



School Social Work Association of America Resolution Statement

School Social Work Association of America Responds to Recent Mass Shootings in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio

First and foremost, the School Social Work Association of America would like to offer our condolences to the families, friends, and communities impacted by the most recent mass shootings, and every individual and community affected everyday by hate and gun violence across the country. Second, we want to offer some information and resources to assist school social workers in responding to the consequences of such acts as well as taking action to help play a role in preventing such violence. Our nation is in the midst of a public health crisis that demands immediate action not only from our policy leaders but from our communities as a whole. Our expertise and unique position as school social workers provides us the opportunity to facilitate courageous conversations, spearhead initiatives to promote inclusion and safety as well as support the healing process when tragedies like these occur.

In response to these shootings, it is critical to discuss both the issue of gun violence that continues to impact so many communities, and the intersection of this gun violence with white supremacy and anti-immigrant/anti-Latinx rhetoric that fostered the conditions for the tragedy in El Paso. As school social workers, naming the violence fueled by bigotry and hate is necessary in helping communities to heal, particularly those communities that feel targeted by this violence, regardless of where they live. The shooting in El Paso was the deadliest anti-Latinx massacre in recent history (Romero, Fernandez, & Corkery, 2019) and the consequences have reverberated across the country in Latinx and especially, Mexican American communities. In the statement made to the police, the shooter specifically stated that his targets were “Mexicans” (Warrant of Arrest, 2019). The manifesto the shooter posted also stated that he was responding to the “Hispanic invasion of Texas” (Bogel-Burroughs, 2019).

The lived experiences of Latinx U.S. citizens and immigrant children are already wrought with fear and shaped by the constant threat of their parent’s deportation (Zayas, 2015). Now, they also are living with the fear of being the targets of mass shootings due to their race. “The combination of easy access to assault weapons and hateful rhetoric is toxic. Racism has been shown to have negative cognitive and behavioral effects on both children and adults and to increase anxiety, depression, self-defeating thoughts and avoidance behaviors” (APA, 2019, para. 2). Indeed, the current anti-immigrant climate is a form of violence (Solis, 2003) and contributes to the feeling of marginalization among Latinx youth as they are challenged to construct their social identities in the midst of this social context (Villarreal Sosa, 2011). The anti-immigrant climate, that targets primarily Latinx, Black, and Muslim immigrants, has also led to increasing hate crimes beginning prior to the 2016 election, and continuing to escalate in 2018 (Anti-Defamation League, 2018).

As school social workers, we have a responsibility to address these issues and have these challenging and difficult conversations related to this climate of hate and intolerance.

What can school social workers do?

1. Begin by reflecting on our code of ethics and national school social work model and consider how we actively emulate these values in our practice. The NASW (2017) ethical guidelines contains the ethical principle to “help people in need and to address social problems” (Ethical principles 1 and 2). This includes “challeng[ing] social injustice” and “pursu[ing] social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people” (Ethical principles 1 and 2). Specifically guiding school social work practice, the School Social Work Practice models states, “school social work practitioners are *expected* [emphasis added] to give voice to issues of diversity, and social and economic justice that lead to school failure and educational disparities” (Frey et al., 2017, p. 32). The various policies and national rhetoric around immigration that has led to the traumatization of countless children would certainly fit into this section of the model.
2. Offer a safe place for students and families to process their fears and concerns.
3. Provide professional development for staff on trauma informed culturally responsive practices as a means to address the lasting impact of trauma experienced by the families who lost loved ones to violence, those that were injured as well as building staff capacity to cope with the inevitable potential for vicarious trauma.
4. Implement universal evidence based interventions that promote inclusion, safety and honors the value of every student such as peace circles, restorative practices and SEL.
5. Support the creation of welcoming communities and schools for immigrant students and families. This includes assessing your school with questions such as: How does the staff/faculty address this issue? Do students and families see available resources for immigrants in a visible location? Is there professional development for staff and faculty related to supporting Latinx students and immigrant students?
6. It is also critical, as discussions are taking place about addressing gun violence, to dispel any myths about the role of mental illness and gun violence. Routinely blaming mass shootings on mental illness is stigmatizing and simply unfounded. People diagnosed with a mental illness are not any more likely to commit violence against others than the general population (Budenz, Purtle, Klassen, Yom-Tov, Yudell, & Massey, 2018). Yet, in the aftermath of mass shootings, stigmatizing and inaccurate portrayals of people with mental illness as violent are amplified, and increase stigma (Budenz et. al. 2018).
7. Research has shown that most people diagnosed with mental illness are not dangerous but when an individual is “at risk for violence due to mental illness or suicidal thoughts, mental health treatment and supports can prevent gun violence” (APA, 2019). Advocate for increased funding and access to mental health supports and resources that include school social workers working collaboratively with other school-based and community based mental health providers.
8. While not often discussed, as school social workers, we also have a responsibility to address interventions with perpetrators of hate crimes. The reality is that most offenders are not part of organized hate groups, 31% of hate-based offenders against other individuals and 46% of hate based property crimes are young people under the age of 18, and most serious crimes typically begin with smaller incidents. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001; 2017). In addition, approximately 10% of these crimes occur in school or university settings (U.S. Department of

Justice, 2001, 2017). It is necessary to both address the behavior of these young people; as well as address the school culture and climate that can reinforce these beliefs. For example, *an absence of positive images* of minority groups can allow the negative images in the media to flourish.

9. Support parents in supporting their children. Provide white parents tips about how to have age appropriate conversations with their children about the value of diversity and how to be an ally. Provide parents of color support with fostering ethnic/racial pride in their children, how to cope with discrimination when they encounter it, and modeling advocacy.
10. Given the continued frequency of gun violence and mass shootings, as school social workers, we need to be advocates for a public health approach to gun legislation that includes a ban on assault weapons and criminal background checks on all gun purchases. For a more detailed discussion and list of recommendations on gun violence, please see SSWAA's position paper, "[A Public Health Approach to School Safety and Violence Prevention.](#)"

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