

February 21, 2018

Honorable Senator Todd Young:

The recent tragic mass-shooting deaths of 14 students and three staff members in Parkland, Florida have again heightened national awareness and escalated concern about keeping our students, staffs, and schools safe.

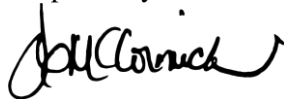
Understandably, our citizens – and now student survivors themselves – are leading efforts for school walkouts and sit-ins, planned in response to the Florida shootings and similar horrific events at schools across the nation. These responses, and other actions on school campuses, will be occurring nationwide and aimed at influencing lawmakers to pass tougher gun safety laws. The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) will remain in communication with districts regarding student-initiated demonstrations, school safety concerns, and any related issues. Our goal is to heighten school leaders' awareness of the climate and provide support and guidance to schools.

In Indiana, we understand the importance of district preparedness. To that end, your Indiana Department of Education is responsible for supporting well-defined, locally developed safety plans which are practiced, evaluated, and continuously updated. In addition, IC 5-2-10.1-9 requires each school district to maintain a school safety specialist. To support these requirements, the Indiana School Safety Specialist Academy provides basic and advanced trainings. Sponsored by IDOE's School Security and Safety Unit, The Academy provides ongoing, certified instruction and information regarding state and national best practices. The Academy also offers exemplary resources for school safety, security, intervention/prevention, and emergency preparedness planning. Lastly, school districts are required to participate in emergency preparedness drills per IC 20-34-3-20. Drills are used to prepare schools for tornado, fire, and man-made emergency events. For your review, the attached document provides indicators and trends related to Indiana school safety efforts.

As Indiana's education leader, I implore the General Assembly and our Indiana Congressional Delegation to undertake efforts to address school safety. These efforts must include passing policies which decrease risks, providing support for social and emotional programs to address mental and behavioral health, and approving budgets that increase resources. As part of our ongoing commitment to students, the Indiana Department of Education has offered state legislative language (for action) to require charter and non-public schools (choice scholarship) to comply with the same school safety requirements that school corporations must follow.

My office is ready to collaborate and participate in any discussions that address the safety and well-being of Indiana students. School safety is a very complex issue and requires a multifaceted approach to solutions. The actions of Hoosier leaders will reflect our level of courage and commitment to children.

Respectfully,



Dr. Jennifer McCormick  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction