



PDKInternational.org

MAIL PO Box 13090
Arlington, VA 22219
PHONE 800-766-1156
FAX 812-339-0018

**Statement of PDK International CEO Dr. Joshua P. Starr in Response to the
Federal School Safety Commission Report
December 19, 2018**

At first glance, the final report of the Federal Commission on School Safety, released on December 18, appears to provide guidance and recommendations for educators seeking to respond to a recent spate of mass shootings in and around public schools. Look more closely, however, and it becomes obvious that the report's authors have little genuine interest in addressing school safety at all. Rather, they have used the murder of dozens of students as a pretext for introducing an entirely unrelated policy proposal: a call to reverse the Obama Administration's 2014 guidelines on reducing racial disproportionality in school suspensions.

To the extent that the report does offer recommendations for promoting school safety, it mostly just recycles familiar ideas, such as urging school districts to monitor instances of cyberbullying and to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Further, some of the report's recommendations are impractical or prohibitively expensive. For example, the report suggests that rural school systems partner with local community agencies to provide mental health services for troubled young people — however, thanks to declining state and federal funding for community services, no such agencies exist in much of rural America. Finally, some parts of the report are flat-out disingenuous, such as the suggestion that states do nothing to enact age restrictions on firearms purchases, given a lack of conclusive research in this area — the report conspicuously neglects to mention that if there's a paucity of research in this area, it is because the National Rifle Association lobbied successfully (via the so-called Dickey Amendment of 1996) to prevent the Centers for Disease Control from conducting such research.

Of the report's 18 recommendations, one stands out as distinctly *unlike* the others: The suggestion to roll back the Obama Administration 2014 guidelines for reducing the disproportionate suspensions of non-White students in the nation's public schools (a pattern, observed time and again by researchers: African American children, especially, are much more likely than White children to be disciplined for identical classroom behaviors). The purpose of the 2014 guidelines is to ensure that local school systems stop treating some children unfairly, punishing children of color for offenses that are overlooked when committed by White students. The report describes these guidelines as infringing on the ability of local educators to maintain safe and orderly schools and classrooms, but they do no such thing. They require only that local educators act *fairly*, enforcing disciplinary policies consistently for all students.

The American public has distinct opinions about school security issues, as seen in the [2018 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#). State and local leaders would do well by understanding those results before implementing any new regulations or policies. In addition, much has been written about school safety issues from

Engaging educators and strengthening schools, so every student thrives.

a variety of perspectives. Those who are interested in understanding the research, as well as perspectives of practitioners, can find articles here:

On Leadership - Armed officers in schools: The good, bad, and ugly

By Joshua P. Starr, October 22, 2018

<https://www.kappanonline.org/starr-armed-officers-in-schools-the-good-bad-and-ugly/>

How dress codes criminalize males and sexualize females of color

By Alyssa Pavlakis and Rachel Roegman, September 24, 2018

<https://www.kappanonline.org/pavlakis-roegman-dress-codes-gender-race-discrimination/>

The power of peer influence to address student behavioral problems

By Mark J. Van Ryzin and Cary J. Roseth, April 24, 2018

<https://www.kappanonline.org/van-ryzin-roseth-power-peer-influence-address-student-behavioral-problems/>

On Leadership: Reducing suspensions or building relationships? Reframing the problem

By Joshua P. Starr, April 30, 2018

<https://www.kappanonline.org/starr-student-discipline-suspensions-relationships/>

Career Confidential: Shootings bring more questions than answers

By Phyllis L. Fagell, February 22, 2018

<https://www.kappanonline.org/fagell-school-shooting-educators-questions/>

The shame of shaming

By Joan F. Goodman, September 25, 2017

<https://www.kappanonline.org/goodman-the-shame-of-shaming/>

Under the Law: The privacy of a student's backpack

By Julie Underwood, September 24, 2017

<http://www.kappanonline.org/underwood-under-law-student-privacy-search/>

Later start time for teens improves grades, mood, and safety

By Kyla L. Wahlstrom, August 14, 2017

<https://www.kappanonline.org/later-start-time-for-teens/>



PDKInternational.org

MAIL PO Box 13090
Arlington, VA 22219
PHONE 800-766-1156
FAX 812-339-0018

Engaging educators and strengthening schools, so every student thrives.