

**South Carolina Behavioral Health Coalition (SCBHC)**  
**Safe School Environment Vision and Call to Action**  
**March 2018**

The South Carolina Behavioral Health Coalition is committed to improving the health, safety and well-being of all South Carolinians. In particular, leaders of this Coalition believe that all children in our state should have the opportunity to learn and grow in a school environment that is safe and that promotes behavioral health and wellbeing.

Of specific concern to the Coalition is the epidemic of gun violence in our society, and the repeated tragic impact it is having on our nation's schools. As America tackles the problem of gun violence, the South Carolina Behavioral Health Coalition calls on our state's leaders to prioritize the safety of our children by establishing a vision for safe schools. As our leaders in education, law enforcement, and mental health articulate concrete steps to achieve this vision, every South Carolinian should seek opportunities to help make the vision a reality.

As professionals who are engaged with addressing behavioral health issues on a daily basis, we urge consideration of the following guiding principles to ensure a safe school environment:

1. That violence is not intrinsically a product of mental illness; most people who suffer from mental illness are not violent, and most people who act out violence are not mentally ill.
2. That the most effective way to address behavioral health issues in the school setting is through prevention, education and early intervention.
3. That school violence prevention and preparedness programs be implemented and that these programs be non-stigmatizing in nature.
4. That we continue to support and remove any barriers to research into the contributing factors behind gun violence so that we can develop evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies in school and community settings.
5. That policies should be established to reduce access to firearms by troubled youth or those who are of immediate danger to themselves or others.
6. That all students should have direct and timely access to school-based mental health counselors.
7. That every effort is made to increase the number of mental health professionals available to youth in the school and community setting.
8. That public and private payers and employers should provide coverage for school-based mental health counseling and treatment.

With these principles in mind, the Behavioral Health Coalition calls on leaders across our state and in all walks of life to support the vision of safe schools articulated by Governor McMaster, the State Superintendent of Education, the Chief of our State Law Enforcement Division, and the Director of our State Department of Mental Health. That vision for safe schools is set forth below.

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## **South Carolina School Safety Vision**

### **To be implemented immediately:**

1. The Department of Education working with law enforcement and mental health experts will develop virtual training modules for students, teachers, and staff, parents, and community members to identify characteristics of potential dangerous behavior and the importance of reporting this potential dangerous behavior.
2. The comprehensive district safety plan shall be developed and practiced yearly with local law enforcement and will include intruder/lockdown drills.
3. The Department of Education working with SLED will review all statutes and regulations regarding school safety requirements in schools and updated/implemented by the 2018-2019 school year.

### **To be implemented by 2020:**

1. A trained law enforcement school resource officer in every school.
  2. Access to school-based mental health counselors in every school.
  3. Best security practices must be included in any future school building plans.
  4. Recommend expansion of state health care coverage for mental health counseling.
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*This vision and call to action was adopted by the Leadership Team of the South Carolina Behavioral Health Coalition on March 29, 2018.*



Gerald Wilson, MD  
Chairman