



SECURING SCHOOL SAFETY

Schools can head off the potential for violence earlier thanks to a collaboration between NSA, ISA, CSS, and a Parkland parent



Max Schachter, founder of Safe Schools for Alex, meets with Vice President Mike Pence.

The Indiana Sheriffs' Association (ISA) and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) continued to work toward the improvement of school security. But disaster struck again, most notably at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Parkland, Florida, Feb. 14, 2018) and at Santa Fe High School (Santa Fe, Texas, May 18, 2018).

In the wake of such devastating school shootings, America's elected sheriffs were hard-pressed to respond to the concerns of their constituents, who wanted to know what more could be done to mitigate school shootings. With issues addressing mental health and gun control continuing to polarize the electorate, ISA decided to focus on a primary objective everyone could agree on—school safety—and let other issues be addressed separately.

Among the most influential in seeking best practices at the national level were Knox County (Indiana) Sheriff (Ret.) Steve Luce, ISA's executive director, and Max Schachter, who lost his 14-year-old son, Alex, in the Parkland mass shooting.

"I couldn't understand why this was still happening," Schachter says. "We made the airports safe after 9/11. We made the federal buildings safe after the Oklahoma City bombing. It's been 20 years since Columbine, and children and teachers continue to be murdered in their classrooms. The next school mass murderer is already out there. It's just a question of when and where. I could not sit back and wait for more families to be shattered. I had to do something."

Influenced by the author's PreFense (preventive defense) concepts, Sheriff Luce estimated that most available solutions concerned only the last 10% of a threat progression: response. "It made sense to me for us to start focusing on the 90% and moving toward earlier intervention," Sheriff Luce said in a recent interview.

Potential Threat	Developing Threat		Active Threat	
Potential Threat Indicators	Observable Concerning Behavior	Potential Violence Indicators	Pre-attack Behavior	Attack Behavior
90%			10%	



The school in Shelby County and ISA's work in school safety efforts were getting media coverage at the time, and Schachter reached out to Sheriff Luce. "I don't know how it would have been possible without Max," Sheriff Luce says. In March 2018, ISA asked NSA to get involved in the effort to keep America's classrooms safe.

Numerous high-level meetings followed with the Trump administration and congressmen discussing appropriations and a focus on hardening physical security. The goal was for NSA to lead the charge on school safety by providing a comprehensive school safety and security resolution. Sheriff Luce and Pierce County (Washington) Sheriff Ed Troyer drafted a resolution and delivered it to the chair of NSA's Committee of State Sheriffs' Associations.

After review, NSA's Executive Committee voted unanimously to support the resolution and send it to the NSA board of directors for approval. The resolution was read and passed unanimously on June 18, 2018, in New Orleans during the association's annual Education & Technology Expo. NSA was officially recognized as part of the collaborative law enforcement effort at a national level.

THE JOURNEY TOWARD BEST PRACTICES

NSA and ISA leadership had the foresight to see the missing pieces of the puzzle and bring them together, but it wasn't an easy task. ISA was (and is) a recognized leader in school safety, and that's why Schachter began his journey to align the U.S. federal government in this collaborative effort at the state level.

Schachter was appointed to serve on the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission on March 20, 2018, by former Florida Gov. Rick Scott. The commission was tasked with investigating the Parkland massacre and developing recommendations to protect Florida's schools.

"[Sheriff] Steve Luce was instrumental in educating me and helping me formulate the ideas and approach to school safety," Schachter says. "We traveled to Washington, D.C., many times—the Oval Office and the halls of Congress. None of that would have been possible without Steve."

Some of the safety features and best practices discussed in these initial meetings included a secure network that connects to a 911 call center and equipping teachers with an emergency fob that can immediately alert a police call center. Teachers would be able to communicate with authorities to protect students, and each classroom would have a designated safe space.

"All school safety systems should allow teachers to teach and students to learn, so they do not have to worry about being shot in their classrooms," Schachter says.

A TIMELINE OF RESPONSE

Schachter met with the Federal Commission on School Safety (FCSS) in March 2018, the first of many appearances intended to educate committee members on the impact of the Parkland shooting and the concept of best practices in the prevention and mitigation of school violence.

On April 5, 2018, Schachter brought a contingent to Shelbyville, Indiana, for a school safety forum that included Indiana, Florida, and federal representation. Its purpose? To

explore one of the safest schools in America and discover its cutting-edge technology and interventions.

On April 18, 2018, Sens. Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Bill Nelson (D-Florida) hosted government officials, families impacted by the Parkland shooting, experts, and leaders for a forum in Washington, D.C., on violence intervention and prevention, with a focus on technology in school security. The purpose of the forum was to bring people together to understand best practices on school safety to take back to their agencies and communities.

In June 2018, Schachter spoke at the Federal Bureau of Investigation School Safety Summit in Quantico, Virginia, focusing on behavioral warning signs, crisis intervention, threat assessment, school crisis response plans, law enforcement response, and the hardening of schools. In August, he testified before the FCSS at the White House. Panelists spoke on school policing, drills, protocols, building design, and threat assessment, pushing for more centralized federal efforts to advance best practices and track what's happening in schools around the country.

On Oct. 3, 2018, Schachter worked with Sen. Rubio to craft a letter signed by 34 members of Congress to urge Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and the FCSS to create a central authority to help school districts seeking to improve safety features within new and existing schools.

And on July 25, 2019, Schachter testified on school safety before the Senate Homeland Security Committee, urging congressional action to make schools safer. Pinellas County (Florida) Sheriff Bob Gualtieri, chair of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission, also testified.

Schachter was starting to realize that in the absence of nationally recognized school safety best practices, every K-12 school administrator had to become a school safety expert. To provide the guidance required for these school administrators, he envisioned the creation of a "one-stop shop" school safety clearinghouse of best practices.

In July 2019, Schachter and Tony Montalto, president of Stand With Parkland, attended the National School Safety Foundational Elements Roundtable hosted by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Their input led to the inclusion of the Low Cost/No Cost Immediately Implementable School Safety Tactics on *SchoolSafety.gov*, which was launched by the Federal School Safety Clearinghouse on Feb. 10, 2020.

SUSTAINABLE INTERVENTION

The term "response-option dependency" refers to the common strategy of waiting until an active threat occurs, then relying on physical

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security to save lives. Forward-thinking school administrators realized that a successful strategy can only be achieved by a collaborative effort in which all members of the learning community are stakeholders, not just law enforcement and judicial entities.



(Top) Schacter joins a meeting with President Trump and members of his administration. (Above) From left, Schacter, Stand With Parkland's Tom Hoyer, Pinellas County (Florida) Sheriff Bob Gualtieri, and child safety advocate Deborah Tempkin testify before the U.S. Senate's Homeland Security Committee.

related to physical security at school campuses and school incident response to improve the safety of children, teachers, and school staff. Sheriff Mascher (NSA), Sheriff Luce (ISA), and Tarani (CSS) further extended that effort toward sustainable interventions in preventing school violence below a threat assessment threshold.

Assessment Thresholds	Intervention Levels
Incident Control	Highest Level Intervention
Threat Assessment	Mid-level Intervention
Behavioral Assessment	Lowest Level Intervention

In a new initiative centered on promoting and accelerating tangible resources to build and maintain protocols that insulate schools from violence, NSA has launched the NSA School Safety Resource (NSSR) website, www.sheriffs.org/programs/school-safety. This platform offers support in creating learning environments that minimize potential threats and maximize resilience, while providing insights into public safety and recognizing that the first responsibility of a school is to educate.

School leadership, the judicial system, law enforcement, community stakeholders, and federal partners continue to make schools more secure places of learning—places where teachers can teach and students can learn without the fear of being killed in their classrooms. 🌟

Steve Tarani is an operational readiness specialist who has more than 25 years of experience in law enforcement.

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To be better prepared, administrators determined that school security should be extended beyond physical security. They implemented critical incident planning, threat assessment guidelines, active shooter training, “See Something, Say Something®,” and similar measures at or above the threat assessment threshold.



As a result, school safety, school security, and physical security became integrated in many schools, each with overlapping areas of responsibility supporting the others. However, two decades of case history, the final report of the FCSS, and supporting federal publications reveal that all schools, colleges, and universities share common vulnerabilities—rectifiable gaps in school safety found below the threat assessment threshold.



These shared vulnerabilities were further defined and addressed by ISA, NSA, and members of Certified Safe Schools (CSS) LLC, which then collaborated to codify best practices starting at the behavioral assessment threshold and presented these practices as amendments to the NSA 2018 School Safety and Security Resolution.

“OK, we’ve got all this input from the law enforcement community stakeholders and federal partnerships; what about the schools? Shouldn’t they have a say in this?” Yavapai County (Arizona) Sheriff Scott Mascher, asked at the June 27, 2018, summit. His question resulted in consultation with school administrators on a set of best practices that could be readily implemented in most school settings. In response to these requests and further development of best practices, NSA ratified the amendments officially on June 26, 2019.

Demonstrating unprecedented leadership, Schacter initiated a collaborative effort to identify, compile, and develop best practices