



# WHO CARES?

PARENT'S ACTION PLAN FOR  
IMPROVING SCHOOL SAFETY

Protecting Our Children from  
Bullying, Drugs, Weapons and Suicide



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#### About the Cover Picture

The picture was taken in Queen Anne's County Maryland. Each year all the students in the entire school system wear identical shirts to promote Unity Day and their anti-bullying message. The school district began this amazing program in 2013 that makes reporting bullying, drugs, weapons and other harmful behavior easier by using their mobile phones. The district has seen a 71% decrease in reports of bullying since then.

## INTRODUCTION

### CHAPTER I: HOW THE SCHOOL SYSTEM WORKS

- a. How the school system works, or doesn't
- b. It's the "policy" stupid! – So let's change it!
- c. What were they thinking? – How school administrators think

### CHAPTER 2: ORGANIZATION

- a. Should I form a group?
- b. How to form a group – Step-by-Step Instructions
  - Decide you're going to start a group
  - Identify a few additional co-founders
  - Email your contacts and post a message on your Facebook page
  - Decide on a name
  - Agree on demands
  - Volunteer for roles
  - Adopt means of communication
  - Build coalitions
  - Join nearby We Care Group
  - Engage policymakers
  - Fundraising
  - Grow
- c. Already have a group?

### CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

- a. Know your facts
- b. Mental Health Facts/Statistics
  - Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) increase health risks
  - Bullying statistics
  - Suicide homicide death rate in teens
  - National survey of American Attitudes on substance abuse
- c. Understanding the policy and who the influencers are
- d. You Voted them in, they work for YOU!
- e. Statistics

### CHAPTER 4: TAKE ACTION – DEMAND ACTION

- a. Who are your legislators?
- b. Sign up on their websites
- c. Build partnerships
- d. Set up a Google News Alert, stay informed
- e. Build relationships with reporters
- f. Four opportunities for action
  - Opportunity 1 – Town Halls/Community Meetings
  - Opportunity 2 – Public Events/Ribbon Cuttings/Parades
  - Opportunity 3 – Elected Official Office Visits
  - Opportunity 4 – Coordinated Calls

## INTRODUCTION

I have been working with a group of advocates for school safety for the past five years. As I watched another news story and witnessed the video of a child being beaten in school by a group of bullies, I began to write to a reporter complaining about safety in our schools, but the only words that came to mind were “WHO CARES?”. Who cares enough to step outside of their school system boxes, rules and policies to truly take action that can save our children from the torment thousands of our children experience every day? Who cares? The answer: parents care, students care and you care, and this is where the change must start.

### WHO IS THIS ACTION PLAN BY AND FOR?

- ✓ Parents who have had their child bullied and feel the schools didn't do enough
- ✓ Parents who feel the schools do not do enough to keep drugs out of schools
- ✓ Parents who feel they should know when harmful activities are uncovered in their schools
- ✓ Parents who want their children to have a safe and secure learning environment

Each day thousands of students fear going to school because of bullying and intimidation. If they build up the courage to tell their parents and school administrator, the actions most schools take are ineffective, antiquated and in many cases, makes the situation worse because now their kids are labeled as a “snitch”. This poor and inadequate response by the school system results in our kids turning inward and turning toward drugs, alcohol and, even worse, suicide to end their pain.

This guide takes years of experience, countless meetings with school administrators, politicians, law enforcement, counselors, PTAs and students. It is not funded by any political party. In fact, as you will read, some are a part of the problem, not the solution, despite every one of them putting “better schools” in their campaign platform. Parents and students must rise up with a concrete plan and clear list of demands, in order to change the system.

### **Something needs to be done!**

During our years of working with students, schools, legislators and law enforcement we have developed a program that we believe will work in your school system. It is based on these five principles:

1. Parents must show up, in force, and demand safer schools
2. Parents must demand that school systems disclose harmful activities, such as bullying, drugs, weapons and other harmful activities that jeopardize their child's safety.
3. Parents must know what changes they want and clearly spell out these changes so they can be incorporated into a new school “policy”.
4. Parents must know who can make these changes, both legislatively and administratively, as well as the bureaucratic obstacles they will face.
5. Parents must have legislators willing to push their demands and you must support them.

The bottom line is that it's not money, personnel, bureaucracy or any of the other issues that can effect serious change, it's parental and student mobilization and action. School officials work for the parents and students, not the other way around. Parents must apply pressure, where it will force change to make our schools safer.

Parents and students have the motivation and now they have a plan to break through the obstacle. Only you can force a change in what is wrong with our educational system.

**It starts here and now with this Parents Action Plan!**

*Alvin Butler, Sr.*

Alvin Butler Sr.  
Executive Director  
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# CHAPTER I: HOW THE SCHOOL SYSTEM WORKS

## a. Lesson from the Tea Party and The Resistance Movements

Let's be clear, the approach of this Parent's Action Plan is ripped right out of the playbook used by the Tea Party and copied by The Resistance Movement. It involves coordinating small local groups, whose voices were too small, and uniting and strengthening them with national coordination. It was brilliant, and it worked!

### History of these movements

The Tea Party and the Resistance Movement that followed, started as organic movements built on small local groups of dedicated conservatives and liberals. Yes, they received some support/coordination from above, but fundamentally all the hubbub was caused by a relatively small number of groups working together.

The Tea Party started as disaffected conservatives talking to each other online. In response to the 2008 bank bailouts and President Obama's election, groups began forming to discuss their anger and what could be done. They eventually realized that the locally based discussion groups themselves could be a powerful tool.

Groups were small, local, and dedicated. Tea Party groups could be fewer than 10 people, but they were highly localized, and they dedicated significant personal time and resources. Members communicated with each other regularly, tracked developments in Washington, and coordinated advocacy efforts together.

The Resistance movement, angered by the election of Donald Trump as president, created a guide called "Indivisible". They even state it was created based on lessons learned from the Tea Party.

*Donald Trump is the biggest popular-vote loser in history to ever call himself President. In spite of the fact that he has no mandate, he will attempt to use his congressional majority to reshape America in his own racist, authoritarian, and corrupt image. If progressives are going to stop this, we must stand indivisibly opposed to Trump and the Members of Congress (MoCs) who would do his bidding. Together, we have the power to resist — and we have the power to win.*

*We know this because we've seen it before. The authors of this guide are former congressional staffers who witnessed the rise of the Tea Party. We saw these activists take on a popular president with a mandate for change and a supermajority in Congress. We saw them organize locally and convince their own MoCs to reject President Obama's agenda. Their ideas were wrong, cruel, and tinged with racism — and they won.*

This Parent's Action Guide is based on these successful grassroots movements; however, we take it to a more local and state level and a nonpartisan level. It is not about right vs left it is about student and child safety and on that all sides can agree.

## b. How the school system works, or doesn't

School systems in the U.S. vary from state to state, from community to community, even from school to school. There are obvious differences in size, culture, procedures and hierarchy, not to mention the differences in private vs public schools. However, regardless of where your child goes to school, or how large or small the system is, one problem is present regardless of these differences. That is the issue of school safety and, in particular, bullying, drugs, alcohol, weapons and self-mutilation or suicide. These issues know no culture, economic or ethnic barrier.



The ways in which these schools run and are organized and run vary. Some are relatively independent: what goes on in the school is largely determined by the principal and teaching staff. Some involve parents as partners in planning and implementing both curriculum and school management. Some have strict dress codes – sometimes to the point of requiring uniforms – others have none. Some are devoted to academics and to sending as many students as possible to top-ranked colleges; others seem much more concerned with sports or other extracurricular activities. By and large, schools mirror the educational philosophy and attitudes of the people in their districts.

All schools have policies regarding bullying and other harmful activities in their schools. System-wide policies are generally decided upon by state legislators and/or state and county school boards. These policies are then implemented by the school staff.

Most school systems and schools are hierarchical – they have a clear (at least to themselves) chain of command, and you must follow that chain in order to communicate with the system. This Parent's Action Plan shows how to penetrate that hierarchical structure to effect change and security for our kids.

But it doesn't stop with changing policies we need attitudes change. During a meeting of state school counselor, those individuals who manage the front-line counselors who deal with student crisis's, they were presented with a solution to reduce bullying, drugs, suicide in their schools. Upon hearing that the solution might require them to receive information beyond their normal 8 – 4:30 schedule, one of the counselor stated:

*“I deal with these problems eight hours a day and I don't want to deal with them after hours also”*

In combating the issues that make our children unsafe in schools, we must also combat human culture in the school system that allows people to have jobs that they are not suited for.

### c. It's not the money it's the "policy" – So let's change it

Just about every school system has a set of policies - the official or unofficial rules which these organizations employ. Policies are generally based on a combination of logic and people's assumptions, correct or incorrect, about the way the school system is and works.

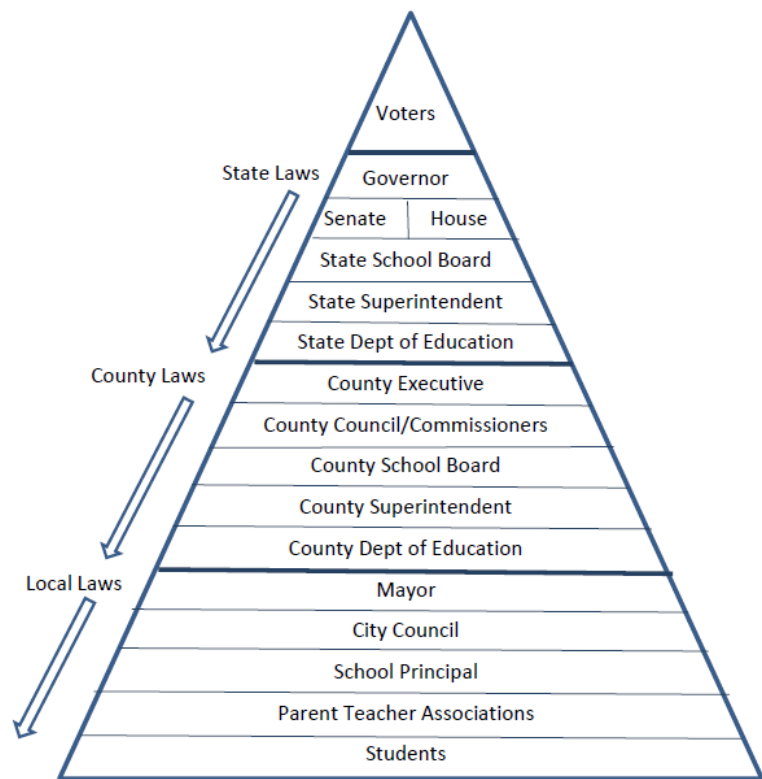
When the policies of the educational system stand in the way of beneficial interventions or necessary fundamental community change, you may need to change the policies themselves. Changing policy is a step on the road to changing social conditions and real community development. It saves you from constantly having to repeat your efforts, and in the long term, changes people's minds and attitudes. It's usually the shortest road to permanent system change.

The ideal policy change agents are broad-based coalitions, although organizations that work with those affected by the policies in question, grass roots community initiatives, concerned professional groups, and determined individuals can all be effective in the right circumstances.

The fundamental guidelines for changing policies are the 8 P's<sup>i</sup> :

1. **Planning** - using a participatory strategic planning process.
2. **Preparation** - including doing all the necessary research and becoming expert on existing policies.
3. **Personal contact** with policy makers, other change agents, and anyone else you have to deal with.
4. **Pulse of the community** - knowing what the community's attitudes are, what citizens will accept, where to start in order to be successful.
5. **Positivism** - framing policy changes and their outcomes in a positive light.
6. **Participation** - including everyone affected by or concerned with the issue in planning and implementing policy change.
7. **Publicity** for your efforts in general and for your suggested policy changes - and particularly the reasons for them.
8. **Persistence**, monitoring and evaluating your actions, and keeping at it for as long as necessary.

Legislative Power in the Educational System



[www.whocaresyoucare.org](http://www.whocaresyoucare.org)

#### d. What were they thinking? - How school administrators think

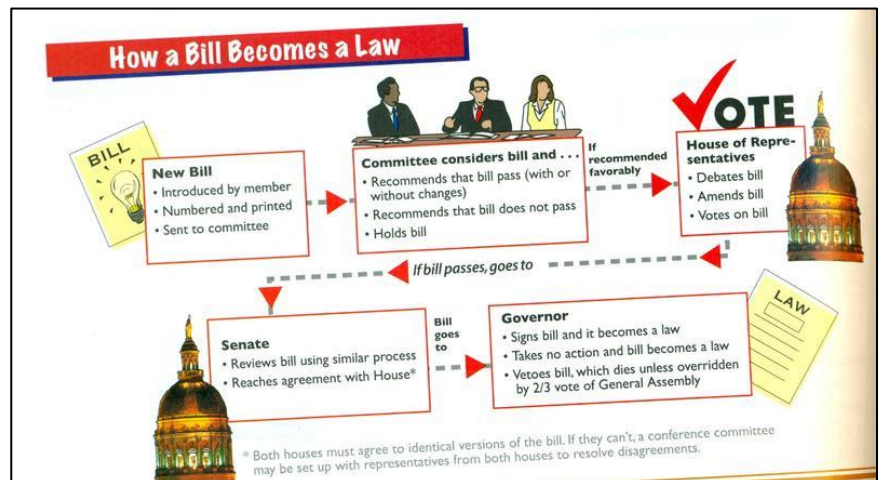
To influence your own school systems, you have to understand one thing: every elected official runs for office. Functionally these elected officials write policy and appoint key school administrators. They are always either running for office or getting ready for their next election — a fact that shapes everything they do.

To be clear, this does not mean that your elected official is cynical and unprincipled. The vast majority believe in their ideals and care deeply about representing their constituents and having a positive impact. But they also know that if they want to make change, they need to stay in office.

This constant reelection pressure means they are enormously sensitive to their image in the district or state, and they will work very hard to avoid signs of public dissent or disapproval.

School policy change, at least officially, happens from the inside. The Board of Education or Superintendent (or at least the principal if the change concerns only a single school) has to approve and institute the change. Furthermore, as we mentioned earlier, the school staff involved in implementing it have to actually do so, rather than just go through the motions, if the change is going to mean anything.

At the same time, policy change often originates from outside the system, and that's where you come in. Schools, as we discussed, are hierarchical, and like many hierarchical organizations, they can be resistant to change of any kind. They are often particularly resistant to change that implies that what they've been doing is wrong, incompetent, or harmful. It may take a good deal of pressure from parents, students, community members, and/or officials to get them to respond.



## CHAPTER 2: ORGANIZATION

### a. SHOULD I FORM A GROUP?

There's no need to reinvent the wheel — if a group or network is already attempting to end bullying, drugs, suicides or other harmful activities in our schools, just join in with them. If you are a group that is concerned about any of these issues, register with Who Cares? [www.whocaresyoucare.org](http://www.whocaresyoucare.org) and let us send additional members, other groups and resources to you to strengthen your group.



If you look around and can't find a group working specifically on local action focused on your school or school district in your area, just start doing it! It's not rocket science. You really just need two things:

1. Ten or so people (but even fewer is a fine start!) who are geographically nearby — ideally in the same school or local community
2. A commitment from those people to devote a couple hours per month to improving the safety and culture in their schools. Parents fed up with their child being bullied or feeling like the schools don't do enough are motivated members and we provide a solution to their frustration.

### b. HOW TO FORM A GROUP – Step-by-Step Instructions

If you do want to form a group, here are the steps on how to go about it:

- **Decide you're going to start a local group** - Start where people are: if you're in a group with a lot of people who want to do this kind of thing, then start there; if you're not, you'll need to find them somewhere else. Registering your group at [www.whocaresyoucare.org](http://www.whocaresyoucare.org) will allow people looking for a group to join the ability to find you. The most important thing is that this is a LOCAL group. Your band of heroes is focused on applying local pressure, which means you all need to be local.
- **Identify a few additional co-founders** who are interested in participating and recruiting others. Ideally, these are people who have different social networks from you so that you can maximize your reach. Ideally the best co-founders are:
  - Parents who have had their child bullied and feel the schools didn't do enough
  - Parents who feel the schools do not do enough to keep drugs out of schools
  - Parents whose child has committed suicide or attempted it because of bullying
  - Parents who feel they should know when harmful activities are uncovered in their schools
  - Parents who want their children to have a safe and secure learning environment
- **Email your contacts and post a message on your Facebook page**, on any local Facebook groups that you're a member of, and/or other social media channels you use regularly. Say that you're starting a group for parents of \_\_\_\_\_ School or \_\_\_\_\_ School District dedicated to making our schools safe and ask people to email you to sign up.



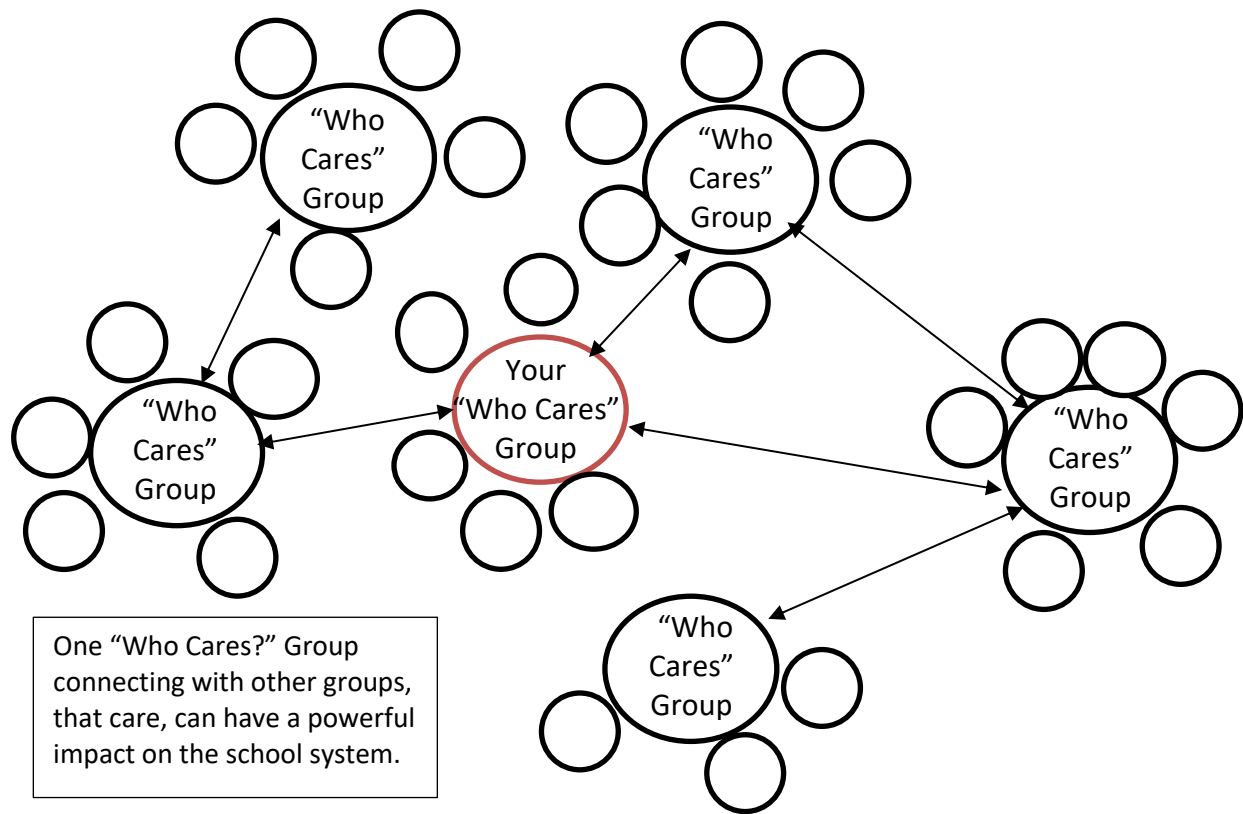
- **Invite everyone who has expressed interest to an in-person kickoff meeting.** Use this meeting to agree on a name, principles for your group, roles for leadership, a way of communicating, and a strategy. Rule of thumb: 50% of the people who have said they are definitely coming will show up to your meeting. Aim high! Get people to commit to come — they'll want to because protecting their kids is important.
- **Have an agenda:** Keep people focused on the ultimate core strategy: applying pressure to your school or school district. Other attendees may have other ideas — or may be coming to share their concerns — and it's important to affirm their concerns and feelings. But it's also important to redirect that energy and make sure that the conversation stays focused on developing a group and a plan of action dedicated to this strategy.
- **Decide on a name:** Good names include the geographic area of your group, so that it's clear that you're rooted in the community — e.g., "School/School District Cares." You are 100% welcome to pick up and run with the Who Cares? name if you want, but we won't be hurt if you don't.
- **Agree on demands:** This is your chance to say what your group stands for but more important what you want from the school system. While it is easy to stray away from your main goal, student safety, we urge you to stay focused. The decision makers you come in contact with must know you are about protecting your children and not improving teaching methods, athletics or other issues. Most of these will improve once you change the culture of the school by focusing on a safe environment for students.

Here are some recommend changes that our experience has shown, will improve the safety of your school:

- **Complete Resolution** of Issues – Many times when, and if, schools “deal with” the reported situation, it amounts to talking to the bully and student and then they considered it resolved. However, in many cases the bullying and harassment takes on new forms, such as stares and being called “a snitch”. Schools must insure that the student and parents feel that the situation is resolved and not just “dealt with”.
- **Revise Antique Reporting Methods** - Demand an end to antiquated reporting procedures that hinder a student's ability to come forward. Today almost every student has an iPhone or access to a computer. This gives them the ability to report issues, anonymously, without having to resort to forms, counselor meetings and other methods that are intimidating to students. Schools must allow reporting of issues via anonymous electronic media, such as texting, web chat, mobile apps and or online report forms that don't require the student to provide their name.
- **Report Transparency** – All too often bullying, drugs, weapons, suicides, staff abuse, threats to the school and other harmful activities that are uncovered in schools are withheld from parents and even law enforcement. While most schools make bullying statistics are available in most school districts, reports on drugs, weapons and other harmful acts are not made available to parents. These this leaves parents in the dark as to how safe or unsafe their child's school really is. We demand that policies be reviewed to insure procedures and their handling is transparent to parents and students. All schools must report incidences of bullying, drugs and weapons on a monthly or annual basis.

- **Encourage Students to Come Forward** – Students ALWAYS know a problem exists in the school, long before the school system or parents. Unfortunately, many students are not aware of how or if they should report issues like bullying, drugs, suicidal concerns, weapons, threats to the school and other harmful activities in their schools. While most schools have this procedure in their student handbooks, or on their websites, most students remain unaware of the procedure. Posters, announcements, and other procedures must be used to ensure that every student is aware that the school not only wants them to come forward but also encourages them to do so.
- **Mental Health Training and Protocols:** Students with mental health concerns are most likely to bully, use drugs, alcohol, attempt suicide and are likely to become violent to other students and to themselves. While the home is always the first place to determine these issues, the school administration is in a unique position to compare a student’s attitude, social ability and study patterns to what is deemed “normal” for that student’s peer groups, as opposed to being just a phase the child is going through. There are trauma and depression screenings and protocols that allow for screening and risk assessments/threat assessments where professionals can make a determination as to whether a child is a threat to harm his/herself or others. All schools should train teachers and staff to recognize behavioral concerns in students and have written protocols in place help the parent and student towards a healthy solution for the student.
- **Expulsion of Problem Students** While mental health screenings are the first step in determine if a student’s behavior is correctable, in some cases, it may be necessary to remove the problem student from the school in order to protect the body as a whole. Acceptable protocols must be in place to determine what conditions warrant removing the student both temporarily and permanently.
- **Volunteer for roles:** Figure out how to divide roles and responsibilities among your group. This can look very different depending on who’s in the room, but at a minimum, you probably want 1-2 people in charge of overall group coordination, a designated media/social media contact, and 1-2 people in charge of tracking the educational calendar events. In addition to these administrative roles, ask attendees how they want to contribute to advocacy efforts: attend events, record events, ask questions, make calls, host meetings, engage on social media, write op-eds for local papers, etc.
- **Adopt means of communication:** You need a way of reaching everyone in your group in order to coordinate actions. This can be a Facebook group, a Google group, a Slack team — whatever people are most comfortable with. It may be wise to consider secure or encrypted platforms such as Signal and WhatsApp.
- **Build coalitions.** Grassroots advocacy is all about banding together like-minded people for a single purpose or cause. The same collaboration can, and should, happen between organizations. Organizations who learn to work together can bring about the policy changes that would have otherwise been impossible to impact separately and alone.
- **Join nearby We Care Groups:** Many issues may involve areas outside of your school or school district. By joining other We Care Groups you can support each other for county or state-wide shows of force. You will find this will be your greatest asset in effecting upper level,

or statewide, change that impacts your school or school district. To find a group near you go to [www.whocaresyoucare.org](http://www.whocaresyoucare.org).



- **Engage policymakers.** Elected officials rely on the information from their constituents to make the right decisions and membership organizations can compile that information to educate them. Organizations who educate and engage policy makers on the views of the voter around specific issues will be seen as a credible and useful source of information.
- **Fundraise.** No matter how big a volunteer force, or how much passion and energy you have, successful grassroots advocacy still requires cash. Money for resources like advertising, advocacy tools, tables at events, feeding volunteers, etc., should all be laid out in your strategic plan so that you know how much you will need to fund raise.
- **Grow!** Enlist your members to recruit across their networks. Ask every member to send out the same outreach emails/posts that you did. Recruit people for your email list — 100 or 200 isn't unreasonable.

### c. ALREADY HAVE A GROUP?

Sign up at [www.WhoCaresYouCare.org](http://www.WhoCaresYouCare.org). We're creating a public directory of groups to help you make connections on your home turf. We'll also be sending special updates to group leaders to help build local action plans.

Your group may be pursuing the Who Cares? goals as part of a broader mission. Whatever works!

[www.whocaresyoucare.org](http://www.whocaresyoucare.org)

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

### a. Know your facts

Before you can affect change you must know the facts. There is plenty of state and local information on your county and state websites. For example one good place to start is your state's Board of Education website. Maryland is required, by law, to put out two annual reports on bullying.

[Maryland's Model Policy To Address Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation](#), revised periodically and the [Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation in Maryland Public School](#) put out each year. These two reports or similar reports are probably put out by your state. It is a good starting point for understanding the current bullying situation in your schools as well as policies in place to combat the problem. Unfortunately this only pertains to bullying, and no such reports exist for drugs, suicides or other issues in most states.

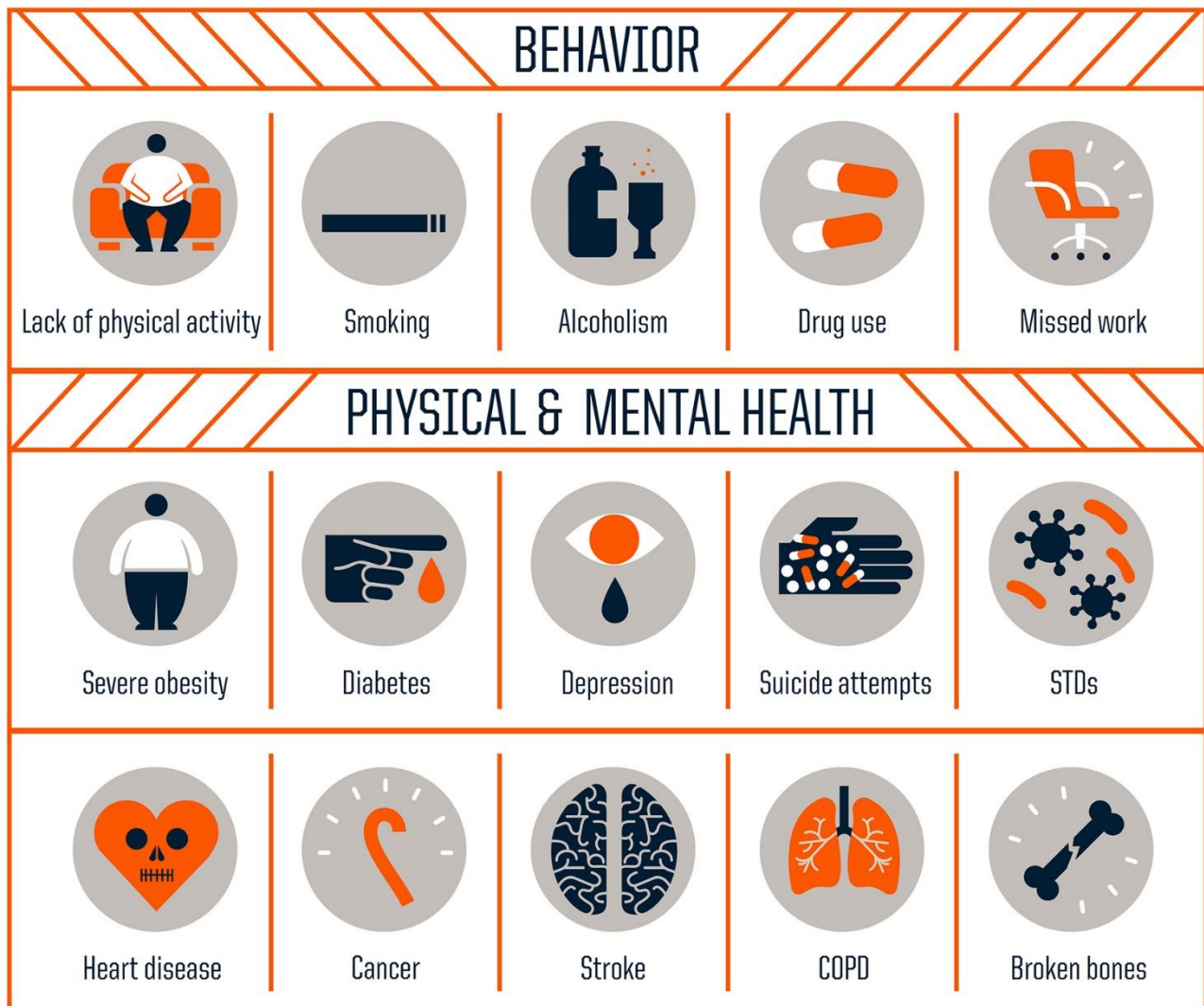
Local Education Agency	School Year		
	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Queen Anne's	6.9	4.0	<b>3.0</b>
Montgomery	2.9	2.8	<b>3.2</b>
Prince George's	3.3	1.9	<b>3.4</b>
St. Mary's	5.8	4.4	<b>3.4</b>
Garrett	8.5	5.2	<b>3.9</b>
Anne Arundel	4.2	3.9	<b>4.1</b>
Baltimore City	5.6	3.7	<b>4.4</b>
Worcester	7.5	1.8	<b>4.8</b>
Frederick	7.9	6.2	<b>4.9</b>
Allegany	5.3	4.7	<b>5.2</b>
Carroll	6.6	6.5	<b>5.4</b>
Harford	2.6	2.8	<b>5.5</b>
Howard	5.2	5.2	<b>6.7</b>
Charles	6.4	6.9	<b>7.7</b>
Cecil	10.4	7.3	<b>7.8</b>
Calvert	12.3	6.4	<b>8.2</b>
Washington	8.1	10.3	<b>8.5</b>
Baltimore County	5.4	6.8	<b>9.0</b>
Caroline	8.3	9.8	<b>9.6</b>
Somerset	12.6	8.2	<b>13.4</b>
Talbot	17.4	13.8	<b>13.4</b>
Wicomico	11.3	14.2	<b>14.4</b>
Dorchester	19.1	19.2	<b>15.0</b>
Kent	29.8	18.0	<b>16.3</b>

Table is from the [Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation in Maryland Public School](#) report and sorted by 2015-16 best to worst. [Queen Anne's County Public Schools](#) was featured on the cover for this Parent's Action Plan.

# MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS

## ACEs Increase Health Risks

Childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. As such, early experiences are an important public health issue. Much of the foundational research in this area has been referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Reactions to trauma are sometimes misdiagnosed as symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, because kids dealing with adverse experiences may be impulsive — acting out with anger or other strong emotions.

Other resources available at websites like [stopbullying.org](http://stopbullying.org), the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and [centeronaddiction.org](http://centeronaddiction.org) will give the national perspective. Below are some national statistics on bullying, teen suicides and drug use help you get started:

<https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-cyber-bullying>

1. Nearly 43% of kids have been bullied online. 1 in 4 has had it happen more than once.
2. 70% of students report seeing frequent bullying online. Filling up your friends' Facebook feeds with positive posts instead of negative ones can boost school-wide morale. Start a Facebook page for students to submit positive acts they see in school to promote a culture of positivity on and offline. Sign up for
3. Over 80% of teens use a cell phone regularly, making it the most common medium for cyber bullying.
4. 68% of teens agree that cyber bullying is a serious problem.
5. 81% of young people think bullying online is easier to get away with than bullying in person.
6. 90% of teens who have seen social-media bullying say they have ignored it. 84% have seen others tell cyber bullies to stop.
7. Only 1 in 10 victims will inform a parent or trusted adult of their abuse.
8. Girls are about twice as likely as boys to be victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying.
9. About 58% of kids admit someone has said mean or hurtful things to them online. More than 4 out of 10 say it has happened more than once.
10. Bullying victims are 2 to 9 times more likely to consider committing suicide.
11. About 75% of students admit they have visited a website bashing another student.

## Suicide and Homicide Death Rate in Teens

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), in 2015: Suicide and Homicide was the third and fourth leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10 and 14, and the second and third leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 15 and 34.

Leading Cause of Death in the United States (2015)							
Data Courtesy of CDC							
Rank	Select Age Groups						
	10-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	All Ages
1	Unintentional Injury 763	Unintentional Injury 12,514	Unintentional Injury 19,795	Unintentional Injury 17,818	Malignant Neoplasms 43,054	Malignant Neoplasms 116,122	Heart Disease 633,842
2	Malignant Neoplasms 428	<b>Suicide 5,491</b>	<b>Suicide 6,947</b>	Malignant Neoplasms 10,909	Heart Disease 34,248	Heart Disease 76,872	Malignant Neoplasms 595,930
3	<b>Suicide 409</b>	Homicide 4,733	Homicide 4,863	Heart Disease 10,387	Unintentional Injury 21,499	Unintentional Injury 19,488	CLRD 155,041
4	Homicide 158	Malignant Neoplasms 1,469	Malignant Neoplasms 3,704	<b>Suicide 6,936</b>	Liver Disease 8,874	CLRD 17,457	Unintentional Injury 146,571
5	Congenital Abnormalities 156	Heart Disease 997	Heart Disease 3,522	Homicide 2,895	<b>Suicide 8,751</b>	Diabetes Mellitus 14,166	Cerebrovascular 140,323
6	Heart Disease 125	Congenital Anomalies 386	Liver Disease 844	Liver Disease 2,861	Diabetes Mellitus 6,212	Liver Disease 13,278	Alzheimer's Disease 110,561
7	CLRD 93	CLRD 202	Diabetes Mellitus 798	Diabetes Mellitus 1,986	Cerebrovascular 5,307	Cerebrovascular 12,116	Diabetes Mellitus 79,535
8	Cerebrovascular 42	Diabetes Mellitus 196	Cerebrovascular 567	Cerebrovascular 1,788	CLRD 4,345	<b>Suicide 7,739</b>	Influenza & Pneumonia 57,062
9	Influenza & Pneumonia 39	Influenza & Pneumonia 184	HIV 527	HIV 1,055	Septicemia 2,542	Septicemia 5,774	Nephritis 49,959
10	Two Tied 33	Cerebrovascular 166	Congenital Abnormalities 443	Septicemia 829	Nephritis 2,124	Nephritis 5,452	<b>Suicide 44,193</b>

# National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse

<https://www.centeronaddiction.org/addiction-research/reports/national-survey-american-attitudes-substance-abuse-teens-2012>

## **Marijuana, Prescription Drugs, Cocaine, Ecstasy, Other Drugs Sold at School**

Almost half of high school students (44 percent) know of a student who sells drugs (including marijuana and prescription drugs) at their school. We asked these students to list the kinds of drugs (up to three) that are sold. Nearly all of these high school students (91 percent) say marijuana, one-quarter (24 percent) say prescription drugs, nine percent say cocaine, and seven percent say ecstasy. Cigarettes, LSD/mushrooms, alcohol, heroin and methamphetamine were also mentioned. (Figure 2.B)

Compared to high school students who do not know of a student drug dealer at school, those who do are:

- More than twice as likely to have used marijuana (35 percent vs. 16 percent);
- One and a half times likelier to have used alcohol (55 percent vs. 32 percent); and
- Nearly twice as likely to have used tobacco (21 percent vs. 11 percent).

## **Tobacco, Alcohol, Marijuana Use Common among Classmates**

Ninety-three percent of high school students say that some classmates drink alcohol, 93 percent say some use drugs (including marijuana and controlled prescription drugs) and 93 percent say some smoke. We asked teens what percent of their classmates drink, use drugs and smoke. They say (on average) that:

- 47 percent drink alcohol;
- 40 percent use drugs; and
- 30 percent smoke cigarettes

## **More than a Quarter of High School Students Say Most Classmates Use Drugs**

One in five 12- to 17- year olds (22 percent) say that most (more than half) of their classmates drink alcohol and 18 percent say that most of their classmates use drugs. Among high school students:

- 28 percent say more than half of their classmates use drugs (including marijuana and controlled prescription drugs); and
- 37 percent say more than half of their classmates drink alcohol. Students who say that more than half of their classmates smoke, drink or use drugs are more likely to have used these substances themselves: (Figure 2.C)
- Compared to high school students who say that less than half of their classmates use drugs, those who say that more than half of their classmates use drugs are two and a half times likelier to have used marijuana (42 percent vs. 17 percent);
- Compared to high school students who say that less than half of their classmates drink, those who say that more than half of their classmates drink are more than twice as likely to have used alcohol (64 percent vs. 29 percent); and
- Compared to high school students who report that less than half of their classmates smoke, those who estimate that more than half of their classmates smoke are twice as likely to have used tobacco (27 percent vs. 13 percent).

## **Increase in Drug-Infected Private High Schools**

For the first time, this year more than half of private high school students (54 percent) and 61 percent of public high school students say that students keep, use or sell drugs at the schools they attend. We call these schools drug infected. Over the past decade, the percent of students who say they attend a drug-infected private high school has increased significantly.

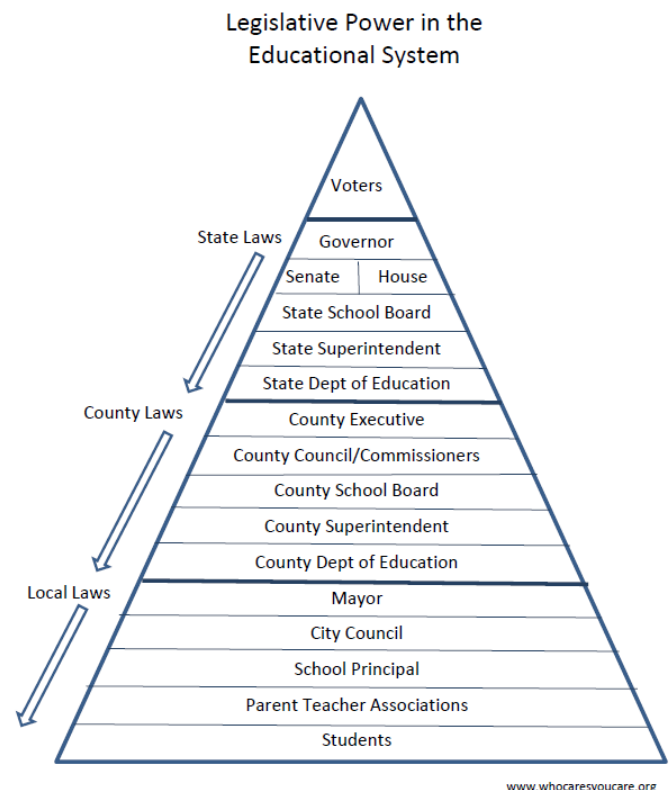


## b. Understanding the “Policy” and who the influencers are

The more you know about current policy, the school system, the issue your proposed changes relate to, and the individuals involved, the better your chances of success will be. The homework you need to do:

- **Learn about current policy – Google It.** Find out exactly what the current policy on the issue is. These can be obtained by going to your school or school district website. You may have to get both the school district and state policy to get the full picture. If it’s written down, be sure you have a copy.
- **Know the issue inside out.** Make sure you understand the issue well enough that you can answer any questions put to you, make sure they can’t come up with anything you haven’t thought of.
- **Prepare a solid rationale for the proposed change.** Be prepared to:
  - Explain exactly why the change is necessary. If it’s to remedy a problem, you should be able to define and cite examples of the issue, demonstrate why it *is* a problem, and describe what the hoped-for results of policy change would look like. If the change is meant to fill a gap or add a needed program, you should be able to show convincingly how the change will benefit students (or the school, or the community), and how its consequences will be an improvement over the consequences of the current policy, or lack of one.
  - Refer to research that backs up your arguments. Studies show improvements in various kinds of student outcomes – reading scores, attendance and graduation rates, etc. – as a result of the kind of change you’re seeking can help to convince the appropriate people to take action.
  - Defend your proposal against attacks and counterarguments. This gets back to knowing opponents and their arguments.

- **Learn everything you can about the structure of the school system and the personalities of those within it.** You can’t deal with a school system without understanding how it operates. Once again, most systems are hierarchies, and hierarchies have protocols – rules – about whom to contact first, who makes decisions about various issues, etc. If you don’t know the protocol, you can easily make a mistake that might offend or threaten someone whose support you need. An ally or sympathetic



advisor within the system may be able to help you understand what your best approach might be.

- Set aside the opportunity to discover the structure of the levels of leadership in the framework (Appendix B). Is it unbending or adaptable? Who reports to whom? Where do you begin in the event that you have a protest or need to talk about an episode or issue? At the most minimal level? At the most noteworthy? Whom will you annoy in the event that you don't take after convention?
- In many frameworks, the place to begin is nearest to the issue. An issue that identifies with a solitary classroom should begin with the instructor. In the event that the determination there is unsuitable, or if the instructor can't help, the main is the subsequent stage, trailed by the director, and eventually by the Board of Education or Superintendent. For a framework wide issue, you'd begin with the administrator. In the event that the issue required a framework wide arrangement change, regardless you'd begin with the administrator. At last, any real framework wide change needs to precede the Board of Education or Superintendent.

### c. **You VOTED them in, they work for YOU!**

Who are the individuals that you can get to support your agenda. The teachers, school counselors, principle, school board member, local politicians? Which individuals are potential partners in an arrangement change exertion? Which are potential adversaries, and which are the neutrals you'll need to persuade? What positions have they gone up against the issue before? What's imperative to them? Who are their companions and bodies electorate? Who is up for reelection or reappointment?

Sporadically, affecting a change can involve choosing or voting out the opportune individual. A difference in a few elected officials, with a strong parent (voter) backing can change statutes and policies.

Go to Board of Education or Superintendent meetings to see how they operate. Who are the capable voices on the committee? Whose conclusions are regarded, and whose are disregarded? Who impacts whom? Who reacts to what sorts of contentions? Does the committee work well as a body, or is it racked with contradiction and doubt?

Identify your allies and your opponents, both in the system and in the community. There may be groups that are obvious allies on a particular issue. Allies and opponents don't always break down neatly into identifiable groups. Sometimes, where a policy doesn't particularly benefit or harm a particular group, it's simply a diverse collection of individuals on each side of the issue, disagreeing about the right way to do things. In that case, you have to identify allies and opponents one by one.

**Change of personnel.** The problem may not be policy, but simply the way an individual or group chooses to do things. Changing the people may solve the problem. We've already mentioned defeating elected officials in an election. Another possibility is advocating for the firing of a superintendent or other school employee.

Firing someone is a drastic step, and not easy to do. Ironically, the easiest person in a district to fire is often the superintendent, since he/she usually serves at the pleasure of the Board of Education. The fact that you don't like the way someone teaches, or disagree with the way he treats students, will not be

enough unless there's enormous community support for getting rid of them, or unless he's clearly incompetent or has violated important rules.

**Reframing the current policy.** The Board of Education or Superintendent may be willing to redefine the policy in a way that addresses the issue, without instituting a change.

**Passage of a law.** You may be able to get a bill passed that settles the issue once and for all – adopting your core platform may go a long way in resolving the issue.

## CHAPTER 4: TAKE ACTION – DEMAND ACTION!

Now that you've laid the groundwork for policy change, it's time to start taking action. You should almost always start by following established procedure. (You might make an exception when there's already a huge controversy over the issue in the schools and/or the community, and you know you have a fight on your hands.) That procedure varies from system to system (and sometimes even from school to school within a system), but if you've done your homework, you'll know what it is. If following procedure doesn't work – your proposal is rejected out of hand, no one will even give you a hearing, you're blocked by bureaucratic stalling – it's time for community action.

This chapter describes the nuts and bolts of implementing your action plan to put pressure on school administrators and elected officials. Before we get there though, there are a few things all local groups should do:

**Begin with these five steps to gather intel.** Before anything else, take the following five steps to arm yourself with information necessary for all future advocacy activities.

1. **Who are your legislators?** Each member of your group should find out who their school administrators and elected officials are. It is important that you select the ones they voted for, or the school administrator that was appointed by the people they elected. Use the Legislative Power Template (Appendix C) in this Parent's Action Plan.
2. **Sign up on their websites** to receive regular email updates, invites to local events, and propaganda to understand what they're saying. Every elected official has an e-newsletter.
3. **Build Partnerships** Find out where your elected officials stand on the issues of the day — school safety, reduce bullying and drugs, etc. Don't be surprised if everyone says they are for safer schools. Review their voting history. They want your backing because you represent the voters and can turn out support on the issue of safe schools, use it to your, and their, advantage.
4. **Set up a Google News Alert** <http://www.google.com/alerts> — for example, for “Maryland Public Schools” — to receive an email whenever an incident is news. Unfortunately, most of the alerts will be bad news. This is what we want to change. Until then you will find lots of upset parents willing partner with you and your group to effect change.
5. **Research on Google News** <https://news.google.com/news> what local reporters have written your school system. Find and follow those reporters on their website, Facebook, Twitter, etc. and build relationships. Before you attend or plan an event, reach out and explain what your group is about, and provide them with background materials and a quote. Journalists on deadline — even those who might not agree with you — appreciate when you provide easy material for a story.
6. Use these four Opportunities, as outlined in broader detail, in the attached addendum to this Parent's Action Plan:



**Opportunity 1 Town Halls/Community Meetings** - Elected Officials regularly hold local town halls or public listening sessions throughout their districts or state. You can use these events to great effect — both to directly pressure Elected Officials and to attract media to the cause.



**Opportunity 2 Public Events/Ribbon Cuttings/Parades:** In addition to town halls, Elected Officials regularly attend public events for other purposes — parades, infrastructure groundbreaking, etc. Like town halls, these are opportunities to get face time with the Elected Officials and make sure they're hearing about your concerns, while simultaneously changing the news story that gets written.



**Opportunity 3 Elected Official Office Visits:** Every Elected Official has at least one district office, and many Elected Officials have several spread through their district or state. These are public offices, open for anybody to visit — you don't need an appointment. You can take advantage of this to stage an impromptu town hall meeting by showing up with a small group. It is much harder for district staff to turn away a group than a single constituent, even without an appointment.



**Opportunity 4 Coordinated Calls:** Mass office calling is a light lift, but it can actually have an impact. Tea Partiers regularly flooded congressional offices with calls at opportune moments and Elected Officials noticed.

*(In the attached Appendix D is a more detailed plan for each these opportunities)*

## Summary

In summary, changing the school system is not easy. There are people and systems, built over the years, with policies and resistance to change. The only way to change the system is to demand it. Parents have always had the collective power to change things, to make schools safer for their kids. Your kids have ideas that also need to be heard and incorporated into your plan. The most difficult decision you will face is the first one; which is the decision to make the system better or not. Once you have made that decision you will find that your support network of likeminded parents, who are also frustrated, will carry you and your group through the ups and downs of making your child's school and school system safer.

Good luck! We are here to help you protect your children in any way we can.

[contactus@whocaresyoucare.org](mailto:contactus@whocaresyoucare.org)

## Credits

[Queen Anne's County Public Schools - Maryland](#)

[University of Kansas Community Tool Box](#)

[The Tea Party Movement](#)

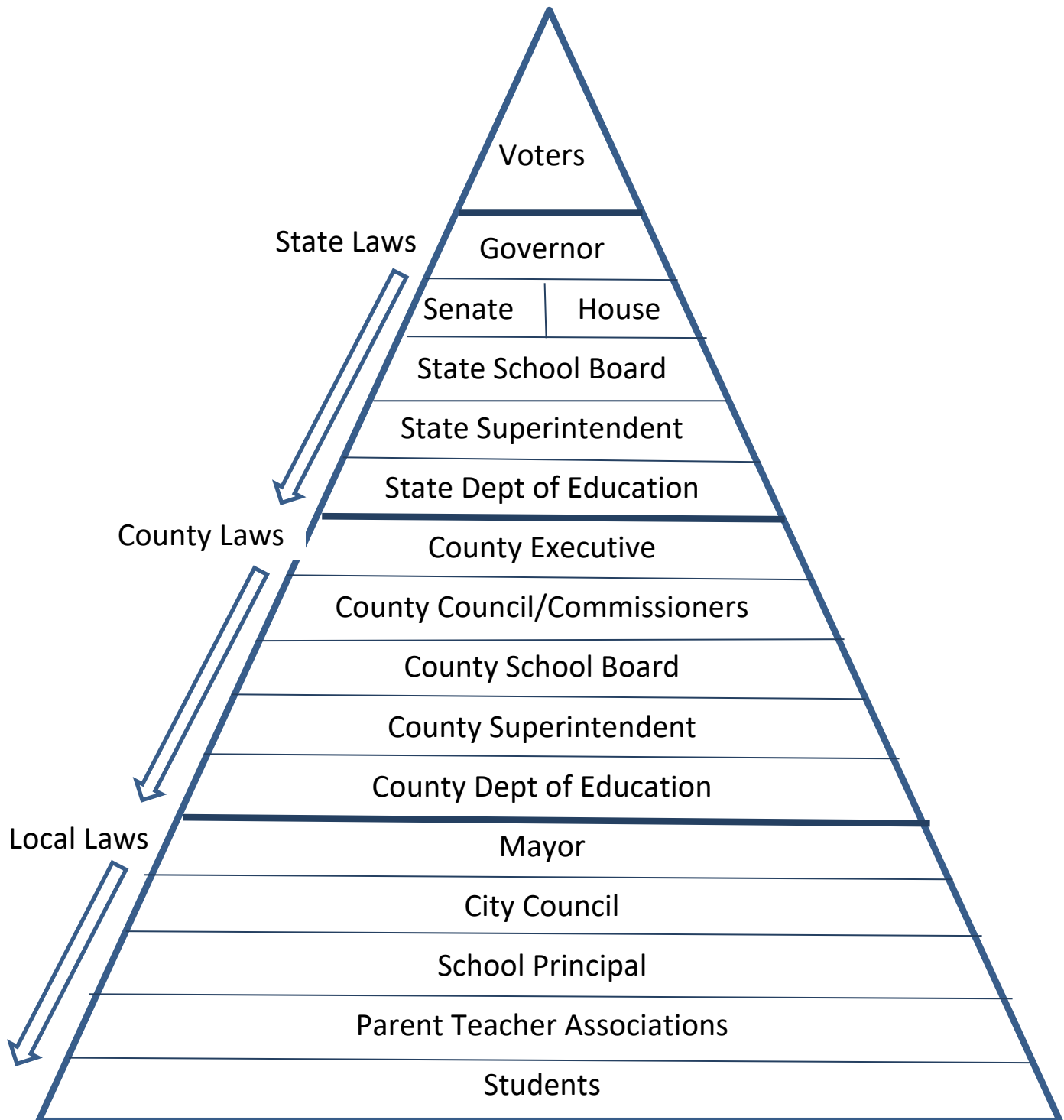
[The Resistance Movement](#)

## **Recommended Changes to Existing Policy**

Here are some recommended changes that our experience has shown, will improve the safety of your school:

- **Complete Resolution of Issues** – Many times when, and if, schools “deal with” the reported situation, it amounts to talking to the bully and student and then they considered it resolved. However, in many cases the bullying and harassment takes on new forms, such as stares and being called “a snitch”. Schools must insure that the student and parents feel that the situation is resolved and not just “dealt with”.
- **Revise Antique Reporting Methods** - Demand an end to antiquated reporting procedures that hinder a student’s ability to come forward. Today almost every student has an iPhone or access to a computer. This gives them the ability to report issues, anonymously, without having to resort to forms, counselor meetings and other methods that are intimidating to students. Schools must allow reporting of issues via anonymous electronic media, such as texting, web chat, mobile apps and or online report forms that don’t require the student to provide their name.
- **Report Transparency** – All too often bullying, drugs, weapons, suicides, staff abuse, threats to the school and other harmful activities that are uncovered in schools are withheld from parents and even law enforcement. While most schools make bullying statistics available in most school districts, reports on drugs, weapons and other harmful acts are not made available to parents. These this leaves parents in the dark as to how safe or unsafe their child’s school really is. We demand that policies be reviewed to insure procedures and their handling is transparent to parents and students. All schools must report incidences of bullying, drugs and weapons on a monthly or annual basis.
- **Encourage Students to Come Forward** – Students ALWAYS know a problem exists in the school, long before the school system or parents. Unfortunately, many students are not aware of how or if they should report issues like bullying, drugs, suicidal concerns, weapons, threats to the school and other harmful activities in their schools. While most schools have this procedure in their student handbooks, or on their websites, most students remain unaware of the procedure. Posters, announcements, and other procedures must be used to ensure that every student is aware that the school not only wants them to come forward but also encourages them to do so.
- **Mental Health Training and Protocols:** Students with mental health concerns are most likely to bully, use drugs, alcohol, attempt suicide and are likely to become violent to other students and to themselves. While the home is always the first place to determine these issues, the school administration is in a unique position to compare a student’s attitude, social ability and study patterns to what is deemed “normal” for that student’s peer groups, as opposed to being just a phase the child is going through. There are trauma and depression screenings and protocols that allow for screening and risk assessments/threat assessments where professionals can make a determination as to whether a child is a threat to harm his/herself or others. All schools should train teachers and staff to recognize behavioral concerns in students and have written protocols in place help the parent and student towards a healthy solution for the student.
- **Expulsion of Problem Students** While mental health screenings are the first step in determine if a student’s behavior is correctable, in some cases, it may be necessary to remove the problem student from the school in order to protect the body as a whole. Acceptable protocols must be in place to determine what conditions warrant removing the student both temporarily and permanently.

# Legislative Power in the Educational System



# Know your Legislators

Elected/Appointed School Official	Name	Position	Email Address	Phone
<b>Governor</b>				
<b>Senate</b>				
<b>House</b>				
<b>State School Board</b>				
<b>State Superintendent</b>				
<b>State Dept of Education</b>				
<b>County Executive</b>				
<b>County Council/Commissioners</b>				
<b>County School Board</b>				
<b>County Superintendent</b>				
<b>County Dept of Education</b>				
<b>Mayor</b>				
<b>City Council</b>				
<b>School Principal</b>				
<b>Parent Teacher Assoc. (PTA/PTO)</b>				



## OPPORTUNITY 1 TOWN HALLS/LISTENING SESSIONS



Elected Officials regularly hold local “town halls” or public listening sessions throughout their districts or state. You can use these events to great effect — both to directly pressure Elected Officials and to attract media to the cause.

### PREPARATION

1. **Find out when your Elected Official’s next public town hall event is.** Sometimes these are announced well in advance, and sometimes, although they are technically “public,” only select constituents are notified about them shortly before the event. If you can’t find announcements online, call your Elected Official directly to find out. When you call, be friendly and say to the staffer, “Hi, I’m a constituent, and I’d like to know when his/her next town hall forum will be.” If they don’t know, ask to be added to the email list so that you get notified when they do.
2. **Send out a notice of the town hall to your group, and get commitments from members to attend.** Distribute to all of them whatever information you have on your Elected Official’s voting record, as well as the prepared questions.
3. **Prepare several questions ahead of time for your group to ask.** Your questions should be sharp and fact-based, ideally including information on the Elected Official’s record, votes they’ve taken, or statements they’ve made. Thematically, questions should focus on a limited number of issues to maximize impact. Prepare 5-10 of these questions and hand them out to your group ahead of the meeting. Example question:

### SHOULD I BRING A SIGN?

Signs can be useful for reinforcing the sense of broad agreement with your message. However, if you’re holding an oppositional sign, staffers will almost certainly not give you or the people with you the chance to get the mic or ask a question. If you have enough people to both ask questions and hold signs, though, then go for it!

### AT THE TOWN HALL

1. **Get there early, meet up, and get organized.** Meet outside or in the parking lot for a quick huddle before the event. Distribute the handout of questions, and encourage members to ask the questions on the sheet or something similar.
2. **Get seated and spread out.** Head into the venue a bit early to grab seats at the front half of the room, but do not all sit together. Sit by yourself or in groups of two, and spread out throughout the room. This will help reinforce the impression of broad consensus.

**Make your voices heard by asking good questions.** When the Elected Official opens the floor for questions, everyone in the group should put their hands up and keep them there. Look friendly or neutral so that staffers will call on you. When you’re asking a question, remember the following guidelines: **Stick with the prepared list of questions.** Don’t be afraid to read it straight from the printout if you need to.

**Be polite but persistent, and demand real answers.** Elected Officials are very good at deflecting or dodging questions they don’t want to answer. If the Elected Official dodges, ask a follow-up question. If

they aren't giving you real answers, then call them out for it. Other group members around the room should amplify by either booing the Elected Official or applauding you.

**Don't give up the mic until you're satisfied with the answer.** If you've asked a hostile question, a staffer will often try to limit your ability to follow up by taking the microphone back immediately after you finish speaking. They can't do that if you keep a firm hold on the mic. No staffer in their right mind wants to look like they're physically intimidating a constituent, so they will back off. If they object, then say politely but loudly: "I'm not finished. The Elected Official is dodging my question. Why are you trying to stop me from following up?"

**Keep the pressure on.** After one member of the group finishes, everyone should raise their hands again. The next member of the group to be called on should move down the list of questions and ask the next one.

**Support the group and reinforce the message.** After one member of your group asks a question, everyone should applaud to show that the feeling is shared throughout the audience. Whenever someone from your group gets the mic, they should note that they're building on the previous questions — amplifying the fact that you're part of a broad group.

**Record everything!** Assign someone in the group to use their smart phone or video camera to record other advocates asking questions and the Elected Official's response. While written transcripts are nice, unfavorable exchanges caught on video can be devastating for Elected Officials. These clips can be shared through social media and picked up by local and national media. Please familiarize yourself with your state and local laws that govern recording, along with any applicable Senate or House rules, prior to recording. These laws and rules vary substantially from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

## **AFTER THE TOWN HALL**

**Reach out to media, during and after the town hall.** If there's media at the town hall, the people who asked questions should approach them afterward and offer to speak about their concerns. When the event is over, you should engage local reporters on Twitter or by email and offer to provide an in-person account of what happened, as well as the video footage you collected. Example Twitter outreach:

“@reporter I was at Rep. Smith's town hall in Springfield today. Large group asked about Medicare privatization. I have video & happy to chat.” Note: It's important to make this a public tweet by including the period before the journalist's Twitter handle. Making this public will make the journalist more likely to respond to ensure they get the intel first.

Ensure that the members of your group who are directly affected by specific threats are the ones whose voices are elevated when you reach out to media.

**Share everything.** Post pictures, video, your own thoughts about the event, etc., to social media afterward. Tag the Elected Official's office and encourage others to share widely.

## OPPORTUNITY 2 OTHER LOCAL PUBLIC EVENTS



In addition to town halls, Elected Officials regularly attend public events for other purposes — parades, infrastructure groundbreakings, etc. Like town halls, these are opportunities to get face time with the Elected Officials and make sure they're hearing about your concerns, while simultaneously changing the news story that gets written.

**Similar to town halls, but with some tweaks.** To take advantage of this opportunity, you can follow most of the guidelines above for town halls (filming, etc.). However, because these events are not designed for constituent input, you will need to think creatively about how to make sure your presence and message come through loud and clear.

Tactics for these events may be similar to more traditional protests, where you're trying to shift attention from the scheduled event to your own message.

1. **Optimize visibility.** Unlike in town halls, you want your presence as a group to be recognizable and attention-getting at this event. It may make sense to stick together as a group, wear relatively similar clothing / message shirts, and carry signs in order to be sure that your presence is noticeable.
2. **Be prepared to interrupt and insist on your right to be heard.** Since you won't get the mic at an event like this, you have to attract attention to yourself and your message. Agree beforehand with your group on a simple message focused on a current or upcoming issue. Coordinate with each other to chant this message during any public remarks that your Elected Official makes. This can be difficult and a bit uncomfortable. But it sends a powerful message to your Elected Official that they won't be able to get press for other events until they address your concerns.
3. **Identify, and try to speak with, reporters on the scene.** Be polite and friendly, and stick to your message. For example, "We're here to remind Delegate Smith that his constituents want an end to antiquated bully reporting methods and full transparency" You may want to research in advance which local reporters cover Elected Officials or relevant beats, so that you know who to look for.
4. **Hold organizational hosts accountable.** Often these events will be hosted by local businesses or nonpartisan organizations — groups that don't want controversy or to alienate the community. Reach out to them directly to express your concern that they are giving a platform to someone who has not supported the safer schools through C.A.R.E. program. If they persist, use social media to express your disappointment. This will reduce the likelihood that these organizations will host the Elected Official in the future. Elected Officials depend on invitations like these to build ties and raise their visibility — so this matters to them.

## OPPORTUNITY 3 DISTRICT OFFICE VISITS



Every Elected Official has at least one district office, and many Elected Officials have several spread through their district or state. These are public offices, open for anybody to visit — you don't need an appointment. You can take advantage of this to stage an impromptu town hall meeting by showing up with a small group. It is much harder for district staff to turn away a group than a single constituent, even without an appointment.

1. **Find out where your Elected Officials' local offices are.** The official webpage for your Elected Official will list the address of every local office. You can find those webpages easily through a simple Google search.
2. **Plan a trip when the Elected Official is there.** Most Elected Official district offices are open only during regular business hours, 9am-5pm. While Elected Officials spend a fair amount of time in Washington, they are often "in district" on Mondays and Fridays, and there are weeks designated for Elected Officials to work in district. The Elected Official is most likely to be at the "main" office — the office in the largest city in the district, and where the Elected Official's district director works. Ideally, plan a time when you and several other people can show up together.
3. **Prepare several questions ahead of time.** As with the town halls, you should prepare a list of questions ahead of time.
4. **Politely, but firmly, ask to meet with the Elected Official directly.** Staff will ask you to leave or at best "offer to take down your concerns." Don't settle for that. You want to speak with the Elected Official directly. If they are not in, ask when they will next be in. If the staffer doesn't know, tell them you will wait until they find out. Sit politely in the lobby. Note, on any given weekend, the Elected Official may or may not actually come to that district office.

**Meet with the staffer.** Even if you are able to get a one-off meeting with the Elected Official, you are most often going to be meeting with their staff. In district, the best person to meet with is the district director, or the head of the local district office you're visiting. There are real advantages to building a relationship with these staff. In some cases, they may be more open to progressive ideas than the Elected Official, and having a good meeting with/building a relationship with a supportive staff member can be a good way to move your issue up the chain of command. Follow these steps for a good staff meeting: Have a specific "ask" — e.g., vote against X, cosponsor Y, publicly state Z, etc.

Leave staff with a **brief** write-up of your issue, with your ask clearly stated.

Share a personal story of how you or someone in your group is personally impacted by the specific issue (bullying, drugs or a friend committed suicide, etc.).

Be polite — yelling at the underpaid, overworked staffer won't help your cause.

Be persistent — get their business card and call/email them regularly; ask if the Elected Official has taken action on the issue.

**Advertise what you're doing.** Communicate on social media, and tell the local reporters you follow what is happening. Take and send pictures and videos with your group: "At Delegate Smith's office with 10 other constituents to talk to her about privatizing Bullying in schools. She refuses to meet with us and staff won't tell us when she will come out. We're waiting."

## OPPORTUNITY 4 COORDINATED CALLS

Mass office calling is a light lift, but it can actually have an impact. Tea Partiers regularly flooded congressional offices with calls at opportune moments and Elected Officials noticed.



1. **Find the phone numbers for your Elected Officials.** You can find your local Elected Officials and their office phone numbers at [www.callmycongress.com](http://www.callmycongress.com).
2. **Prepare a single question per call.** For in-person events, you want to prepare a host of questions, but for calls, keep it simple. You and your group should all agree to call in on one specific issue that day. The question should be about a live issue — e.g., a vote that is coming up, a chance to take a stand, or some other time-sensitive opportunity. The next day or week, pick another issue, and call again on that.

**Find out who you're talking to.** In general, the staffer who answers the phone will be an intern, a staff assistant, or some other very junior staffer in the Elected Official's office. But you want to talk to the legislative staffer who covers the issue you're calling about. There are two ways to do this: Ask to speak to the staffer who handles the issue school safety issues. Junior staff are usually directed to not tell you who this is, and just take down your comment instead.

On a different day, call and ask whoever answers the phone, "Hi, can you confirm the name of the staffer who covers school safety issues?" Staff will generally tell you the name. Say "Thanks!" and hang up. Ask for the staffer by name when you call back next time.

**If you're directed to voicemail, follow up with email. Then follow up again.** Getting more-senior legislative staff on the phone is tough. The junior staffer will probably just tell you "I checked, and she's not at her desk right now, but would you like to leave a voicemail?" Go ahead and leave a voicemail, but don't expect a call back. Instead, after you leave that voicemail, follow up with an email to the staffer. If they still don't respond, follow up again. If they still don't respond, let the world know that the Elected Official's office is dodging you.

Congressional email addresses are standardized, so even if the Elected Official's office won't give you an email address, you can probably guess it if you have the staffer's first and last name.

**Keep a record of the conversation.** Take detailed notes on everything the staffer tells you. Direct quotes are great, and anything they tell you is public information that can be shared widely. Compare notes with the rest of your group, and identify any conflicts in what they're telling constituents.

**Report back to media and your group.** Report back to both your media contacts and your group what the staffer said when you called.

**SAMPLE CALL DIALOGUE**

- **Staffer** - Delegate Smith's office, how can I help you?
  - **Caller** - Hi there, I'm a constituent of Delegate Smith. Can I please speak with the staffer who handles school safety issues?
  - **Staffer** - I'm happy to take down any comments you may have. Can I ask for your name and address to verify you're in the Delegate's district?
  - **Caller** - Sure thing. [Gives name/address]. Can I ask who I'm speaking with?
  - **Staffer** - Yes, this is Ron Johnson.
  - **Caller** - Thanks, Ron! I'm calling to ask for the Delegate's support on a school safety proposal. Our group is working to improve safety in the schools and there are six key issues we are working to change in schools to make them safer for our kids.
    - Complete Resolution of Issues
    - Revise Antiquated Reporting Methods Need Updating
    - Reporting Transparency
    - Encourage Students to Come Forward
    - Mental Health Training and Protocols
    - Expulsion of Problem Students
  - **Staffer** - Well I really appreciate you calling and sharing your thoughts! I of course can't speak for the Delegate because I'm just a staff assistant, but I can tell you that I'll pass your concerns on to him.
  - **Caller** - I appreciate that Ron, but I don't want you to just pass my concerns on. I would like to know if the Delegate will support us so we can spread the word to our group. [If they stick with the "I'm just a staffer" line, ask them when a more senior staffer will get back to you with an answer to your question.]
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