

To: Nevada Statewide School Safety Task Force
 From: Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D., Director of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age
 Re: Statement
 Date: August 27, 2018

I am sorry that I am not able to be in attendance. I have provided some articles that I hope will be helpful to you, along with some information on my book, *Engage Students to Embrace Civility*, and student program, *Embrace Civility*. I just wanted to take this opportunity to write what I would say if I had the opportunity to present.

In 2007, my book on cyberbullying, *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge on Online Cruelty, Threats, and Distress*. Obviously, I was early in noting and responding to this concern.

What I realized at the time was that what educators were being told about bullying behavior was partially inaccurate and the approach they were advised to use was not going to be effective in addressing digital concerns. What has clearly emerged since this time is ample research that documents that what schools are doing to better address bullying is not, despite best intentions and efforts, having a positive impact. This is data from the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey that demonstrates no reduction.

THE PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO:		2007 Total	2009 Total	2011 Total	2013 Total	2015 Total	2017 Total	Trend
Did not go to school because of safety concerns		5.5	5.0	5.9	7.1	5.6	6.7	↕
Were bullied at school		NA	19.9	20.1	19.6	20.2	19.0	↕

Being a growth mindset kind of person, I have been trying to figure out why this is the case and better, research-based, practices that schools could implement. The very brief answer to this is that schools must:

- Implement Trauma Informed Care practices to increase the resilience of some of the students who are hurtful and to better support many of the students who are treated badly.
- Engage student leaders in a positive social norms based approach to communicate to the students who are being hurtful to achieve social dominance and status that the majority of students do not like to see this and truly admire those who are kind and respectful and step in to help.
- Increase the social relationship skills of students in hurtful situations, as a witness, the one who was hurtful, or the one targeted.
- Improve the effectiveness of the responses to hurtful incidents that are reported by staff and by the principal by focusing on an investigation and an intervention that supports resilience and restoration.

However, especially at this point in time with the concerns of increased school shootings, increased suicide attempts, and other social disruptions, it seems that the insight I have developed also must be applied in the context of increasing efforts related to school safety.

Along with others, I note a huge concern of the efforts of companies selling school security technologies that have no evidence of effectiveness and are exceptionally costly. In addition, there are calls for more

armed personnel. School shootings happen so rapidly, the potential they will be stopped by armed personnel in the vast majority of situations is almost zero--only if the school shooter clearly wants to be "killed by cop." Increased armed personnel are not a deterrent because most school shooters are suicidal.

I would strongly encourage you to read:

- The Atlantic: School-Security Companies Are Thriving in the Era of Mass Shootings. A multibillion-dollar industry is pushing an array of expensive technologies with the message that any campus could be next.¹
- Rand Corporation. The Role of Technology in Improving K-12 School Safety.²

Both increases technical security and armed personnel will be entirely ineffective in reducing or responding to most instances of violence--and will increase student distress, invade student privacy, increase the school-to-prison pipeline, and interfere with the positive relationships between staff and students school that are **essential** to reducing the risks of school violence.

The Secret Service just released a helpful guide, *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model*.³ This document provides helpful guidance on an effective Threat Assessment process, with a caveat: It does not focus sufficiently on the role and impact of trauma.

Establishing an effective threat assessment process is essential. However, the absolutely essential component of an effective threat assessment approach is that students are willing to report. In the introduction to the guidelines presented findings from a prior report on school shootings: "(P)rior to most attacks, though other students had information about the attackers' plans, most did not report their concerns to an adult."

It is my opinion that this statement was not sufficiently explicit. The finding in a prior comprehensive study of school shootings was more clear:

The school shooters had exhibited concerning behavior prior to the attack in 93% of the incidents and at least one other person had some type of knowledge of the attacker's plan in 81% of the incidents and more than one person had such knowledge in 59% of the incidents. Of those individuals who had prior knowledge, 93% were peers of the perpetrators--friends, schoolmates, or siblings.⁴

Clearly, the only way we are going to reduce the carnage of school shootings is to increase student reporting of concerns, leading to an effective threat assessment.

Here is where insight that I have from the bullying research comes in. This is quoted from my book *Engage Students to Embrace Civility*:

It is well established that the majority of secondary students do not report hurtful incidents. Data from 2015 NCVS indicated that only 43% of students who reported someone had bullied them at school said that they told an adult.⁵

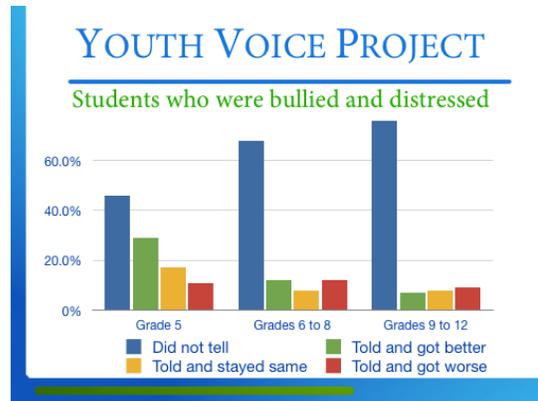
One 2004 study at the elementary school level found that there was a perception among the students that the school tolerated bullying because nothing was ever done and therefore it was a waste of time to report.⁶ A 2004 study of secondary students revealed that students did not report their situation to teachers or other adults for fear of being viewed as a "squealer," belief that the school staff would act in a way that would make their situation worse, and they did not trust school staff to keep secrets told to them in confidence.⁷ In a 2007 study, students associated telling a teacher with a double jeopardy: they might not be believed and telling might result in retaliation by the perpetrators.⁸

The Youth Voice Project asked students who were repeatedly bullied and had experienced moderate to very severe levels of distress whether they reported to an adult at school and, if so, whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse⁹ The findings indicated:

- Elementary (grade 5). 46% did not tell an adult, 29% told and things got better, 17% told and things stayed the same, 11% told and things got worse.

- Middle school (grades 6 to 8). 68% did not tell an adult at school, 12% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 12% told and things got worse.
- High school (grades 9 to 12). 76% did not tell an adult at school, 7% told and things got better, 8% told and things stayed the same, 9% told and things got worse.¹⁰

(Interrupting my book to add this slide that communicates this data more clearly.)



On the Embrace Civility Student Survey, (this was a survey of 1,500 students I conducted) students who were treated badly were also asked if they told a school staff member and, if so, how the staff responded and whether things got better, stayed the same, or got worse. If they did not tell a school staff member, they were asked why they did not do so. Overall, only 32% of all students told a school staff member. Only 36% of the “more vulnerable” students (bullied once or twice a week or more and distressed) told a staff member.

For all targeted students who told a school staff member, after they told, the reported impact was:

- 48% Things got better.
- 39% Stayed the same.
- 15% Things got worse.

However, after the “more vulnerable” students told a staff member, the reported impact was:

- 30% Things got better.
- 45% Things stayed the same.
- 25% Things got worse.

Thus, looking at these findings from an overall perspective, the current level of the “tell an adult” approach to bullying for “more vulnerable” students was:

- 64% Did not tell a staff member.
- 11% Told a staff member and things got better.
- 16% Told a staff member and things stayed the same.
- 9% Told a staff member and things got worse.

The reasons given by the “more vulnerable” students for not telling were:

- Did not think a school staff member would do anything to help.
- Thought that a school staff member might make things worse.
- Thought I would be blamed.
- I probably deserved it.
- The student being hurtful would likely have retaliated.

Essentially, given that it appears that we currently have about a 10% rate of effectiveness in the “tell an adult” approach to resolving situations where students are being bullied and are feeling distressed, this does not bode well for reliance on the student reporting, leading to effective threat assessment approach.

Clearly, this is where schools must focus their attention. Fortunately, this not a difficult task to accomplish.

Additional insight from a survey conducted in Oregon is helpful. the Student Wellness Survey, which is similar to the CDC’s Youth Behavior Risk Survey, however with some additional questions.¹¹

Table 6:

I can talk to my teachers openly and freely about my concerns.	68.9	56.6	61.1
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Table 19:

There is at least one teacher or other adult in my school that really cares about me.	73.5	66.1	71.2
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If this data is at all similar to what would be found in other states, then this indicates a huge problem. If around 30% of students do not think that any staff member really cares about them and around 40% would not feel comfortable talking with a teacher about a concern, this tells us where improvements must rapidly be made.

Anonymous tip lines may help some. But no anonymous tip line is is going to effectively address the underlying factors that are interfering with staff-student connections and the trust many students , likely those at higher risk and associated with those at higher risk, apparently do not have when trying to deal with concerns associated with emotional distress.

My new book, *Engage Students to Embrace Civility*, contains guidance on a recommended comprehensive approach to respond reports of bullying and other hurtful behavior that is in accord with the federal civil rights regulations, as well as Nevada’s model policy.¹² This approach incorporates principles of Trauma Informed Care, Restorative Practices, and Collaborative Problem Solving. This book also addresses how schools can improve staff-student connections. The documents I have submitted also provide insight into positive strategies.

Thank you for the opportunity and your attention.

1 <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/08/school-security-mass-shootings/567080/>

2 https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1488.html

3 https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/USSS_NTAC_Enhancing_School_Safety_Guide_7.11.18.pdf.

4 The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States. <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>

5 U.S Department of Education, NCVS, supra.

6 MacDonald H, Swart E. (2004). The culture of bullying at a primary school. *Education as Change* 8: 33–55.

7 Garpelin A. (2004). Accepted or rejected in school. *European Educational Research Journal* 3: 729–742.

8 Oliver C, and Candappa M. 2007. Bullying and the politics of ‘telling’. *Oxford Review of Education* 33: 71–86.

9 Davis, S. and Nixon, C. (2013) *Youth Voice Project: Student Insights into Bullying and Peer Mistreatment*. Research Press:

Illinois; Davis S. and Nixon, C. (2011) *Youth Voice Project, National Data Set*. Youth Voice Project. <http://www.youthvoiceproject.com>.

10 Davis S. and Nixon, C. (2011), supra.

11 https://oregon.pridesurveys.com/dl.php?pdf=Oregon_SWS_Statewide_Report_2016.pdf&type=region.

12 http://bullyfreezone.nv.gov/About/Model_Policy/