

Illinois Education Association Calls On School Districts, Lawmakers To Take Immediate Action To Address Increased Violence In Schools

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SPRINGFIELD — Illinois Education Association (IEA) President Kathi Griffin is calling on school districts that are not adhering to Illinois school safety laws to immediately comply. Griffin made the announcement at a news conference earlier today. Griffin also announced Rep. Fred Crespo (Hoffman Estates-D) and Rep. Tony

McCombie (Savanna-R) are working with the IEA on legislation to track which school districts are not in compliance with Illinois' laws.

“What happened in Michigan two weeks ago is a tragedy. Every incident where someone in a school is injured at the hand of another is heartbreaking,” said Griffin. “Violence is increasing in our schools across the state. Our educators should not have to constantly worry about their safety and the safety of their students. This is not their problem to solve. They’re under enough stress already. School administrators need to take immediate action to keep our students, staff and communities safe.”

In 2019, the Illinois Education Association initiated, and the state legislature passed, the School Threat Assessment Bill, House Bill 1561 (HB 1561).

The law does several things:

- Instructs schools to develop a threat assessment team and a threat assessment protocol.
- Expands the use of the 1-cent county sales tax to include school safety improvements, school resource officers or mental health professionals, or allow a district to issue bonds, borrow money or find other ways to pay for the similar needs.
- Requires school districts to implement a threat assessment procedure that may be part of a school board policy on targeted school violence and prevention, which must include the creation of a threat assessment team made up of specific people.
- Calls for each district to review each school building's emergency and crisis response plans, protocols and procedures and the make-up of its team.
- Requires each district's assessment team to include mental health professionals as well as representatives from state, county and local law enforcement agencies.

The IEA is now partnering with Crespo and McCombie to sponsor new legislation that will ensure school districts are complying with the requirements in the School Threat Assessment law.

“Keeping schools safe, free of violence, making sure that students have a learning environment that is welcoming and open to all is paramount to having a strong school community. A strong school community leads to a strong community, overall. This legislation was meant to bring a similar assessment plan to districts across the state – no matter the size – and this leads to a better Illinois,” Crespo said.

“Ideally, in a situation like what happened in Michigan, the threat assessment team would have been called upon and intervened to get the student they help they need before tragedy occurs. That’s the intent of these laws,” McCombie said. “The children

of our state are our most important asset. We must ensure threat assessment plans are not only created, but also followed to keep our students safe.”

Griffin also issued a reminder to school districts advising they can use Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to hire more staff to address mental health issues students may be facing.

“We need to make sure we are doing everything we can from a security standpoint, but also we need to make sure we are addressing the trauma that our students are going through,” Griffin said. “The pandemic is causing additional trauma for many Illinois families. We need to recognize that and do what we can to help.”

To request a recording of today's press conference, please email Bridget Shanahan at Bridget.Shanahan@ieane.org.

The 135,000 member Illinois Education Association (IEA-NEA) is the state’s largest union. IEA represents PreK-12 teachers outside the city of Chicago and education support staff, higher education faculty, retired education employees and students preparing to become teachers, statewide.