

Safer Kids, Safer Schools Final Report Summary
October 30, 2023

School shootings occur with dreaded regularity in the U.S. As of October 6, 2023 there have been 389 school shootings in the U.S. since Columbine in 1999. More than 357,000 K-12 students have experienced school gun violence, and 2022 had the highest U.S. incidence of school gun violence on record.¹ Considering the broader impact and trauma of school gun violence on students, educators, first responders, and families—a single bullet has the power to inflict lasting trauma on entire communities.

School shootings are unacceptable and preventable.

An independent group of 30 concerned Traverse City, MI citizens called the Safer Kids, Safer Schools Task Force (SKSS) convened in the fall of 2022 to engage in open dialogue, learn the underlying causes of school violence, explore diverse perspectives and identify impactful recommendations to increase the safety and well-being of youth in our schools and community. While SKSS is a Traverse City-based initiative, the results and recommendations from this effort could be carried into practice in other schools and communities.

SKSS sought the answers to these questions:

1. What are the root causes of school shootings?
2. What is being done now in Traverse City to prevent a school shooting?
3. What more must be done to address this problem?
4. Who should be responsible for implementing solutions?

SKSS engaged in learning about the factors that contribute to school shootings by reading [The Violence Project](#), reviewing journal articles, state and federal reports and participating in presentations by school safety experts, law enforcement and social workers and health professionals.

As a result of seven, two-hour workshop sessions from October 2022-January 2023, SKSS concluded that:

- **We cannot fortify our way to safety.** Physical safety measures and procedures are important but not fail-safe. A commendable amount of work has already been accomplished and more is underway to support school safety at Traverse City Area Public Schools.
- **The well-being of our young people is essential.** Factors that place students at risk are childhood trauma, loneliness, bullying, mental health challenges, individual in-crisis and

¹ Cox, J., Rich, S., Chong, L., Muyskens, J., Ulmanu, M. (February 14, 2023) More than 338,000 students have experienced violence at school since Columbine. Washington Post.

lack of community awareness and coordinated response. Ensuring that all young people are physically-mentally-emotionally well is the greatest investment we can make to prevent a school shooting in our community.

- **Family/school/community engagement and a helping, compassionate approach are essential to caring for our young people.** The entire community must consider the well-being of our young people as a priority and responsibility. The future vitality of our community depends on it.

To promote community awareness about preventing school shootings and engage members of the public in sharing ideas and proposing solutions, SKSS organized a series of facilitated public input sessions in April and May of 2023. A total of 135 community members participated in these sessions to identify and discuss challenges, root causes and barriers to student well-being and to identify and prioritize initiatives in the schools and throughout the community that could lead to safer kids and safer schools.

Recommended **school-based** solution categories developed from community input sessions were:

- Creating a caring and connected school community.
- Expand student engagement.
- Expand mental health supports and programs within schools.
- Enhance screening and crisis intervention efforts.

Recommended **community-based** solution categories developed from community input sessions were:

- Create a movement to develop a caring and connected community.
- Promote community awareness of risk and appropriate responses.
- Reduce and respond to trauma.
- Engage and empower youth.
- Expand availability of essential community resources and supports.
- Enhance early intervention efforts.

Priority recommendations from the public input sessions are shared in the accompanying PowerPoint slides.

Identifying young people in crisis and caring for their well-being is our civic responsibility. Keeping our kids safer at school and in our community requires a new form of community literacy and action. Together we must support this work with compassion, time, energy and resources. The challenges are too great and the stakes are too high to ignore.

With gratitude, the SKSS recognizes the generous financial gifts of local individuals and foundations. We give special thanks to Jim and Diana Huckle, the Oleson Foundation, the Art and Mary Schmuckal Family Foundation and Rotary Charities of Traverse City whose leadership support enabled us to jump-start this grassroots effort to make our kids, schools and community safer for all. Local public and private K-12 and higher education leaders enthusiastically supported this SKSS initiative with their personal financial contributions.

The SKSS Leadership is indebted to the dedicated voluntary participation of the Task Force members. Members have been resolute in their caring, diligence, honesty, insight and commitment to making our kids, young people, schools and community safer.

The core work of the SKSS was strategically planned, documented and organized by these talented professionals: Facilitators Jonathan Pool and Pennie Foster-Fishman, communications specialist Courtney Bierschbach and administrative coordinator Michelle Baggett. Tim Quinn and Shelley Keith were instrumental behind the scenes, helping to shape a new culture of caring for our kids. We are thankful to all for their passion and experienced guidance.

APPENDIX B—Resources

General Resources

EducationWeek (2022) *School shootings this year: How many and where. (School Climate & Safety)* <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-this-year-how-many-and-where/2022/1>

EducationWeek (2023) *School shootings this year: How many and where. (School Climate & Safety)* <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-this-year-how-many-and-where/2023/1>

Peterson, J. & Densley, J. (2021) *The violence project: how to stop a mass shooting epidemic*. New York: Abrams Press.

Safer Kids, Safer Schools Task Force (2022) *Additional community resources*.

Presentations

Greilick, Carol (October 18, 2022) *Social and emotional learning: What it is and why it's important* [PowerPoint] Safer Kids, Safer Schools Task Force Meeting, Traverse City, MI.

Hirko, Kelly (October 4, 2022) *Gun violence in America* [PowerPoint] Safer Kids, Safer Schools Task Force Meeting, Traverse City, MI.

Recommendations

Quinn, T. & Keith, M. (August 7, 2023) *Safer Kids, Safer Schools School-based Strategy Recommendations*

Required Readings

Baldas, T., Anderson, E., Wisely, J. (October 24, 2022) *Ethan Crumbley admits guilt to murder in Oxford High School shooting*. Detroit Free Press. <https://autos.yahoo.com/autos/live-ethan-crumbley-expected-plead-123733396.html>

Bird, G. (November 15, 2022) Information about Grand Traverse County School Safety Collaborative.

Bird, G. (November 15, 2022) Bio for Gregg Bird, Grand Traverse County Emergency Management Coordinator.

Michigan Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (2022) *Profile for health youth survey for neighboring counties*. Michigan.

Peterson, J. & Densley, J. (2021) *The violence project: how to stop a mass shooting epidemic* [School Mass Shooters Graphic]. New York: Abrams Press.

Safer Kids, Safer Schools Task Force (November 2022) Interview with Superintendent John VanWagoner.

Safer Kids, Safer Schools Task Force (November 15, 2022) Questions on physical safety submitted to TCAPS Superintendent Dr. John VanWagoner and Grand Traverse County Emergency Management Coordinator Gregg Bird.

Safer Kids, Safer Schools (2022-23) Blog posts recapping each Safer Kids, Safer Schools Task Force session. <https://sksstc.com/updates>

School Safety Task Force, et al., (November 2018) *Final recommendations of the School Safety Task Force*. Michigan

Steigerwald, L., (May 26, 2022) *Michigan Superintendent Makes Proposals to Prevent School Shootings*. Bridge Michigan. <https://bridgemi.com/guest-commentary/opinion-michigan-superintendent-makes-proposals-prevent-school-shootings>

U.S. National Threat Assessment Center (July 2018) *Enhancing school safety using a threat assessment model*. United States Secret Service.

Yan, H., Riess, R., Salahieh, N. (October 25, 2022) *St. Louis school shooting Tuesday*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/25/us/st-louis-school-shooting-tuesday>

Recommended Readings

Chambers, J. (September 18, 2019) *'We have to do something': Michigan school district considers arming staff*. The Detroit News. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/education/2019/09/19/michigan-school-district-considers-arming-staff-with-guns/2279563001>

Grand Traverse County Emergency Management (2022) *Lockdown and Secure Mode Definition and Roles*

Mervosh, S. (July 31, 2022) *Trained, armed, and ready to teach kindergarten*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/31/us/teachers-guns-schools.html>

Ortiz, J. (November 26, 2019) *How to keep our schools safe? We're focusing our time, energy and money on 'all the wrong things,' experts say*. USA Today. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/11/21/school-shootings-metal-detectors-solution-experts/4255318002/>

Peterson, J. & Densley, J. (2019) *The off ramp project- The r-model™ ready-respond-refer-revisit organizational crisis response teams*. <https://off-ramp.org/crisis-response-teams>

Schildkraut, J. & Nickerson, A. (2022) *Lockdown drills: Connecting research and best practices for school administrators, teachers, and parents*. MIT press. Massachusetts.

Yan, H. (October 27, 2022) *School shootings warning signs*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/26/us/school-shootings-warning-signs-red-flags-xpn/index.html>