GLOBAL ALLIANCE
for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

Resolution on Safe Schools: Addressing Violence Prevention & Gun Violence
An official statement from the Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice (formerly the American Orthopsychiatric Association)

As a global behavioral health organization committed to upholding principles of human rights and social justice through policy, community action, and systemic change, we advocate for all children's right to receive an education in a safe environment.

We are deeply concerned about the gun violence that occurs in and around K-12 schools in the United States, the effects of exposure to these incidents on students' health and well-being, and the response of schools and communities to the violence. Schools are vital to communities, providing physical spaces and access to relationships that provide safe and supportive learning environments for students—a pivotal element in fostering academic, social, and emotional development. As students have returned to in-person classes this fall, reports of increased levels of mental (e.g., anxiety, depression) and behavioral health issues are worrisome. Now more than ever, we believe that prevention efforts must be implemented alongside adequate, evidence-based response protocols to promote safe schools, reduce gun violence, minimize trauma, and increase overall community safety.

Exposure to violence at school violates children's right to education in a safe space and can negatively impact well-being. In the last decade, there has been an influx of federal funding to support security-focused interventions (e.g., COPS in schools). Thus, the response of most K-12 schools to the rise in gun violence has been to enact a host of school safety measures, including the addition of school resource officers and the development and implementation of active shooter drills. As of the 2015-2016 school year, 95% of schools have implemented some form of active shooter drill, which consists of students preparing for the possibility of an armed attacker committing acts of violence within the school. These drills vary in intensity and can include announcements made over an intercom system, simulations of gunfire, fake blood, and actors portraying an attacker.

Key Facts
- School shootings with casualties at public and private K-12 schools reached their highest levels in 20 years in the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years
- More than a quarter of a million students have been exposed to gun violence at school since the Columbine shooting in 1999
- More than 70% of guns used in school shootings come from the students' homes or from a friend or family member
- In 77% of school shooting incidents, at least one person knew of the shooter's intent beforehand
- At least 40 states require school-based active shooter drills

Despite their prevalence, little is known about the effectiveness of the drills in keeping students safe or if they are worth the potential cost to students' well-being and perception of safety. In fact, a recent study of elementary, middle, and high school students in a large urban school district reported that, while students had a greater familiarity with the schools' protocols following the drills, they were less likely to report feeling safe at their school and in specific locations within the school (Schildkraut et al., 2020). Increased fear of victimization at school can contribute to a variety of negative outcomes, including the inability to concentrate, avoidance of particular places, and disengagement in school.

To promote strategies for safe schools and violence prevention and to address gun violence in K-12 schools in the United States, the Global Alliance recommends:

(1) School safety must be prioritized, with an emphasis on building positive relationships, promoting social connectedness and supports, cultivating opportunities and resources for students to engage in their school environments, and including social and emotional learning into school curriculum.

(2) Efforts that prevent school gun violence and promote a positive school climate must be prioritized and supported by the communities in which they are embedded. Preventing gun violence and promoting safe and equitable schools requires that communities address social and structural issues. Therefore, we advocate for:

- Health and mental health care access for all students;
- Fostering connections among and between students, teachers, staff, their schools, and communities;
- Providing schools with resources to implement early detection of and supportive responses to behavioral health challenges; and
- Environmental design of schools that promotes safety and eliminates places of insecurity.

(3) Rigorous longitudinal research must be conducted on the effectiveness of active shooter drills in schools and the long-term effects of these drills on students' health and well-being. In the meantime, if schools continue to implement these drills, we join others (including the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Resource Officers) in advocating for a developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed approach.

Additional Resources	Relevant articles in AJO
Everytown Research & Policy CDC Youth Violence Prevention Huskey, M. G., & Connell, N. M. (2021). Preparation or provocation? Student perceptions of active shooter drills. *Criminal Justice Policy Review, 32*(1), 3–26. Limber, S. P. & Kowalski, R. M. (2020). How schools often make a bad situation worse. *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice, 3,* 211-228. Peterson, J., Sackrison, E., & Polland, A. (2015). Training students to respond to shootings on campus: Is it worth it? *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management, 2*(2), 127–138. Jonson, C. J., Moon, M. M., & Hendry, J. A. (2020). One size does not fit all: Traditional lockdown versus multioption responses to school shootings. *Journal of School Violence, 19*(2), 154–166. Schildkraut, J., Grogan, K., & Nabors, A. (2020). Should schools be conducting lockdown drills? WestEd. Bradshaw, C. P., Cohen, J., Espelage, D. L., & Nation, M. (2021). Addressing school safety through comprehensive school climate approaches. *School Psychology Review*, 1-16.	Boberiene, L.V. (2013). Can policy facilitate human capital development? The critical role of student and family engagement in schools. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 83, 346-351. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajop.12041 Cornell, D. (2015). Our schools are safe: Challenging the misperception that schools are dangerous places. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 85*(3), 217–220. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000064 Hargrove, D. S., & Perdue, R. P. (2015). A broader perspective of gun control. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 85*(3), 225–227. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000066 Grover, H. M., Boberiene, L. V., & Limber, S. P. (2021). Are U.S. schools places of community? Does it matter? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 91*(3), 332–347. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000551

How can you help?
- Join our Safe & Humane Schools Task Force.
- Talk to your children and children in your life about their school community and safety.
- Talk to your children and children in your life about their experience with active school shooter drills and process through any feelings of fear they may have. Involve trained mental health professionals, if needed.
- Advocate for common sense gun safety and gun violence prevention measures. See Everytown Research for reports and recommendations on issues such as gun storage, extreme risk laws, and more.

Resolution principally drafted by Melissa Lewis and the Safe and Humane Schools Task Force.