **in at least 42% of those incidents, there is documentation that the attacker exhibited dangerous warning signs before the shooting** (*Everytown For Gun Safety, 2017*)

In comparison to other developed nations, the United States is an outlier with unusually high rates of violence. According to a study by the United Nations, the United States has nearly six times the gun homicide rate of Canada, more than seven times that of Sweden, and nearly 16 times that of Germany (United Nations, 2012). Death due to gun-inflicted wounds are the primary reason why America has a much higher overall homicide rate (Lopez, 2018). According to a CNN article published in 2017, “The US makes up less than 5% of the world’s population, but holds 31% of global mass shooters.”

Types of Violence: Examining Incidents and Effects of Bullying

In recent years, there has been an increase of violent behavior as a result of bullying. Approximately 20.8% students report being bullied (National Center for Educational Statistics,

2016). For students between the ages of 12-18 years of age, 35% of students reported being bullied and 15% reported incidents of cyberbullying (Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014). Of the students who endured bullying at school, approximately 33% of students reported being bullied at least once or twice a month during the school year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Of those students who reported being bullied, 13% were made fun of, called names, or insulted; 12% were the subject of rumors; 5% were pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on; and 5% were excluded from activities on purpose (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016).

Percentage number of Students Reporting Incidents of Bullying In The United States

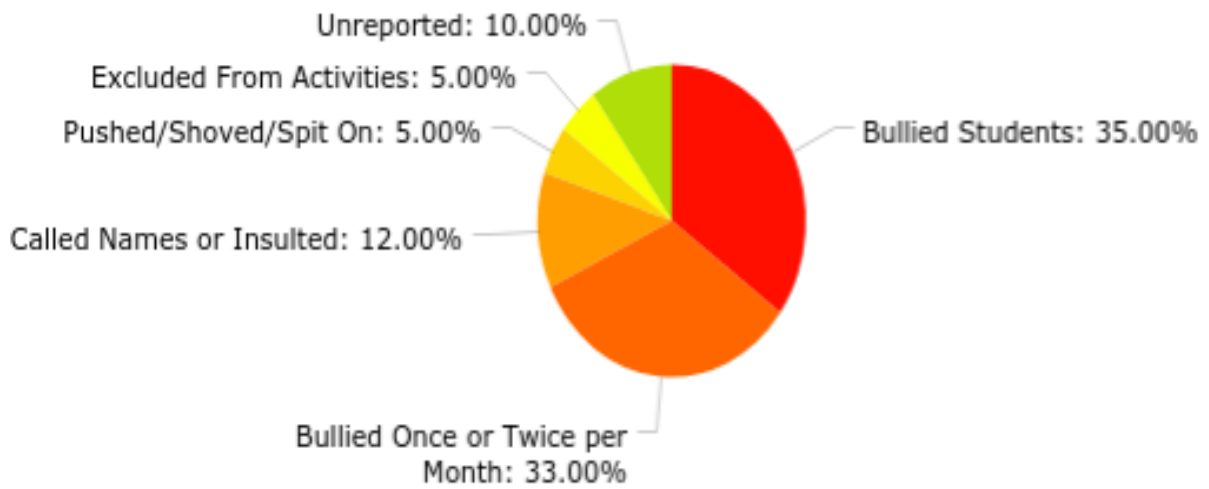


Chart Source: National Center for Education Statistic, 2016 (Created by: WOVEN)

More female students report incidents of bullying at school in comparison to male students, at a rate of 23% to 19%. In contrast, a higher percentage of male students report being physically bullied and threatened with violent acts of harm (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). A total of 43% of bullied students report notifying an adult at school about the incident; however, studies show that adults often fail to properly rectify the issue.

Effects of Bullying

Students who experience bullying are at greater risk to succumb to poor school adjustment, sleep difficulties, anxiety, and depression (Center for Disease Control, 2015). Students who are both targets of bullying and engage in bullying behavior are at greater risk for both mental health and behavior problems (Center for Disease Control, 2015).

Bullied students report that bullying has a negative effect on how they feel about themselves (19%), and an adverse effect on their relationships with friends and family and their confidence in completing their school work (14%). This is in addition to having negative effects on their physical health (9%) (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Bullied students are twice as likely as non-bullied students to experience negative health effects such as headaches and stomach pains (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013). Students who blame themselves for the abuse and determine that they deserved to be bullied are more likely to face negative outcomes, such as depression, extended victimization, and difficulties with adjusting to school environments (Perren, Ettakal, & Ladd, 2013; Shelley & Craig, 2010). The percentages of youth who have experienced cyberbullying at some point in their life have nearly doubled (18% to 34%) from 2007-2016 (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016).

Bullying: Students w/ Disabilities, Students of Color, & LGBTQ Students

Reports of incidents of bullying are some of the most prevalent among students with behavioral, emotional, mental health, and intellectual disorders. Approximately 35.3% of students with behavioral and emotional disorders, 33.9% of students with autism, 24.3% of students with intellectual disabilities, 20.8% of students with health impairments, and 19% of students with specific learning disabilities face the highest levels of bullying victimization (Rose et al., 2012). More specifically, students with learning disabilities, autism, emotional-behavior disorders, mental health disorders, and speech or language impairments report greater rates of bullying victimization in comparison to their peers without disabilities. Additionally, their victimization occurs for a much longer period of time and on a more consistent basis in comparison to their peers (Rose & Gage, 2017).

Furthermore, students with disabilities were more concerned about school safety and being injured, harassed, or murdered by other peers compared to students without a disability (Saylor & Leach, 2009). When reporting bullying among students enrolled in special education programs, special education students were more likely to be discouraged from reporting their abuse to authority. (Davis & Nixon, 2010)

In regard to race, approximately 25% of African-American students, 22% of Caucasian students, 17% of Hispanic students, and 9% of Asian students report being bullied at school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). More than one third of adolescents report school bullying as a result of cultural intolerance, biases, and discrimination (Russell, Sinclair, Poteat, & Koenig, 2012). As a result, studies find that race-related bullying is significantly associated with negative outcomes of emotional well-being and can even cause physical health issues (Rosenthal et al, 2013).

Students who identify and/or are perceived to identify with the LGBTQ community, 74.1% of LGBTQ students were verbally bullied in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 55.2% because of their gender identification (National School Climate Survey, 2013). Approximately 36.2% of LGBT students were physically bullied (e.g., pushed, shoved) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 22.7% because of their gender expression (National School Climate Survey, 2013). The percentage of LGBTQ students who reported feeling unsafe at school is very high. Approximately 55.5% of LGBTQ students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and another 37.8% reported feeling unsafe because of their gender identification (National School Climate Survey, 2013). In addition, 30.3% of LGBTQ students missed at least one entire day of school per month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and 10.6% missed four or more days (National School Climate Survey, 2013).

Bullying contributes to suicide, mass shootings, and school violence Researchers find that there is an association between bullying and suicide-related behaviors. This association is often coupled with other factors such as depression, violent behavior, and substance abuse (Reed,

Nugent, & Cooper, 2015). Students who bully others, are bullied, or witness bullying are more likely to report high levels of suicide-related behavior than students who are not involved in bullying (Center for Disease Control, 2014). Students who've experienced bullying are nearly three times more likely to attempt suicide than students not facing bullying (Gini & Espelage, 2014). A particularly disturbing shift is that, while men are three times more likely to die by suicide, the rate of suicide in teenage girls has doubled from 2007 to 2015.

Studies have also shown a correlation between school shooters and bullying, in instances where mass shooters felt provoked to commit their heinous crimes. **Approximately 71% of school shooters felt "persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked or injured" leading up to their school attack, according to Secret Service data.** Bullied high schoolers are also more than twice as likely to bring guns or knives to school as their non-bullied peers.

III. Identifying The Issue

What's Wrong with American Students? Is this the question? Or is it what is wrong with American society? What are the factors within our communities and our societies that are resulting in violence in schools and in the public square?

Ever since the Columbine High School **With the recent Columbine in Crimea you might note how much a model this has become - partly because of the media coverage it received** shooting massacre that occurred on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado, the continuous spike in the number of school shootings has drawn nationwide attention to student mental health issues. According to a 2017 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 13% and 30% of American school-age children experience mental health disorders. Unfortunately, teachers are the first to observe behaviors in students that could potentially be symptoms of an undiagnosed mental health issue or a personal emotional problem. In most cases, teachers are the least equipped to handle such issues. These symptoms may range from disengagement from school activities and socializing with peers, extreme sadness or depression, chronic absence, to disorderly or violence behaviors that interrupt the classroom and the school. Statistically speaking, teachers are most likely to have four or five students in each class who are dealing with some type of mental or emotional health issue and nearly two-thirds

of those students are not getting any professional help.

Most public schools do not have enough counselors or mental health professionals on staff to deal with the students emotional and social needs, primarily due to financial constraints. (Do we have any figures to support this and further make the point. For example the funding going to security and other “armed” guards, redesigning space to “protect” students. How is funding to deal with violence being used? According to a *Washington Post* article, part of the reason for the lack of counselors is due to limited budgets and drastic cuts. With no other funding alternative available, counselors have to compete with teaching positions for general personnel funds. With a lack of counselors present to address student mental health concerns, student academic achievement rates decrease not only for the students with the mental issue, but for the entire classroom and contributes to increases of school violence and behavioral issues that disrupt the learning process.

V. Identifying Solutions

Examining Social-Emotional Learning and Conflict Resolution Programs in Schools

In this section, we evaluate the significant outcomes of social-emotional learning programs and conflict resolution techniques as a solution that successfully reduces incidents of school violence. School-based programs decrease bullying by up to 25% (McCallion & Feder, 2013). If students who experience trauma or violence are able to identify one supportive adult in the school they trust, they are less likely to face adverse consequences (Morin et al., 2015).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Schools

Studies show that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) not only improves academic performance by an average of 11 percentile points, but it also increases positive social behaviors such as kindness, respect, sharing, and empathy, improves student’s overall perception about school. SEL programs also report a decrease in student depression and stress while in class (Durlak et al., 2017). Effective SEL activities are facilitated in classrooms that help students

develop the following five key skills according to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL):

- 1) Self-Awareness - To fully understand one's own emotions, personal goals, and values. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations, having positive mindsets, and a sense of self-efficacy and optimism. High levels of self-awareness require the ability to recognize how thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected.
- 2.) Self-Management - requires skills and attitudes that facilitate the ability to regulate one's own emotions and behaviors. This includes the ability to delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses, and persevere through challenges in order to achieve personal and educational goals.
- 3.) Social Awareness - involves the ability to understand, empathize, and feel compassion for those from different backgrounds or cultures. It also involves understanding social norms for behavior and recognizing family, school, and community resources and supports.
- 4.) Relationship Skills - help students establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, and to act in accordance with social norms. These skills involve communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when it is needed.
- 5.) Responsible Decision Making - involves learning how to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse settings. It requires the ability to consider ethical standards, safety concerns, accurate behavioral norms for risky behaviors, the health and well-being of self and others, and to make realistic evaluation of various actions' consequences.

The implementation of effective SEL programs in schools garner both short and long term benefits for students, and the benefits help them throughout their lives. This includes having a more positive outlook towards oneself, others, and their responsibilities. The ability to enhance self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, empathy, connection and a commitment to school due to a newfound sense of purpose. Increased behaviors of positive social awareness and connection.

The ability to build positive relationships with peers and adults and reduce risky and impulsive behavior. SEL programs also decrease levels of emotional distress while significantly improving test scores, grades, and attendance rates of student participants.

The long term success of students is to develop greater social and emotional competencies and increase the likelihood of high school matriculation, readiness for higher education, ability to pursue a sustainable career, positive family and work relationships, improved mental health, and decrease the likelihood of involvement in criminal activities (e.g., Durlack, Oberle, Taylor, Weissberg 2017).

Conflict Resolution Techniques in Schools

For several decades, a multitude of studies show that the majority of teachers believe that students with behavioral issues negatively impact the learning process of other students. Moreover, most teachers believe that they can improve the academic outcomes of their students if behavioral problems were adequately addressed and resolved. Research proves that the primary social skills that are typically lacking in students who are prone to violent behavior include poor impulse control, poor problem-solving skills, and a lack of anger management skills, and the inability to understand, control, and communicate one's emotions (Committee for Children, 2002). In addition to the students inability to control their feelings, victims and witnesses to disruptive student behaviors also lack proper conflict resolution skills and the ability to assertively communicate with the problematic student (Heydenberk, 2000).

Schools that successfully integrate conflict resolution techniques into their programs not only reduce incidents of violence in their communities and schools, but also provide "life-long decision making skills" (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1997), and enhance the students overall self-esteem and confidence. Additionally, research has shown that effective conflict resolution programs also reduce the time that teachers spent on mediating conflicts between students, improved the overall school environment, and improved problem-solving skills and self-control among students (Bodine, 1996). Studies also show that such conflict resolution mediation promotes "responsible, pro-social behavior, and improved communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking" (Van Steenberg, 1994). Improvements in student's academic performance is

a particularly significant gain when conflict resolution skills are applied. (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

NICE: Innovative Programming Combats School Violence I would write out entire title here as it is the first time you use it - and do you combat violence or do you work to prevent violence and the bullying etc that lead to violence.

The Nurturing Inclusive Community Environment (NICE) Program was established in 2017 in response to the increase in school violence, is a collaboration between We Oppose Violence Everywhere Now (WOVEN) and Creative Response to Conflict (CRC). This program and is currently being facilitated in two high schools in Spring Valley, New York.

The NICE program uses two evidence based techniques Put this thought first. Perhaps put graph in italic. This is key point. is unique because it is the only program that integrates social-emotional learning (SEL) with conflict resolution methods and unlike most schools, it provides full-time staff to focus on providing support to students. It integrates these two evidence-based techniques into school curricula with community-building and restorative justice techniques with the goal of supporting academic achievement and mitigating incidents of school violence.

Most schools (any statistics here?) tend to focus solely on SEL programs whereas the NICE program blends both SEL techniques and conflict resolution skills to support the student's emotional and academic success. The program aims to make schools a safe place to learn and engage through skills that are necessary to help students manage their emotions, work with others, and set goals. NICE staff members are full-time staff placed in classrooms to assist in facilitating mediations, community-building circles, and counseling sessions to support students' social-emotional and academic growth.

The field of conflict resolution developed over time from non-violence, peace, social justice, and mediation movements. In contrast, the field of SEL was influenced by child mental health studies of resiliency that focused on the importance of enhancing social-emotional competencies.

These programs are usually implemented separately, but the NICE model integrates both methods into a single program that is customizable based on the schools particular needs. There is no other program in the country like it.

Another way in which the NICE program is unique is that it utilizes external staff members who can focus solely on providing support to students. Most schools across the country do not have the ability to dedicate multiple school-based employees on social-emotional learning and mediation. Teachers tend to face difficulties with finding sufficient time to devote to SEL lessons and our program addresses this issue by providing a dedicated team of people through the NICE program, which includes four staff members working in each school to support the SEL needs of the students. Staff members are bilingual and receive extensive training in providing emotional support to students.

With so many caring educators focused on assisting to make the school safer and more welcoming for everyone the program has the ability to reach out to all parts of the school community, students, staff, parents and community members. Because there is no one size fits all model to address school violence and student behavioral issues, NICE staff members develop curriculum only after determining student needs from in-class observations. The customizable model, which allows schools to personalize the model based specifically on the school's need and priorities, makes the program flexible. The NICE Program can be shaped according to school budget availability and need. This would include determining the number of NICE staff members, training plans, and other factors that contribute to student success.

When the NICE program staff began working with students and teachers, school administrators saw immediate results. Within the first four months of the program, administrators reported a 60% decrease in student disciplinary referrals.

The program has also seen additional success in the following areas:

- Decrease in failure percentages in classrooms
- Fewer student disciplinary referrals
- Increased teacher and student participation

- Decrease in language and cultural barriers
- Increase student and family involvement and support of the program.
- Increase in teachers relying on NICE Staff for support

The NICE program model was observed by researcher Beth Fisher-Yoshida, a faculty member and Academic Director of the Negotiation and Conflict Resolution program at Columbia University. Dr. Fisher-Yoshida's area of expertise is on improving communication through developing more self-awareness that leads to better relationships and improved negotiation practices. The research team will quantify the successes of the program and create a replicable model to be implemented into other schools. We strongly believe that programs like the NICE program have the ability to mitigate and decrease incidents of school violence in American schools.

VI. Current Policy Initiatives

As of March 2018, U.S. Congressman Harold Rogers (R-KY), John Rutherford (R-FL), Ted Deutch (D-FL), and Derek Kilmer (D-WA) announced the bipartisan Students, Teachers and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence Act of 2018, H.R. 4909. The proposed legislation will fund early intervention and prevention programs to stop school violence before it occurs. If this bill is passed, it will allow the Department of Justice to make grants available to states for the purposes of training students, school personnel, and law enforcement to identify signs of violence and intervene. The legislation will allow for anonymous reporting systems, school threat assessment and violence intervention teams.

The U.S. House of Representatives version of the proposed legislation will reserve \$50 million annually for grant programs to be administered by the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, to assist local law enforcement, school staff, and students by funding up to 75% of the costs associated with evidence-based programs to prevent school violence. In contrast, the Senate bill would authorize \$75 million in fiscal year 2018 and \$100 million annually for the next 10 years. The bill also states that some amounts will be partially offset by funds previously allocated to a Justice Department's Comprehensive School Safety Initiative.

VII. Policy Recommendations

Recommendations for Federal and State Policy Makers

With Congress currently suggesting multiple school safety initiatives to assist local governments with combating school violence, NICE and CRC would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Fund and promote evidence-based intervention and prevention programs to prevent school violence. Particularly programs that include social-emotional learning (SEL) techniques and conflict resolution methods. **They aren't going to both Fund and Promote - I would suggest just funding - and indicate it is to come from existing funds - that is redirected funding.**
2. Include both a programmatic and research component to not only implement evidence-based programs in schools but also properly track the evidence of successful school violence prevention models that can potentially be replicated nationwide.
3. Focus on providing full-time staff trained in conflict resolution, mediation, counseling, social and emotional learning and other restorative justice practices to work in schools alongside teachers, administrators, and school resource officers (SRO).
4. Insure that schools partner with wraparound mental health providers.
5. Federal, state and local grants should give preference to schools that partner with violence prevention non-profit organizations, mental health providers, researchers, and the local police departments.
6. Provide funding to support technical assistance training on SEL, conflict resolution, and restorative justice techniques.
7. Require certification training in conflict resolution and SEL for teachers, nurses etc. SRO 's and school nurses on violence prevention, mediations, SEL techniques and conflict resolution methods.

8. Enable states under Titles II and IV of the “Every Student Succeeds Act”—formerly known as “No Child Left Behind”— to put existing funding toward efforts school safety through violence prevention programs.
9. Focus on school security improvement measures such as adding alarm systems, metal detectors, and SRO in schools. These methods have long proven to be ineffective. Programs need to focus on addressing student’s emotional and mental health.

VIII. Call to action — What can you do?

The goal of the NICE program is to develop a curriculum and train staff so the NICE Program NICE program model can be in in every school across the country to prevent school violence and improve student’s overall emotional wellbeing and academic success. **Isn’t the curriculum going to be available in the Spring of 2019? Shouldn’t it be : The Nice program has developed a curriculum.... Or is currently.**

If you are passionate about protecting America’s innocent children then please do what you can to support the program.

Here are the following recommendations for community involvement:

- Send our recommendations to your **local school board**. ~~local elected official and school board via mail or email.~~
- Contact the NICE program and donate to help support the children who are already enrolled in the program; in addition to supporting the expansion of the program in other schools across the country.

With your support and advocacy, we can improve overall student performance in a uniquely challenged era of American history by helping to prevent the epidemic of school shootings in the United States. Our goal is to make sure that every child, no matter their race, religion, or socioeconomic status receives the emotional, social, and mental health support that they need to be successful in school. ***The time to act is now!***

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