



Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents

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A Call for Action: Responding to the Tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

The Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents, comprised of School Superintendents who are responsible for the education and well-being of more than 240,000 children, is shocked and saddened by the tragedy that occurred at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018. We strongly decry the senseless shooting that cut short the lives of 17 innocent students and staff. This incomprehensible and horrific act of violence demands immediate and bold action by state and federal legislators to end gun violence in our schools and communities.

As school superintendents who represent 77 schools districts in New York State, we speak with one voice on this issue. We again call on our state and federal legislators to immediately enact stricter gun control legislation, and to provide adequate funding and access to mental health services for children and families.

As education leaders, we believe that school safety is a fundamental right we must provide all our children. The statistics draw a picture that calls for immediate changes in a civilized society committed to protecting its citizenry, and especially its children. According to the New York Times, more than 438 students and teachers have been shot in at least 239 school shootings since Sandy Hook in 2012. There have been 63 people injured or killed in six school shootings in the first 25 days of 2018, according to Education Week. These outcomes are unacceptable.

A reasoned and rational approach to gun control and increased access to mental health services for students and families in our schools and communities are essential first steps. We implore our state and national education officials and political leaders to take immediate action. We need to stem the tide of senseless gun violence and ensure that student safety and mental health services are as great a priority as student performance on tests.

At this time, the Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents proposes the following policy and legislative reforms:

- Provide funding to schools and communities for adequate mental health, social, and guidance services and resources for the purpose of prevention, support, and response;
- Provide funds for districts to upgrade their facilities if internal safety audits find there is a need for improvements;

- Punish irresponsible gun dealers;
- Restore community funding for youth and school resource officers to create stronger school-community partnerships;
- Reinstate the ban on the sale, import, transfer and ownership of assault weapons;
- Require thorough background checks for all gun purchasers and prevent individuals convicted of violent crimes from being able to purchase guns.

Unless we agree to eliminate access to weapons and increase access to mental health services, then we maintain the conditions that produced the horrific murder of educators and children in Parkland, Florida.

Out of our commitment to our students and communities, the Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents stands ready to help in this effort to prioritize safety in our schools and communities. We encourage others to join us in demanding that we make every effort to protect our society's most vulnerable members. The time for action is now!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Raymond Sanchez".

Raymond Sanchez