



# Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents

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## **A Call for Action: Responding to the Mass Murder at Sandy Hook Elementary School**

The Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents is shocked and saddened by the tragedy that occurred at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut on December 14, 2012. This unspeakable act demands immediate and bold action by state and federal legislators to end gun violence in our schools and communities.

The statistics paint a chilling story that demands the immediate action of a civilized society committed to protecting its citizenry, and especially its children. Every twenty minutes an American is killed by guns. There are nearly **33,000** gun deaths in the United States each year. Each year **3,000** children and teens are killed and **15,000** injured by gun. **10,000** children and adolescents are injured by assault firearms. America's children are sixteen times more likely to be murdered through gun violence than children in any other of the world's top 25 industrialized countries. These outcomes should be unacceptable to all Americans.

Since 1979, **118,000** children have died from gun violence in America – more than the double the amount of American deaths from the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Most gun violence against children occurs away from school, but in the last twenty-five years nearly forty school shootings have resulted in deaths of **111** student and **26** school personnel.

Immediate action is required. A reasoned and rationale approach to gun control and increased access to mental health services for students and families through schools and communities are essential first steps. Mental health resources have been undervalued and under-resourced. Fiscal constraints and reduced aid have forced cuts of social workers, guidance counselors, psychologists, and programs to address the social and emotional needs of students. From 2009 to 2012, more than **\$1.6 billion** was cut from state funds for mental health services. Over the past two fiscal years, New York State has cut **\$95.2 million**.

State and national education officials and political leaders need to ensure that student safety and mental health services are as great a priority as student performance on tests.

### **We propose 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;
- Restore community funding for youth and school resource officers for stronger school-community partnerships;

- Prevent individuals convicted of violent crimes – misdemeanors or felonies – even when these were committed when they were juveniles, from being able to purchase or own a gun (Brady Bill - Section 922N);
- Prevent individuals with mental health issues from purchasing or owning a gun (Brady Bill - Section 922N)
- Reinstigate the ban on the sale, import, transfer, and ownership of assault weapons; (Semi-automatic firearms that the state has classified as assault weapons, .50 BMG caliber rifles, and magazines that can hold more than ten rounds of ammunition may not be sold in California. Possession of automatic firearms, and of short-barreled shotguns and rifles, is generally prohibited.)
- End the Gun Show loophole that enables 40% of gun purchases to be made without a background check;
- Punish irresponsible gun dealers (Dealers may not sell any new handgun unless it is listed in the state Department of Justice roster of handguns certified for sale. Listed handguns must include certain mechanical features and pass a set of laboratory tests).

Unless we eliminate the easy access to weapons and increase the limited access to mental health care then the conditions that produced this horrific mass murder of educators and children will remain long after Sandy Hook is a sorrowful memory. Just as there is urgency in providing resources for the war on terror, there must be urgency in preventing gun violence from killing and injuring our precious children. It is time that we show greater concern for protecting our children than for our gun rights. That time is now.

We, the superintendents of the 78 school districts represented by the Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents 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.

We encourage parents to lobby their legislators to move swiftly and unequivocally to address these life-threatening concerns. We beseech all members of the public to join mayors from across the United States and sign their petition, <http://www.demandaplan.org> to demand immediate action on this legislation.