



Position Paper: School Violence Prevention

The Wyoming School Psychology Association (WSPA) strongly believes in creating school environments that are safe, in all senses of the word, for students, staff, and community members. We believe—as does the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) as outlined in their [position statement on school violence prevention](#)—that the best way to achieve nonviolent and peaceful learning environments is through a comprehensive approach to violence prevention that addresses all possible forms of violence and actively pursues steps to ensure the wellbeing of all students. While WSPA’s position towards school violence prevention will be outlined below, the reader is encouraged to review NASP’s position statement, as WSPA endorses it as an excellent review of our current understanding of school violence and the best possible approaches to ensuring safe schools.

School violence—which includes physical fights, bullying, cyberbullying, physical assault, bombing, arson, gun violence, and school shootings—has sadly become an ongoing concern for students, parents, educators, and our broader communities. A key approach to ensuring safety is creating a physically secure school environment. WSPA feels that it is not within the scope of practice for school psychologists to comment on the best way to ensure physical safety in buildings. However, the association strongly believes that any physical safety strategies implemented without also considering the mental, emotional, and social wellbeing of students and staff are insufficient and misguided. Approaches that address the culture and climate of schools are also critical, and must be vigorously pursued to ensure safe schools.

WSPA advocates for proactive, systemic, and methodical approaches to school violence that diminish all barriers to students feeling secure in the learning environments. Physical safety and freedom from threats of bodily harm are a good first step; however, our students and staff face additional, more subtle threats such as the presence of gangs, bullying and cyberbullying, sexual harassment, ongoing teasing, mean-spirited verbal threats, and exclusion, all acts that decrease the safety of schools. We believe a thoughtful, comprehensive approach to addressing all of these threats to school safety must include the following features:

- Partnerships between schools and all relevant community organizations
- Proactive and comprehensive school and community crisis plans
- Positive discipline and supportive school climates
- Parental involvement and support
- Progressive tiers of academic, behavioral, and mental health interventions for at-risk students
- Research-based, school-wide violence prevention programs
- Adequate funding and support for school mental health providers to include school psychologists, counselors, and social workers at recommended ratios
- Adequate funding to intervene at all levels for at-risk students

It is important to note that WSPA does not endorse any one program or approach. Each school and community will need to find solutions that fit their particular needs and culture. What WSPA does endorse is a comprehensive approach, centered on evidence-based practices, that is developed, supported, and continually monitored for effectiveness by key stakeholders. WSPA firmly believes school psychologists must be involved in this process.

School psychologists are uniquely trained to provide leadership and play a central role in violence prevention efforts in schools. WSPA strongly advocates that school psychologists must be key players in violence prevention efforts

at the local, state, and national level. As trained professionals in school safety and crisis prevention, school psychologists can and should:

- Serve on local, state, and national committees addressing school violence prevention
- Provide guidance, facilitation, and consultation in the development of legislation on school safety, including the development of legislation around gun violence and school safety
- Provide guidance, facilitation, and consultation for safety and crisis planning teams
- Facilitate efforts to collect and organize safety, violence, and crisis needs assessments at school, district, and state levels using validated instruments that support effective evidence-based decision making
- Identify and implement prevention and intervention programs designed to improve the safety, culture, and climate of all schools
- Identify and implement programs designed to foster social-emotional skills and resiliency for all students
- Engage in school- community partnership efforts
- Counsel and support victims of violence in all its forms
- Provide individual and group mental health services for at-risk students
- Serve as crisis team members responding to threats and acts of violence
- Provide local and state level trainings for the prevention and intervention of school violence

While school violence continues to be a concern for staff, students, parents and our communities, WSPA believes that comprehensive approaches that are designed with the features outlined above, and that utilize the expertise of school psychologists will yield the best results. Not only will such approaches best protect the bodily safety of staff and students, but they will also protect the mental health and well-being of all who enter our school doors. WSPA strongly believes taking proactive and appropriate steps to ensure school safety and decrease school violence will also lead to happier and healthier adults and citizens as our students mature in environments where they feel valued and secure. WSPA is committed to partnering with school, community, and state leaders in the pursuit of ensuring all Wyoming schools are safe and secure.