



**Massachusetts Association
of School Committees**

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**MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES
POSITION PAPER - 2014**

SCHOOL SAFETY

Expanding the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act and Other Strategies to Protect Students, Including Banning the Sale of Assault Weapons

Many provisions of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act establish programs to help protect students at all levels. These include grant programs to implement policies and action steps designed to secure facilities and protect children in a variety of ways. In one significant way, these strategies fall short. The recent tragedy in Connecticut has, once again, demanded that we focus on school safety and, in particular, the protection of students and faculty from the danger posed by firearms and other weapons in schools. We recognize that there is no inherent right for anyone other than an appropriately authorized public safety officer to bring a weapon into a public school, but current law is insufficient to deter this possibility.

It is naïve to believe that state or federal law or district policy prohibiting the possession of a weapon in school will guarantee the safety of the many students and adults who use the buildings and grounds every day. We also recognize that it may be impossible to identify every potentially dangerous student or citizen, but we believe that reasonable and practical national, state and local policies for school safety can reduce the threat of violence and use of weapons, particularly firearms. We believe that limiting access to weapons to those with a legitimate reason to possess them and to prevent those individuals who pose a danger to others from obtaining weapons is the most effective public policy. We reject the notion that staffing schools with armed security personnel is the most effective strategy, but we maintain that local school committees can make informed decisions about the best ways to protect students based on community standards and practices and oversight of district and municipal government.

We also recognize that public safety includes not only school and law enforcement action, but also the support of the network of public health, social services and family services resources and personnel. The safety of all students and school personnel requires the coordinated work of educators, counselors, health care providers, public safety officers and community leaders.

We call upon the federal, state and local governments to address school safety and gun violence in the following ways:

1. Pass legislation to ban the sale, possession and use of assault weapons as well as high capacity magazines with appropriate law and incentives at the federal, state and local levels. Establish law and implement regulations to require that all firearms be registered and that all those who possess a firearm shall be licensed to own and carry it by the federal, state or local government.

2. Where authorized, require school districts to establish policies on school safety relative to firearms or other weapons. School policies on weapons safety shall address:

- Prohibitions on unauthorized weapons in school.
- Education of all students and school personnel relative to unauthorized weapons and district policies.
- Implementation of strategies for student and school safety.
- Deployment of effective and locally appropriate discipline and sanctions for those carrying weapons in school.
- Professional development for school personnel and students to identify individuals who may be potentially dangerous to others or who may be vulnerable to violence at the hands of others.

3. Retention of public health and mental health professionals to serve as advisors or consultants to district personnel in identifying and addressing student behavioral issues that may result in subsequent detrimental behaviors.

4. Authorization of gun and weapon-free school zones and establishment of penalties for possession or use of an unauthorized firearm within the zone. The zone shall include the school building, grounds, bus stops and playing fields.

5. Establishment of a police and community relations protocol to ensure accurate reporting, rapid response, and resource utilization.

6. Enactment of state and federal criminal sanctions upon anyone in possession of a weapon or firearm in a school, subject to appropriate oversight by the courts.

7. Provide national aggregation of best practices to help local districts make informed decisions about bullying and other behaviors that may trigger violent reactions through the various strategies in place to help students at risk.

8. Provision of appropriate behavioral health services to be covered under Medicaid for eligible students who may pose a threat to others.

9. Inclusion within the appropriate curricula for professional development for school faculty to help identify students who may be at risk for perpetrating acts of violence against others.

10. Recognition that gun violence is as much a public health issue as a public safety problem and should be incorporated into the curricula for student health and safety education with federal monetary support.

For further information contact:

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