

This is a call to action: We can do more to make schools safer

Carolyn Jones, Opinion contributor Published 12:13 p.m. ET May 31, 2018

In 2018, more children have died in schools than members of the armed services in combat.

Something is wrong.

Not long after the Columbine school shooting, Cincinnati Public Schools began strategically evaluating school safety as a major component of the Facilities Master Plan, our effort to build 35 new schools and fully renovate 16 existing buildings. Cincinnati citizens heeded that call to action by supporting a \$1.2 billion initiative that revitalized our inadequate facilities as newer, safer schools.

We also thought more broadly about the role of community partners in our students' daily lives. Again, the Cincinnati community stepped forward and from those discussions, Community Learning Centers were born and have now evolved into a nationally recognized model.

The combination of secure buildings and unmatched community partnerships are two essential reasons CPS schools are safe. CPS is one of the only school districts in the country that has a strategic mental health partner in every single school, through our strong Community Learning Center partner Mindpeace.

Over the past year, Superintendent Laura Mitchell has reformed the district's bullying response by implementing a Bullying Notification capability on all CPS webpages and designating a social worker who focuses on a district-wide response to bullying reports. Superintendent Mitchell also created the Safety Task Force to ensure our school practices exceed expectations.

We also have many responsive safety approaches that separate us from many other districts: Cincinnati Police officers are assigned as School Resource Officers at each of our high schools and serve the area schools; 90 security assistants staff our buildings; and we utilize over 4,000 security cameras and metal-detecting technology in our facilities to ensure the safety of our students and staff.

The recent school shootings in Parkland, Florida, Santa Fe, Texas, and Noblesville, Indiana, are troubling to us. We can do more to make schools safer. Recently, our board unanimously passed a resolution supporting school safety and reducing gun violence. The resolution calls for:

- Enhanced mental health services and substance abuse treatment for all individuals, including children;

- Improved school safety practices, including measures designed to protect students and staff from an active shooter on school grounds and at school activities;
- Increased training for school employees and enhanced coordination with law enforcement agencies and first responders to respond to incidents of violence in schools.

This is a call to action. The board has asked all municipalities that are part of the CPS district to pass resolutions to support this effort. The Hamilton County commissioners and Golf Manor Village Council have passed such a resolution, and we fully expect the leaders of Cincinnati City Council, Amberley Village, Cheviot, Silverton, Madeira, Fairfax, Green Township, Columbia Township, and Delhi Township to do the same.

We are reaching out to our state and federal representatives to demand their support of our initiatives to protect our children.

And we're calling on the people of Cincinnati to remain vigilant. We ask our constituents to join us in ensuring our children are safe and able to learn. We welcome letters of support from organizations and individuals. Send correspondence to the Cincinnati Board of Education, P.O. Box 5381, Cincinnati, OH 45201.

Just as the Cincinnati community met the challenge to support the construction of safer schools and greater community partnerships, we're asking for your support again. We are here for our kids, and without a doubt, safety is the most basic need. Together we can ensure that Cincinnati Public Schools are safe learning environments.

Carolyn Jones is president of the Cincinnati Public Schools Board of Education. School board members jointly submitted this op-ed. Those members are Mike Moroski, Ozie Davis III, Ryan Messer, Eve Bolton, Melanie Bates and Ericka Copeland-Dansby.