U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FEDERAL COMMISSION ON SCHOOL SAFETY

"The Ecology of Schools:
Fostering a Culture of Human Flourishing
and Developing Character"

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C O N T E N T S

P R O C E E D I N G S

OPENING REMARKS

SEC. DEVOS: Good afternoon. Welcome, everyone. Thank you for attending this meeting of the Federal Commission on School Safety.

I'd like to acknowledge my fellow commissioners and thank them for their commitment to the important work of this commission. And we're grateful to today's speakers for presenting their statements and sharing their valuable insights.

President Trump formed this commission in the wake of the terrible tragedy that occurred at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida in February this year. And as the recent shooting at Santa Fe sadly underscored, these are all too frequent incidents in our country.

Every student deserves a safe and nurturing learning environment. We owe it to our students, our educators, our country to give them that.

At President Trump's direction, the agency's represented here are continuing to work with states and districts to improve school safety. And Congress

included a number of the safety measures proposed by the President in the most recent omnibus appropriations bill. There of course remains much more work to be done.

The goal is this commission is to identify ways in which our mental health professionals and education and law enforcement officials can more effectively prevent, protect and mitigate and respond to tragedies.

Our job is not to mandate "one size fits all" policies. Instead, proven and effective policies and practices should be adopted at the state and local levels. They are the ones who know best the unique needs of their schools and the resources of their communities.

The commission does have an important role in highlighting best practices, convening experts and making recommendations.

Thus far, we've heard from the authors of the official reports following the school shootings at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook Elementary, in addition to parents and students who

lost loved ones in these tragedies.

We conducted our first field visit at a school district that is implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports to improve the school climate and we held our first public listening session where members of the public could share their ideas and solutions to improve safety in schools.

Today's meeting is focused on how entertainment, media, cyberbullying and social media may affect violence and student safety. We have a duo of experts on each of these topics and we look forward to hearing from them.

Since we have a tight timeline today, I ask that our speakers and commissioners kindly adhere to the schedule. With that, I'd like to turn it over to my fellow commissioners or, in some cases, their respective designees today for their opening remarks. We'll begin with Attorney General Sessions.

ATTY. GEN. SESSIONS: Thank you, Secretary DeVos. Thank you for your leadership on this whole issue. And you can be sure Secretary DeVos is focused on it. The President has asked her to take a lead and

she is doing so in a very, very strong way.

We look forward to the panelists. We're looking for their views. The Department of Justice is committed to working with the commission to study, evaluate and make recommendations on how we can improve schools' safety. We learn something every time we have one of these meetings.

I think we're, on our side, the law enforcement side, picking up on the idea that there are too many barriers, too many silos in the system where the juvenile courts keep their records secret basically.

The medical people tend to. The school resource officers do and teachers are careful about releasing information that sometimes allows bullying and even violence to build up without sufficient knowledge out there.

So these issues of cyberbullying, youth consumption of violent entertainment and the effects of press coverage on mass shootings is important and I look forward to the hearing.

Over the course of several years, researchers

from the Cyberbullying Research Center surveyed nearly 15,000 middle and high school students through nine different studies from over 80 different schools throughout the United States. About 25 percent of the students surveyed told us they had been cyberbullied at some point in their lifetime.

Of particular concern for today's discussion, the research has found that cyberbullying is related to low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, anger, frustration and a variety of other emotional and psychological problems. And interestingly, traditional bullying is still more common than cyberbullying.

It does appear that teachers and school professionals can do more. In 2015, about 5 percent of students reported they had avoided at least one school activity or one class or one or more places in school during the previous school year because they thought someone might attack or harm them. That's a significant statistic.

More must be done to address these concerns. One thing is for sure. The President is determined that we take strong steps to make our schools safer.

We at the Department of Justice are focusing on these issues.

Earlier this month, the Department of Justice announced its first grants under the Stop School Violence Act, which President Trump signed into law. Under this new law, the department will provide $50 million to train teachers and students to develop an anonymous reporting system for threats of school violence.

In the coming weeks, we will offer another 25 million (dollars) in these school safety grants. We at the department are particularly focused on breaking down barriers to information sharing. And we talked about that, as I noted, at our previous meeting.

To keep students safe, we need to break down the walls that exist between law enforcement, mental health professionals and school officials.

Next Wednesday, the FBI, a component of the Department of Justice, is hosting a school safety event where members of federal, state and local law enforcement will gather to discuss how we can best protect our children from school violence.

The goal is to build upon the discussions we began when I met with the leaders from law enforcement after the Parkland shooting. I'm confident the group will have valuable insights that they can share with us.

We must not lose momentum in our efforts to protect our children, to keep our schools safe. And I look forward to working with the commission to do that. And again, thank you, Secretary DeVos and all of you for coming today to share your thoughts with us.

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you, Attorney General Sessions. I'd now like to turn to Acting Deputy Secretary Claire Grady of the Department of Homeland Security for opening remarks.

MS. GRADY: Thank you. It's my pleasure to join you all today. And I would like to start off by thanking Secretary DeVos for hosting the commission meeting today and for her leadership on this important issue.

I truly believe in the importance of this commission, not only as the acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security, but as somebody who sends two

grandchildren, a stepdaughter and a sister and a sister-in-law to school every day as students, teachers and counselors.

I'm sickened that so many schools are touched by violence and I'm outraged by the loss of so many innocent lives. As President Trump said in his earliest days in office, the government's greatest responsibility is the security of its people. And I'm glad to have such outstanding partners in this effort.

I would also like to thank those who are here today to provide their perspectives on how to foster a culture where children can flourish and develop character in our school systems.

By sharing your knowledge and experiences with the commission, we will better be able to identify and implement effective approaches to enhancing the safety and security of our nation's schools.

Today's meeting focuses largely on -- (off mic) -- and social media's impact on the -- (off mic) -- social media contributes to school violence is important to understanding how best to prevent such violence from occurring again.

To help schools operationalize the lessons learned from similar research efforts -- (off mic) -- is developing an operational guide that will provide school personnel, law enforcement and other public agencies and school professionals -- (off mic) -- outline procedures for schools on how to create multidisciplinary threat assessments, establish central reporting, identify student behaviors of concern, define the thresholds for law enforcement and prevention and identify intervention and management strategies for decreasing the risk of a targeted attack.

The mic wasn't on? Darn it. Sorry. The U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center is leading the development of this guide, which is expected to be available for release in July 2018.

The NTAC is also providing in-person training and consultation on creating effective school-based threat assessment programs, instituting processes and procedures for identifying students who may be exhibiting concerning behavior, establishing protocols to assess the risk a student poses to themselves or

others and identifying intervention and management strategies to mitigate the risk of a student engaging in harms to the school community.

Throughout this guide and related services, the NTAC is available to help leverage the nearly 20 years of experience as a national and international leader for research, training, consultation and information sharing on threat assessment and the prevention of various forms of targeted violence to help make our schools safer for our students and teachers.

I look forward to the discussion that we will have today on this important issue.

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you, Deputy Secretary Grady. And I'd now like to turn to Deputy Secretary Eric Hargan of the Department of Health and Human Services. Welcome.

MR. HARGAN: Thank you, Secretary DeVos, and thank you to all of the speakers who have come here today to share with us your knowledge and expertise about these important matters. Secretary Azar wishes that he could be here today with you. He is in Texas

today with the First Lady, as you may have seen.

Your remarks today will help shape the commission's report, which will provide meaningful and actionable recommendations on ways to keep our students and teachers safe. This commission, as we all know, has an important job to do and we at HHS are all taking our role on the commission very seriously.

I particularly am taking it seriously since I have family and friends in the Paducah Elementary School System when that shooting took place so many years ago. And so, I take this all very personally. So leadership at HHS cares about these issues very much.

I am interested in hearing from you today to better understand the impacts of cyberbullying and social media, youth consumption of violent entertainment and the effects of press coverage on mass shootings on our children and youth.

I'm looking forward to hearing your thoughts on ways to prevent school tragedies and approaches that will positively impact school climate and school safety. So again, thank you all for being here today.

I look forward to hearing from you. Secretary DeVos?

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you, Deputy Secretary Hargan. And here now is how we will proceed. We will first hear from our speakers on panel one, who will speak on the issue of cyberbullying and social media. Then there will be a short question-and-answer session between the commissioners and the panelists.

Then panel two will present their remarks on youth consumption of violent entertainment, followed by a Q&A period. Then finally, panel three will speak to the effects of press coverage on mass shootings.

Just like with the other panels, we will follow that with a brief period of questions and answers. Before concluding today, the commissioners and I will make brief closing remarks.

Each of the speakers will have approximately eight minutes to speak. The light at the top of this timer will turn yellow when you have a minute left. It will turn red when eight minutes have elapsed.

I apologize in advance if I have to ask you to wrap up your remarks to any of our presenters. But we want to ensure everyone has time to present and we want

to hear from each of you.

So I'd like to first welcome our first panel to come and take your seats here. Welcome. Our first speaker is Dr. Sameer Hinduja.

Dr. Hinduja is a professor in the school of criminology and criminal justice at Florida Atlantic University and is co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center. Dr. Hinduja?

PANEL 1: CYBERBULLYING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

DR. HINDUJA: Good afternoon to each of you. Along with my colleague, Dr. Justin Patchin, from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, I have worked to promote the positive use of technology among students through research and outreach for the last 15 years.

Topics we explore in our work include a number of behaviors that mainly occur on social media. These include sexting, sextortion, digital dating abuse, digital self-harm, digital reputation issues and cyberbullying, which I will focus on today.

While I'm proud of the papers and the books we have written, I am most thankful for my time in the trenches working with tens of thousands of students,

educators, mental health professionals, law enforcement and parents each year on these topics. So many are in need of research-informed guidance and I know that's why we're here.

Attorney General Sessions, I have some updated statistics for you. In our most recent study of a nationally representative sample of approximately 5,700 middle and high school students across America, 34 percent say that they have been cyberbullied during their lifetime.

In addition, 12 percent reveal that they had cyberbullied others during their lifetimes. So that's one-third of youth across America indicating that they've been bullied online and about one out of 10 stating they've bullied others online. We also know that more than 80 percent of those being cyberbullied are also being bullied at school, indicating a strong overlap.

As you mentioned, research has tied experience with bullying and cyberbullying to low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, family problems, academic struggles, delinquency, school violence and suicidal

thoughts and attempts.

Most important to me is how negative experiences online unnecessarily compromise the healthy flourishing of our youth at school, where they spend over 6.5 hours each day.

According to our research, over 60 percent of the students who experienced cyberbullying stated it deeply affected their ability to learn and feel safe at school. Furthermore, 10 percent of students we surveyed said they skipped school at least once in the previous year because of cyberbullying. This cannot be happening.

Even though states work hard to get meaningful guidance into the hands of each school district, schools across each state are often left to figure out from trial and error what sort of strategies they should put into place. We go into schools all the time and many administrators and counselors simply are not sure what to do.

In terms of programming, they're trying a variety of strategies, from random assembly speakers to random documentaries and videos to random curricula

they hear about to random programs that capitalize on a quick, emotional reaction.

However, these don't seem to affect meaningful change that lasts more than a few weeks. At best, these approaches are inefficient. And at worst, they're doing more damage than good, as kids will tune out, believe we're oblivious and feel that nothing is going to get better.

Now, more than ever, our efforts must be relevant, research-based, systemic and comprehensive instead of ad hoc and off the cuff.

Allow me to share a few key recommendations. Please note none of these are app-specific are cyber-specific because cyberbullying is not so much a technological problem, as some would believe. It is more of a social problem manifesting where we all increasingly live our lives, online.

First, school climate efforts. Positive school climates are marked by shared feelings of connectedness, belongingness, emotional warmth, peer respect, morale, safety and school spirit. In one of our recent studies, we found that in schools where

students perceived a more positive school climate, there was significantly less cyberbullying as well as less school bullying, violence and other problem behaviors.

This makes sense because most cyberbullying among youth occurs between individuals who know each other at school, not between strangers who only connect online.

Specific school programming towards this end can help reduce the frequency of cyberbullying as well as contribute to increased student attendance, participation, higher student achievement and less disciplinary issues.

Second, social norming. Social norming has to do with modifying the environment or culture within a school so that appropriate behaviors are not only encouraged, but widely presented to be the norm.

That is, schools must work to create a setting in which the responsible use of social media is just what we do around here and just how it is amongst our students. This can occur by strategically highlighting the majority of youth who do use social media in

positive, constructive ways.

If I told you that 12 percent of kids cyberbully others, you wouldn't focus on spreading that fact around your student body.

Rather, you would reframe and re-conceptualize that statistic and create cool and relevant messaging strategies emphasizing that the vast majority of students, 88 percent in this example, are using social media with integrity, discretion and wisdom. By defining what is normal and typical among the student body, it helps induce the remainder to get on board.

Third, student-led initiatives. Adults are doing a lot of good work. But it's repeatedly evident that students are the most powerful catalyst for change on their campuses and in their peer groups. They're the real experts at what it means to be a kid these days.

We don’t often tap into their knowledge and experiences to help convey the right messages and set the right standards. The last thing we want is to waste time, effort and resources on adult-led initiatives that students know would never gain any

traction.

Since teens are fully immersed in all things technological and social, it is crucial to enlist their assistance in promoting and celebrating digital citizenship, setting the tone and tying it into the school's identity and determining how to get the entire student body to help make kindness go viral.

Fourth, resilience. Generally speaking, resilience, is the capacity to bounce back and successfully adapt in the face of adversity. Some interesting findings on this topic came out of one of our recent papers.

Of those students who were cyberbullied, those with the highest levels of resilience were least likely to be phased by it in terms of their ability to learn and their feelings of safety at school.

In addition, students with high resilience who were cyberbullied were more likely to utilize pro-social responses, reporting it to the school, to the site or the app on which it occurred, changing their screen name, blocking the harasser, logging out. They believed in themselves and their ability to do

something about the problem.

Those with the lowest levels of resilience when cyberbullied, they did nothing. They suffered silently because they didn't know that they had agency and autonomy to control their online experience.

Finally, among those students who were cyberbullied, those with higher levels of resilience were less likely to be bothered overall and less likely to get sad, angry, frustrated, fearful or embarrassed because of it.

Why does this matter? Well, in the field of criminology, research consistently demonstrates that youth who experience these negative emotions often haven't developed the positive coping skills to reconcile them. And so, they end up acting out either in self-harm or interpersonal harm or violence.

The topics I have discussed today have similar implications not just for cyberbullying but for general student wellbeing and school safety. Creating and maintaining a positive school environment can reduce a host of problems because adults have better relationships with the students under their care.

Setting appropriate social norms can convey the clear standard among the student body is that everyone looks out for each other, no matter what. Student-led initiatives allow youth to play an enthusiastic and meaningful role in shaping the quality of their school environment.

And as mentioned, resilience programming can help students discover their own ability to be overcomers and rise above the stressors that come their way -- social, relational or otherwise.

In conclusion, I believe the federal government can support these efforts by providing additional personnel and funding to schools to implement these recommendations with fidelity.

Second, scholars need funding to do more evaluation research to determine how well these initiatives are working and how they can be tweaked to be even more successful. Third, we need better ways to get these evolving best practices into the hands of those who need it.

Fourth, we need mechanisms for accountability, not just at the school level but at the state and

federal level. This will help ensure that adequate resources are provided so that our students can thrive and our communities can flourish. Thank you for your time.

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you, Dr. Hinduja. Appreciate your being here today.

DR. HINDUJA: Thank you.

SEC. DEVOS: Our next speaker is Dr. Paul Gausman. Dr. Gausman is currently the superintendent of schools for the Sioux City Community School District in Sioux City, Iowa. He was named the 2014 Iowa Superintendent of the Year. Welcome, Dr. Gausman.

DR. GAUSMAN: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to address this commission.

As mentioned, my name is Dr. Paul Gausman. I've been called a lot of things, so Gausman is certainly fine. I'm honored to be the superintendent of schools for the Sioux City Community School District in Sioux City, Iowa. I'm also honored to be a husband and a father.

Our district has an enrollment of nearly

15,000 students. While this district is medium-sized by national standards, we're the fourth largest in Iowa and we have urban characteristics.

We're blessed to teach our student population made up of about 67 percent of our students in poverty. Twenty percent are English language learners and we just exceeded the national average of 13 percent of our population are students identified with special education needs. Of that group of English language learners, we have multiple home languages spoken in our district.

I do not share any of these items of demography as insurmountable challenges. As a matter of fact, quite the opposite. I chose to work for this organization because of my passion to serve children from diverse backgrounds and in a community that celebrates inclusion.

Sioux City is a blue collar river town, bordering Nebraska and South Dakota with a metropolitan statistical area of about 150,000 people. Sioux City has a long history of hardworking people, railroads, stockyards and food processing. And it's a regional

service hub for many neighboring communities.

Members of the Sioux City Community School District and our community have worked hard to engage the national discourse on school-based bullying.

From 2009 through 2011, we were intricately involved in the creation of the documentary Bully. This important work follows the lives of five students who faced bullying on a daily basis and regrettably one of those students was filmed in our schools, as our district was the only district in the nation to give these filmmakers access to create a transparent and real-time view of school-based bullying.

Students must absolutely feel safe in order to have a chance to be successful in school. And at times, we all, as an entire culture, fail those students on this basic need and right.

I have since participated in activities as a bully prevention advocate and speaker, such as when the film prepared -- premiered, excuse me, at the Tribeca Film Festival. I was a panelist here at the White House screening and I participated in a Senate field hearing on this topic.

We, through our participation in this documentary, opened the door to criticism about our district and our community. But I would not change that work, as the result of our participation includes positive change in our organization.

Our participation in this documentary has created some of the richest and most meaningful discussion in our community about what the entirety of our community must do to assist and support schools in our efforts to prevent bullying.

Bullying is best defined as taking action to attempt to harm, intimidate or coerce someone perceived as vulnerable to such action. Bullying is about power and control and bullying flourishes where vulnerability thrives.

Bullying is not unique to schools. Bullying occurs just about anywhere that multiple people gather and now, as we've just heard, even online and in social media platforms.

In any community, schools are mirrors of the community that they serve. And if you find schools that have significant instances of bullying, those

challenges are a reflection of that community.

In order to repair the challenges of bullying in schools, one must look to the greater community to consider the way in which we will prevent bullying. This speaks to my perspective that bullying is best defeated by prevention.

In our case, in Sioux City, our board, administration, community and staff members align to work toward preventing bullying before it occurs, of course in addition to reacting when it does occur.

We have consistently said that we're not unique because we have bullying in our schools. But we want to become unique in Sioux City by becoming a school district that has made a difference in this arena.

Today, I would like to make remarks specific to the changing nature and growing challenges of cyberbullying and the use of social media in bullying scenarios.

Bullying that takes place on cellphones and other devices and through social media platforms has presented those of us who lead schools with new

challenges that simply cannot be mitigated with previous solutions.

We must consider new solutions specific to social media and cyberbullying and the impact on schools and communities. Certainly, we all in this room can think back to a time in our lives when we were young and potentially more vulnerable to the challenges of bullying.

Some wisdom at that time shared may have been that the victims just need to become more resilient. And my colleague spoke about that and that it's important to be resilient and to remove yourself from the bullying.

But with the growing use of digital devices and student focus on social media platforms, bullying is reaching children in more places, more negatively and more often than at any time in our history.

Certainly, even all of us in this room have been recipients of some version of cyberbullying. And while many of us have the thick skin necessary to continue our work through negative statements, students rarely have the experience or training and never have

had this much contact before in history with their bullies. Bullying now follows students to where once they may have felt safe.

We have also seen the challenge that people will often be far more aggressive and negative with their language on social media or through cyber means than they would in a face-to-face scenario.

More often now, we deal with the challenges of a bullying situation that did not begin in school. It did not occur on school equipment or on a school activity. Yet when the students get back to the school for learning, it becomes a challenge that all of us must resolve.

Our district policy enables staff members to investigate, to provide discipline to bullies and create a safety plan for students who are bullied on social media outside of school hours and days.

However, there are challenges that come with our review of social media and bullying situations as the district can only enforce a safety plan while the students are in school. Additionally, bullying that is not captured with a screenshot or fake accounts that

are used for bullying cannot be traced.

While the district can petition social media organizations to remove accounts that are used for bullying, social media organizations sometimes do, but they are not able to assist us in ascertaining information about account creators, limiting our ability to take action.

The legislature in the state of Iowa has considered but not yet passed legislation to provide us strength in the arena of following through on challenges born on social media.

We need more ability to use social media in our investigations of school-based bullying scenarios, when applicable of course, and to take action against cyberbullies.

Without the kind of support that legislation can provide, it is challenging to take action to deliver consequences to a cyberbully who began that negative action outside of school and on their own device.

In Sioux City, our district is committed to providing an environment where all are treated with

dignity and respect. Instances of bullying are always investigated and acted upon when we are made aware of those challenges. Anti-bullying in education in Sioux City begins in preschool and continues through graduation.

We too, Madam Secretary, are a positive behavior interventions and supports district. Every elementary school in our district uses the evidence-based second step program, a curriculum shown to decrease problem behaviors and promote success as well and to develop a sense of safety and support.

In recent years, our district also uses film clips for character education in our middle schools, a program where licensed clips from popular Hollywood movies teach age-appropriate lessons about mutual respect.

Every high school in our district has a group of student leaders who serve as mentors in violence prevention through an MVP program where these MVP student leaders use lifelike scenarios to deliver programming to their peers to curb gender violence, sexual harassment and bullying, to prevent bullying so

that students know how to behave when they find themselves in a situation of bullying.

We also collaborate with a company to scan all public social media data to discover potential threats, whether that's bullying-based threats or school violence threats. And they provide us with actionable alerts to discover those -- as they discover those negative posts.

We recently added a new component to our required freshmen success strategies course where students earn recognition for appropriate digital citizenship.

As a district, we ask parents and community members to be our partner in educating our youth by reporting instances of concern through an online chat tool that we provide to our community.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address this commission. Know that I desire to continually improve my work to reduce the challenges of bullying in our schools and communities. And I welcome the opportunity to engage in further discourse, collaboration and action.

Q&A DISCUSSION

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you so much, Dr. Gausman. And both of you, both of our panelists, really appreciate your insights shared on bullying and cyberbullying, Dr. Hinduja, as a researcher, and Dr. Gausman, as a practitioner.

We're going to now have a short time for questions and answers. And I'd like to begin with a question I think primarily for Dr. Gausman. You've alluded to working within your community and engaging the community on helping within the school.

Can you elaborate a little bit more on that? How does the community -- how do you involve the community and is there a role for the community to play, an important role for the community to play in this regard?

DR. GAUSMAN: That's correct, and thank you. As I've mentioned, you know, this is a community-based problem. And, you know, bullying doesn't just occur in schools. It occurs in shopping malls, sporting events, just about anywhere people gather. And so, it's very important to us to use those resources in the community

to gather more reports.

We know that only about 25 percent of instances of bullying are even reported to us. We can't act on that which is not reported. So we're doing more work.

Our data shows that we're finding more instances of bullying. We're taking more action. Our student surveys also indicate that they now feel more resilient to stand up to bullying as a result of those community agencies coming together.

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you so much. I'd like to invite my fellow commissioners here to ask questions at this point.

MS. GRADY: So both of you talked about the pervasive nature of bullying and that social media is a way that exacerbates how pervasive it is and then talked about tools schools and communities can use to better create a resilient student body and defeat bullying before it starts.

But my question goes on the opposite end of the spectrum. When do things get to the point where it's appropriate to escalate to involve law enforcement

associated with bullying and what are we doing or do you have any insights in terms of opportunities to what would be triggers to engage law enforcement and what tools or communication pathways could we better facilitate to make sure we're taking appropriate action?

DR. HINDUJA: The vast majority of bullying, cyberbullying is -- (off mic) -- some of it does cross over the line, for example, threats, content that involve sexually explicit material or involving minors -- (off mic) -- et cetera. (Off mic) -- some sort of relationship with the liaison, with local law enforcement so that they can -- (off mic).

Plus, I would also say that as I study other forms of problems online -- (off mic) -- so law enforcement has to -- (off mic) -- to go ahead and take that evidence and to -- (off mic) -- we also want to make sure that they don’t approach this with a fear-based mentality.

They have seen the worst of the worst out there. But we need to be very pro technology and pro kids when we're working on this issue.

DR. GAUSMAN: We too have found the police enforcement -- we're great partners with our police department and our sheriff's department. It's important that we -- we're one of the districts that has school resource officers in our buildings.

We've got to be very clear that just about everything they do as work need not be criminal in nature. It's proactive, preventative in nature. (Off mic) -- creating the proper relationships and conversations between students so that when an event -- (off mic).

ATTY. GEN. SESSIONS: Do you have, Dr. Gausman, any studies that you've been able to do in your school that can show that there are certain programs that tend to reduce hostility and meanness in cyber activities? Have you got any ideas about that?

DR. GAUSMAN: We do. We've been blessed. And I'm sorry, I'm not confident this microphone is working very well. But we've been blessed with a partnership with the Waitt family and the Waitt Institute for Violence Prevention. And the Waitt family began the Gateway Computer Company some time ago and they now are

partners with our district as we work to implement programs that they have helped bring to our district.

The mentors in violence prevention program that I mentioned to you earlier is very important to our success where students mentor other students in relational scenarios.

That's so important because students don't always receive information from their teachers or superintendent of schools. Quite often, they receive it from one another.

And so, when we can train those student leaders to lead other students for preventing negative relationship behavior, it's very important to us.

We also have used programs like coaching boys into men, indicating to why we might ask male students to be aggressive on the field of play but not to be aggressive in relationships, using programs like -- using programs that scan social media so that we can discover anything negative that's out there because again if it's not reported to us, we just can't take action on it.

MR. HARGAN: So thanks for the -- for sort of

these discussions. I'm particularly interested in some of the discussions that you all had about the sources and the elements underlying cyberbullying.

So understanding this is I think Dr. Hinduja, you had talked about the notion of connectedness and climate, this notion of sort of social alienation and isolation.

How in a sort of world of social media and digital media which seems to kind of cut against a connectedness, at least on a sort of daily basis, how do you foresee sort of an increasing digital influenced world, how do you create a sense of connectedness that might reverse these instincts towards cyberbullying and all the other sort of bad behaviors?

I mean, how do you get -- how do you undo that when it seems like everything's going the other way?

DR. HINDUJA: Yeah. I'm not sure if you can undo it online. But I think you can bear a lot of fruit with efforts on campuses. We hear the term trusted adults. We tell our students that when they're being bullied, when they're being cyberbullied, they should go to a trusted adult for help.

But I like the term askable adult. If we can just identify point people on every single campus who say look, I'm an askable adult. You can come to me when you're dealing with issues of your relationships, when you're dealing with issues as it relates to your academics, at home.

You can ask me how I navigated the complexities of adolescence and I'm here for you. I think that goes a long way in terms of building meaningful adult bonds, which can then sort of serve as the buffer against the isolation individuals might experience online.

DR. GAUSMAN: If I might add to that as well, you know, you asked about programs that we have. And in a bullying scenario, there's always the bully and there's the victim or the victim of bullying.

And there's always bystanders. And on social media, there are bystanders always and there seem to be more and more of them.

We really work hard in our community to create a program of upstanders, so that they're not just by standing and watching bullying occur, but they actually

stand up, talk to those involved and askable -- I love that term, askable adult -- so that the students can be a part of solving the problem, even if it's only by reporting that which they've discovered online more in person.

MR. HARGAN: Yeah, because the notion of connectedness seemed to be something that was a larger concept. I mean, not just between adults and the young but also amongst the young as well who are -- I don't know if they're ultimately the people who are going to solve that problem amongst themselves.

SEC. DEVOS: Could I explore a little bit more the notion of upstander?

DR. GAUSMAN: Sure. Sure.

SEC. DEVOS: Do you recognize and acknowledge them in some way or how do you -- how do you encourage that?

DR. GAUSMAN: We actually -- yeah, we actually do. We do that through our training program in MVP and the mentoring program that is there. We also do that as a reward system through the positive behavior interventions and supports program that we've talked

about.

And it sounds like you've toured a district that has that program well implemented. And so, you know, as the name dictates, we're there to recognize positive behavior when it occurs and to acknowledge that so that students understand the value of that positive behavior moving forward.

SEC. DEVOS: All right. Thank you both again very, very much for being here today and for everything you've shared with us.

DR. GAUSMAN: Thank you.

PANEL 2: YOUTH CONSUMPTION OF VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT

SEC. DEVOS: So we will now move to our next panel and we'll give a moment to change. Welcome. Our next panel is going to present remarks on youth consumption of violent entertainment. And our first speaker is Dr. L. Rowell Huesmann.

Dr. Huesmann is currently a progressor of psychology and communication at the University of Michigan and director of the aggression research program in the research center for group dynamics at Michigan's Institute for Social Research. That is a

very long name. But welcome, Dr. Huesmann.

DR. HUESMANN: Thank you, Secretary DeVos. As you said, I'm Rowell Huesmann. I'm the – (off mic) -- professor of psychology –(off mic) -- University of Michigan and director of the Aggression Research Program.

I have studied violent behavior for over 50 years, since the late 1960s when I was a young professor at Yale University and I've written many articles and many books about this and received a number of awards for my research.

I tell you these things to establish some of my credibility. But I also must say that I'm somewhat disappointed when I look back at those 50 years in that our science has not really resulted in producing very safe school environments.

In my brief presentation, I want to tell you some of what I think are clear unambiguous facts about what causes violent behavior. But I must start by saying we're not very good at this and we probably will never be very good.

For example, we're never going to be very good

at predicting ahead of time who's going to shoot up a school. We know a lot about what increases the risk that a person will behave violently. But knowing a lot about risk is a long way from predicting with any modicum of certainty.

Because I'm a psychologist, I want to begin by disagreeing with two seemingly widely help beliefs about school shootings. First, there's a belief we can eliminate school shootings by screening better for serious mental illness.

People who are seriously mentally ill are not predictably at higher risk of behaving violently unless they're paranoid schizophrenics or have hallucinations or delusions telling them to do something like that.

Second, there's the belief that low self-esteem youth who are rejected are particularly prone to be violent. That also is not borne out by the evidence.

Rather, the youth who are more likely to be behave violently are those narcissistic youth who are threatened. That does not mean that low self-esteem is positive. It's just -- I'm just talking about the

relation to behaving violently.

The fact is that people never commit serious acts of violence such as school shootings because of one factor in their lives.

There's always a convergence of predisposing personal factors -- for example, growing up exposed to a lot of violence, physiological factors that predispose people to be more impulsive -- and situational factors that precipitate the event such as being frustrated, rejected by a girlfriend, criticized by peers or even hot weather.

Predisposing personal factors, whether biological or environmental, operate by changing brain circuits over time while precipitating environmental factors operate by activating these circuits that already have been encoded over time in the brain.

We know that there are three particularly important kinds of circuits or cognitions influencing social behavior. First, schemas about the world that we live in; second, scripts -- second, scripts for how we should behave socially; and thirdly, normative beliefs about what kind of social behaviors are okay.

Individuals who have a large repertoire of violent scripts for solving -- second, scripts for how we should behave socially; and thirdly, normative beliefs about what kind of social behaviors are okay.

Individuals who have a large repertoire of violent scripts for solving problems are more predisposed to behave violently.

Individuals who have schemas that the world is a hostile, mean place are more likely to perceive hostility in others and behave violently. And individuals who have normative beliefs that it's okay to behave violently are more likely to behave violently.

In a second, I'll say a little bit about how these individuals acquire these predispositions. But first, let me talk about how they're activated in a specific situation.

A very fundamental brain process is spreading activation, or what we call priming. Whenever we see, hear or otherwise experience something, whatever we see produces a spreading activation in the brain of everything associated with it in the past.

Thus, exposure to violence in the family, among peers, in video games, on TV, in movies, in neighborhoods immediately activates violent scripts and social norms related to violence.

The activation may not last very long. But it makes it more likely that one will behave violently in the short-term. This priming event does not even need to be an entire violent act.

Anything associated in the brain with violence can serve as a prime of violent scripts. The emotion of anger primes aggressive scripts, as does the sight of a perceived enemy.

Perhaps most relevant to school shootings, we know that the mere sight of a weapon will prime aggressive scripts for using weapons.

Of course, if a youth does not already have violent scripts encoded in the brain, violent scripts can't be activated or primed. If a youth does not have normative beliefs approving of violence, a violent script won't even be used, even if it is activated.

So how do scripts and normative beliefs get encoded in the brain, particularly ones promoting

violence? The answer is through learning.

Undoubtedly reinforcement learning plays a role. But the consensus among psychologists today who have studied aggressive and violent behavior is that the more important process is imitation or, more generally, observational learning.

Humans imitate what they see from infancy on. Children see and children do. But they don’t simply mimic the behavior they see. They're more intelligent than that.

You see how someone solves a social problem and you infer the script they're following and you encode that script. You see the belief they must have to do that and you encode the script -- you encode the belief that they have into your brain.

The more youth is exposed to violence in the family, in the neighborhood, among peers, on television, in movies or in video games, the most violent scripts they will encode in their brains and the more their normative beliefs will become accepting of violence.

The more youth observes weapons being used to

solve social problems in any of these venues, the more likely the youth will be to encode scripts for using weapons to solve social problems and the more accepting will be the youth of using weapons to solve social problems.

Of course, youth who already have normative beliefs that violence is wrong will be less likely to encode new scripts or new beliefs.

In summary, there can be no question in my mind that repeatedly observing violence in the family, among peers, in the neighborhood, in TV or movies or in video games increases the risk of a youth behaving violently because of the violence promoting cognitions they inevitably encode.

Similarly, observing violence with weapons increases the risk of behaving violently with weapons.

When a youth with such heightened risk factors comes into a situation that primes these cognitions -- anger, some other violence -- disastrous violent behavior may follow. The availability of weapons for youth exacerbates this problem in two ways. First, the mere sight of the weapons primes violent scripts.

SEC. DEVOS: Dr. Huesmann, sorry to interrupt. Your time has expired.

DR. HUESMANN: Oh, okay.

SEC. DEVOS: And out of respect for the other speakers and participants --

DR. HUESMANN: Sure.

SEC. DEVOS: I'd like to ask that you conclude your remarks now and we will get around to some questions in a couple of moments.

DR. HUESMANN: Okay. I'll say one more thing. My presentation is focused on well-established psychological knowledge. But I haven't answered the question what might best predict future violence.

And the simple answer is past violent behavior. Study after study has shown the best predictor of future violent behavior is past violent behavior. Thank you.

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you so much, Dr. Huesmann. Our second speaker is Dr. Christopher J. Ferguson, who is professor in the department of psychology at Stetson University in Florida. Welcome, Dr. Ferguson.

DR. FERGUSON: Thank you. I took the liberty

of making a few graphs, if I could have permission to pass those to you?

SEC. DEVOS: Certainly.

DR. FERGUSON: So thank you for having me here today. Again, my name is Chris Ferguson. And I'm a professor of psychology at Stetson University and what I'd like to do is really kind of briefly go through different pools of research evidence that we have on entertainment violence.

So the first we have is a relatively large pool of studies of what we call aggression. And it's important to understand that most of the measures we use to study aggression are related to relatively minor behavior.

So we're literally talking about putting someone's hand in a bucket of ice water, giving someone spicy sauce when they don’t like spicy sauce, filling in the missing letters of words so that K-I-blank-blank might spell out kill or kiss, depending on whether you're thinking more aggressive.

Obviously, these things are interesting. But they don’t necessarily tell us a lot about school

safety and school violence and things that are really important to us.

It's also important to point out that this pool of research has been generally inconsistent.

There are some studies that find evidence for effects. There are some studies that don’t find evidence for effects. And there are even a few studies that find that exposure to entertainment violence may actually reduce aggression of this sort.

The other thing that's happening more recently is that these studies are not replicating well. In some of the newer research that's coming out under more rigorous methods in the last few years, newer scholars are having difficulty finding the same results of some of the older studies.

And also, the effects from most of the studies that even do find effects tend to be very small. And there's disagreement among scholars about how to interpret them. My own personal interpretation is that they tend to be what I would call trivial. They're unlikely to have real impact in the real world.

And the U.S. Supreme Court actually did

consider this body of studies in 2011 in the Brown v. EMA case when they considered regulation of violence in video games.

And I'll quote from the majority decision that was written by Justice Scalia: "These studies have been rejected by every court to consider them and with good reason." And I agree with this assessment by the Supreme Court.

We do have a smaller pool of research that actually looks at violence as an outcome. Obviously, these are more correlational or longitudinal. We can't have people be violent in a laboratory setting. So we can track kids over time and look at what kind of factors predict their later violence.

So figure one actually presents an example of one of these studies that we've done in our lab. There are other studies around the world that have come to similar conclusions. And what we tend to find is that entertainment violence is not very predictive of later violent behavior, bullying outcomes, things like that.

We tend to find things like mental health, family environment, things like that tend to be much

stronger predictors or risk factors for violence.

The other pool of data that we can look at is epidemiological data in society. And what we look at here is do rates of consumption of violent media by society correlate with actual violence in society.

This is correlational data again. So we have to be a little bit careful about causality. But it is still interesting.

And what we tend to find is that as society has consumed more violent media over the last several decades, youth violence, homicides have all plummeted. So there are correlations. They're just in the wrong direction, for the most part.

So figure two actually presents the correlation between PG-13 rated movie violence and youth violence. And you'll note that what a lot of people don’t realize is that youth violence has actually dropped by over 82 percent over the last two-and-a-half decades.

Figure three presents the same basic data, but for violent video game consumption in society. Again, these are very strong correlations, just in the wrong

direction from what people sometimes think is actually going on.

We do have some data on mass shooters as well. One of the things that happens with mass shooting events is what's called confirmation bias. And what happens oftentimes is when a shooter is a young male, as happened with Parkland or Santa Fe very recently, people start talking about movies and video games.

But when a shooter is an older male, like the 64-year-old male who attacked a concert in Las Vegas last year, people don’t usually mention video games or media or the woman who shot up a YouTube office several months ago.

That allows an illusion of a correlation to exist where none in fact occurs because people are ignoring the cases that don’t actually fit the data.

What we know, and this is presented in figure four, we've had data going back to 2002 that was done by the Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service looking at a lot of factors related to school shootings.

And the evidence they present, it's not

perfect by any means, but suggests that mass shooters, if anything, consume less rather than more violent media than other males of their age.

And lastly in figure five, we can also look at the cross-national data. And what we can see is that consumption of video games per capita across nations does not correlate with gun violence.

And you can actually change that graphic and put in homicides or put in assaults or sexual assaults and the numbers all kind if work out the same. There's no correlation cross-nationally between entertainment media consumption, particularly video games in this case, and actual violence that occurs in the society.

In fact, some of the countries like South Korea and the Netherlands that consume the most video games per capita, are amongst the least violent on the planet.

And then, there's also the issue I think that's kind of interesting is like, you know, why does this keep coming up and is there kind of a consensus among scholars in the field about the effects of entertainment media. And that's what I document in

figure six, is that there is no consensus among scholars about these types of effects. There's a lot of disagreements.

And what you'll see is in figure six, I compare the consensus over climate change, which is about 99.4 percent among scholars who study that, compared to mild aggression and also violent crime as an outcome.

And as we see, the closer that scholars are asked about issues related to violent crime, the more skeptical scholars become of there being any substantial effects for entertainment violence.

So what sometimes happens is we have professional guilds like my own. I'm a fellow of the American Psychological Association. These organizations typically exist to represent us. They market psychology and they are sometimes guilty of overestimating the amount of effects.

So in 2015, the APA did come out with a policy statement that, to their defense, did not link video games to violence in society but did suggest that there may be some conclusive evidence for effects on

aggression, mild aggression once again.

However, their taskforce prompted an open letter by 230 scholars, over 230 scholars asking them to stop releasing policy statements linking video games to aggression.

And also, just last year, the APA's own media psychology and technology division released its own policy statement asking policymakers like yourselves and news media to stop linking entertainment violence and video game violence to violence in society because the evidence is not there to support the existence of such links.

And again, there are government reviews by the United Kingdom, Australia, Sweden and of course the United States Supreme Court in Brown v. EMA that have all come to more or less the same conclusion as I'm presenting to you today. And that's basically what I have to present. So I'm happy to take any questions at this time.

Q&A DISCUSSION

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you, Dr. Ferguson, and again, Dr. Huesmann. We will now have time for some

questions. And I'll begin by asking both of you if you have thoughts on the efficacy of the current media rating systems. Do they make a difference? Do they not? Can they be improved?

DR. FERGUSON: I can start -- I can start with that. Yeah, so they vary. The last report we had on that was from the Federal Trade Commission. I believe it was 2009, I believe.

And their findings were that the two standout ones were the ESRB, the Entertainment Software Rating Board system, which is the video game rating system, and the MPAA, the Motion Picture Association of America.

And their conclusions were that those two systems were highly successful and generally effective at turning people away at the point of sale. There were more concerns particularly about the Recording Industry Association of America, the sticker. That's the explicit lyrics sticker that you get.

You tend to get kind of a forbidden fruit effect with that. That kind of draws people to the music rather than keeping them away from it.

And then, the television system's kind of confusing. The letters they use don't always make a lot of sense. People don't tend to use the V-chip very much. So my impression is that the video game system and the movie system are both very effective, the other two maybe not quite as much.

DR. HUESMANN: If I could comment? People don't use the V-chip. They don't attend much to television ratings of violence. And the far more important rating is the violence rating than just for mature or non-mature audiences.

And the sale of video games doesn't seem to be affected very much about the ratings. Most kids say that their parents don't attend to the ratings and that they can get a violent game any time they want. So the ratings seem to have no real effect on the purchase of games.

ATTY. GEN. SESSIONS: Is there any data that shows that if parents adhere to those ratings, that it would have a beneficial effect on a child?

DR. HUESMANN: Not -- I don't know of any such study, Attorney General Sessions. There might be. But

I don’t know of it. But I do know that if parents attended to ratings and controlled what their children -- thought about what their children were seeing or playing, the children would be much better off.

DR. FERGUSON: If I could respond a little too, I think that, you know, in my view, the ratings systems are really there to be informative for parents. And some parents may decide that what's right for their family or their child may be different from what's right for another family or child.

So I mean, my thing that I tell parents is simply to be informed, you know, to try to find out what's in a video game, to find out what's in a movie or whatever before making a decision about what to allow for a particular child.

So, you know, for some kids, it may -- I'll be very frank with you. For some kids, it may be perfectly fine to take them to an R-rated movie when they're younger than 17 or to play an M-rated video game. Probably for most kids, it's probably fine, you know. But for other families, that might not be the right decision.

So, I mean, I think we have to kind of think of the ratings systems as a tool that helps families make decisions for themselves. And they may not always make the decision that we would make, you know, as parents. And that's okay, I think, for the most part, so.

MS. GRADY: So Dr. Huesmann, you spoke to normative behaviors that are formed based on exposure to social solutions through violence and the impact that different family, neighborhood, peers and as well as media have on forming those patterns. And then, you also talked about risk and prior violence being the best indicator of future violence.

DR. HUESMANN: Right.

MS. GRADY: Did you see any factors that would indicate that even individuals who have that exposure to violence, that they would not then act on or basically a positive risk factor where that would not translate into negative violent behavior, even if the individual has been exposed? So any positive risk indicators in your research?

DR. HUESMANN: Yes. There certainly are

positive things. What we might call positive parenting, including monitoring and appropriate teaching reinforcement has been shown to moderate children's tendencies to imitate and mimic what they see, for example.

The fact is no one factor causes kids to behave more violently. And the -- it's the accumulation of factors that causes them to. So yes, there are many positive parenting things you could probably all think of that would moderate the effects of the habitual exposure to video violence.

MR. HARGAN: I mean, in listening to both of you, I saw something of a little bit of a contradiction between the notion that imitation or learning about violence on the one hand sort of begets violence and on the other hand that we see the more exposure to at least fictional violence doesn't seem to be correlated with actual violence in the world.

Is there a distinction that you could draw between observation, you know, at a distance -- that is, an observation on a screen, whether it's on television or movies or video games on the one hand and

then observation of violence in real life --

DR. HUESMANN: Yeah.

MR. HARGAN: -- that is, when you see it happening in your neighborhood or your home, that's more predictive violence when you see violence -- I think you said violence working or violence works --

DR. HUESMANN: Yeah. Right.

MR. HARGAN: -- whether that's -- there's a distinction that you've seen from an academic point of view between -- a gap between violence that's seen in one's real -- in one's own life --

DR. HUESMANN: Yeah.

MR. HARGAN: -- and violence seen at a fictional remove.

DR. HUESMANN: Well, let me say a couple of things. First, Professor Ferguson and I have disagreed for many, many years and argued vociferously in a lot of venues. And I don’t think this is the best venue to rehash that argument. So I will restrain myself.

But to the point you state, one of the important things is how a child perceives whatever they're seeing. Do they perceive it as representative

of the real world or not?

For example, I have a study that we did in Oak Park, Illinois in 1977 with a very large sample of children that showed that about 50 percent of first grade girls thought Charlie's Angels told about life just like it really is. Now, when you get up to the fifth grade, that goes -- plummets way down.

So it depends on when you're looking at anything, in the media or outside your window. Do you perceive that as like the world is or not? If you don’t think the world's like that, then you're much less likely to encode that script and follow that script later on.

But the idea that somehow what you see through the window should just be completely different than what you see on the TV box or on the movie screen just really has no basis in psychology.

DR. FERGUSON: Yeah. I actually one time named an article "Does Doing Media Violence Research Make You Aggressive?" But yeah, I would argue that indeed there is a distinction between what happens in the real world versus what happens in the fictional

universe.

There actually have been a few, just very recently, studies of violent video games that are brain imaging studies.

And Simone Kühn has done one of these studies and there have been a few others that suggest that playing violent video games does not have the desensitization effect on the brain that we might expect from people who are exposed to violence in the real world.

So I would argue -- certainly there are obviously disagreements between scholars amongst these things -- that our brains do seem to be efficient at -- even from fairly young ages, at distinguishing between reality and fiction. Obviously, it's something that develops over time.

But some of the evidence suggests that it starts at age three and it's done by age 12 essentially. And you know, we do treat fictional scenarios different than we do real life.

I'll be blunt. I love war movies. But I would have no interest in going to an actual war

because the emotional experience would be very different for those scenarios.

So I do think we need to get to a point where we're not treating fictional exposures to violence the same way we think about exposure to violence to the family, exposure to violence in the neighborhood or violence among our peers.

SEC. DEVOS: One more question. Yeah.

ATTY. GEN. SESSIONS: Sure, maybe one more. There's sort of a layman's view out there and I don't know -- never heard any research actually about it, that if you have some sort of predisposition to violence and then you are -- you may be one of those who are triggered by a violent, you know -- steady diet of violent video games and/or movies. Is there any validity to that?

DR. HUESMANN: I would say there is, yes. If you have a predisposition to violence, then you experience violence, it's likely to activate.

Why do you have a predisposition? Because somewhere in the past you've developed scripts that it seems okay to be violent and so on. And if that's

activated by something you see, violence seen now, you're more likely to behave violently.

So yes, I mean, the exposure to violence is going to have a different effect on a child who's learned very positive, pro-social scripts and doesn't really have any scripts for behaving violently than a child who has been -- developed these scripts in the past. So yes, the predisposition does matter how the current exposure to violence will affect you.

SEC. DEVOS: Dr. Ferguson?

DR. FERGUSON: I'm going to continue the he said/she said unfortunately. We've actually done a few studies with that and actually in our lab and other labs, we have not found sort of a vulnerable population, if you will.

So we've done some actual research with preexisting depression, antisocial traits, ADD and have not found them to be influenced by violent media any more than other kids, which is to say zero.

And there actually was another study that came out of the University of Missouri that looked at young adults with autism spectrum disorders and I think that

was prompted by the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012, that once again was an experimental study and found that once again there was no difference between young adults with autism spectrum versus those that were sort of non-spectrum adults in terms of their response to violent video games in a laboratory aggression setting, which again, both samples was a zero effect.

PANEL 3: EFFECTS OF PRESS COVERAGE ON MASS SHOOTINGS

SEC. DEVOS: I'm afraid that will have to be the last word for this panel. Thank you again, Dr. Huesmann and Dr. Ferguson. And we'll now move to our final panel and we are going to hear about effects of press coverage on mass shootings.

Our first speaker is Dr. Jennifer B. Johnston. Dr. Johnston is an assistant professor of psychology at the Western New Mexico University. Welcome, Dr. Johnston.

DR. JOHNSTON: Thank you for having me, Commission. I appreciate it. My research involves media's impact on our psychology. I'm a media psychologist, if you will. And I have specifically focused on whether mass homicide is contagious and what

role the media has played in spreading this disease, so to speak.

The good news is that we can, I believe, prevent most of these shootings. There are probably four key ways to do that. I will spend the most time on the first because that is my area.

First and foremost, reduce media contagion. Secondly, we need early detection of suicidal and homicidal ideation. We need school threat assessment and intervention programs. And we need to reduce access to semiautomatic and automatic weapons.

Thinking of the panel before me, I want to point out that most of our research on violence and aggression is related to single homicide, manslaughter, one-to-one kind of crime.

And I would argue that it appears mass shootings, it's a different animal. It's against type in why we think it's happening and what may be triggering it, to a large degree.

So I'm going to talk about how prevalent is mass shooting and how that's related to media. Do we have confirmation of media contagion? How strong is

media contagion? Why do we think it's happening? And what can we do? How do we deal with this?

First of all, there has been a threefold increase in mass shootings, as many of you are aware, over just the last 15 or 16 years.

For example, from 1950 to 2000, there were only about two incidents per year. And then, from 2000 to 2003, that rose to seven incidents per year. By 2012, we were at 15 incidents per year. 2016, we were at 20 incidents per year. And last year unfortunately was a record year, 30 mass shootings in 2017.

When I looked at the usual suspects, as they're often called, what might be causing this, violence in entertainment and exposure that way, firearms or gun laws and mental health identification and resources, only one of those -- or media contagion, that is the one that has a corresponding meteoric rise in the last 15 years.

So around the turn of this century is when 24-hour news coverage really came into its own as well as the rise of social media, whereas when you look at the other three potential causes, they haven't changed

much. In fact, gun laws may have loosened and mental health identification is often better than it was before. And so, that's one piece of this puzzle that I looked at.

So do we have confirmation of this? Yes, we have 11 studies now that have evaluated whether media contagion is real and what's involved. All 11 found a contagion effect.

Let me tell you a little bit about the strength of this contagion. Is it negligible or not? One of the important aspects is that all 11 studies also found that the time period in which contagion tends to happen is about two weeks. That's the strongest time period.

And so, one study in particular, Towers out of Arizona State University found that the strength of the contagion is maybe about 22 percent. So for one incident, there's a 22 percent increase that another will occur in a short timeframe.

When you get to three or four incidents, there's a hundred percent guarantee that we will have a fifth mass shooting, or school shooting in particular

in 30 days. So there's a cumulative effect of the impact of these shootings.

Social media as well, there's a study by Garcia-Bernardo and others that indicates that when tweets rise above 10 per million in the days following a shooting, there's a 50 percent likelihood that another shooting will occur in that region. If tweets stay at that level, just 10 per million for 19 days, there's an 85 percent chance that another shooting will occur.

Why is this happening? Well, some of the other panelists talk about are there crosscutting traits that mass shooters share.

And this is where I think they're a bit different from other types of homicide, which we know are decreasing in the U.S. and across the world. And it's also people mentioned our unique problem to some degree in the U.S.

And so, I think that has something to do with it. We have a unique media system. We're kind of world leaders in that way. But in this instance, it may be somewhat a negative type of leadership.

So what I found in my research is that there are three main traits that shooters tend to share, so the majority, not all. They are a bit against type. They don't tend to have a prior history of violence, which is one of our best ways of predicting what they're going to do. So we don't have that to work with.

They tend to be depressed, but to the point of being suicidal. They tend to be socially isolated or had a recent major social connection loss. And they tend to be narcissistic, but specifically fame-seeking.

So I want to talk about that a little bit and that's somewhat unique to them. Is their fame assured? Well, let's take a look at a couple of studies. Dahmen, she looked at 4,900 images from newspapers, just front pages of newspapers all across the country just for three days just related to three shootings. And there were 4,900 images related to the mass shooting.

More than a third of those were specifically the shooter or the perpetrator. And furthermore, when you compared how many shooters to like an individual

victim, the shooter was pictured 16 times more often than any one individual victim. And their images were also larger in size than other images that were shown.

Another study looked at just headlines, so the verbal content related to mass shootings. In one publication, 60 percent of the time it focused on the shooter and not other aspects of the incident.

For a more personal example, the Orlando Pulse Club shooter checked his Facebook and newsfeeds during the event, wanting to see whether he had been mentioned in the news yet.

So we're fairly certain that this is a major motivator for this type of person and what's going on with them. For some reason, I think they see fame as a remedy to the suffering and their suicidal state of mind. So there's a place where we can make a difference.

Sometimes people ask what's the difference between the copycat effect and the contagion effect. And the copycat effect has to do with wanting to specifically emulate a particular criminal or a particular crime whereas media contagion is more

generalized than that.

And it seems to be more about planting the seed that this is an option, that this is a way to cope with or to feel better or gain something you want. But they're both involved in what we're talking about today.

Okay. What can we do? First off, I wanted to thank the Department of Justice for releasing that funding recently, particularly the comprehensive school safety initiative. We really appreciate that.

I know that my colleagues and various others are going to take advantage of that, as well as the investigator-initiated research and evaluation on firearms violence. So thank you for that.

And I want our number one I think point of attack would be that we ask the media to immediately adopt the don’t name them campaign. Do not show the shooter's face. Do not say their name. And do not go into detail about their backgrounds.

Why? Because as the previous panel talked about, and they didn't completely mention one of the pushes towards violence is identification. Imitation,

but we know that the most powerful models for why people behave violently are the ones that they're closest to or that they identify with the most.

So when the media goes into great detail about their backgrounds, that they were bullied or the weapon choices, things like that, then they have someone to identify with. We need to remove that.

Secondly, Deputy Secretary Hargan, I would like the CDC to reconvene a working group on this topic of media contagion the way that suicide contagion was evaluated in 1994. The media did adopt those guidelines that the CDC recommended. So I'm hoping that that can happen and I'm happy to help with that.

SEC. DEVOS: Dr. Johnston?

DR. JOHNSTON: Yes?

SEC. DEVOS: Your time is up.

DR. JOHNSTON: Thank you.

SEC. DEVOS: I'm sorry.

DR. JOHNSTON: I'll make my last comment. So Secretary DeVos, thank you so much for what you're doing. The schools need mental health threat assessment teams. And I would give you two good

examples, the Los Angeles County School District -- Unified School District has had success for eight years, zero mass shootings because they have an excellent model of that, as well as the Long Island, New York school district who works with Dr. Weisbrot, prevented hundreds of shootings with their follow-up procedures.

Train staff and students to look for leakage. Almost all shooters do leak their intent and act on that immediately, as well as suicidal ideation.

And lastly, Deputy Assistant (sic) Grady, please address issues with firearms. I know that you're looking into that later this summer. We've heard this panel will look into that. So thank you for that.

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you so much, Dr. Johnston. Next, we turn to Ben Fernandez, who is chair of the National Association of School Psychologists school safety and crisis response committee. Welcome, Mr. Fernandez.

MR. FERNANDEZ: Thank you. Good afternoon, members of the commission. Thank you for inviting me

to speak on behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists regarding the effects of media coverage of mass shootings and the role that the media can play in helping to inform the public and prevent further violence.

As you said, my name is Ben Fernandez. I'm a school psychologist and also the chair of the school safety crisis response committee.

Modern media enables access to current events, including highly traumatic events, in real time and in multiple formats. The viral, interactive and more intimate nature of media, particularly social media, can make these events feel closer to home and much more personal.

This prevents -- or excuse me, this presents opportunities to increase the attention to school safety, but at the same time perpetuates the belief that schools are dangerous places, when in fact they are safe.

I'd like to focus on three primary points in my time today and I also refer you to my written statement for more detail. My first point being that

by balancing physical and psychological safety, schools are safe. School policies and practices are most critical to this, but the media also plays a role in contributing to the perception of safety by how they shape the overall understanding of specific crisis events.

Mass school shootings are horrific and totally unacceptable and we need to pay attention to them. But they are not the norm. Yet too often coverage of mass shootings has perpetuated the misperception that schools are dangerous.

Schools are overwhelmingly safe places and since the 1990s, the overall trend is that they're becoming safer, despite the unusual number of mass shootings this year.

I'm reminded of my own daughter's fear after the Parkland shooting based on information she saw on social media, rumors in her school and what she saw on the news. She was very concerned about the safety of her own school.

You know, fortunately she came to me seeking guidance on what was really going on. And after honest

conversation and pointing out the physical and psychological safety approaches and efforts of her school, she began to understand, you know, the situation, which then calmed her fears.

It's important that the media convey factual information about the reality of day-to-day safety because coverage can infuse all our perceptions.

Importantly, national, state and local leaders have a responsibility to convey the facts, reinforce best practices and balance reactions to specific events with assurances that schools are amongst the safest for our children to be. Everything you do and other leaders say contributes to the news cycle.

My second being is that best practices for media coverage of traumatic events must include the commitment to do no harm.

School psychologists operate by the principle of do no harm in our daily practice. NASP believes that the media should apply these principles when covering incidents of school violence.

Responsible media coverage can benefit the community, prevent harm and aid in recovery. I want to

stress that reporting school safety incidents is important. People need to know the facts and have an understanding of response and recovery efforts.

The media can play a critical role in assisting with the crisis recovery if they follow best practice reporting. The goal is not to censor or limit the media but rather provide guidance on what is required to do no harm.

Doing no harm includes understanding how actions, images, video and words may contribute to the difficulties of crisis survivors and victims and possibly trigger others who are at risk of harming themselves and others.

Unfortunately, certain media coverage practices can cause harm, perpetuate fear and hamper recover. Irresponsible media coverage includes speculative reporting in the absence of verified information, overdramatizing how information is conveyed.

Asking students to relive the crisis or recount their own experience immediately after exposure to crisis by asking them questions like what were you

thinking when you saw your classmate shot in the back. And then, focusing intensely on the perpetrator.

Such practices increase anxiety, fear and increase perceptions of threat, create the potential for further impact to crisis victims and possibly triggering troubled youth, as well as perpetuate misperceptions of appropriate coping and recovery.

As Dr. Johnston noted, many of these issues related to the coverage of mass violence also apply to suicide. And I encourage you to keep this in mind because schools are far more likely to be dealing with a suicide risk than a threat of a violent attack.

And for more information about avoiding coverage that can cause harm, I recommend the five for five challenge, reporting on suicide matters video on YouTube created by Fairfax County, Virginia.

The good news is that there are responsible media practices that can prevent harm and promote positive messaging.

Some include refraining from providing intensive and graphic details of an incident, avoiding focusing on the method, plans, photos, videos, writing,

manifestos and even images and likenesses of the perpetrator, focusing on students, staff and families who are positively and adaptively coping and avoiding overdramatizing crisis impact.

And seeking out experts and facts related to school safety and crisis intervention services to provide factual and best practice recovery information and then emphasizing that schools are safe and reporting on appropriate evidence-based measures schools are taking to make schools even safer.

My third point this afternoon is that school leaders can play a role in how media coverage will contribute to useful public understanding or may contribute to confusion or harm.

Collaboration with other agencies such as law enforcement, community health, mental health departments and others as well as the media can help guide recovery after a significant event such as mass violence.

For school leaders, it's important to develop a plan on how to communicate with the media that helps accomplish this goal. Such a plan should consider

communication practices before, during and after an incident and may include a process for determining who is responsible for communication, when updates will be given, how information will be attained, verified and then disseminated and then what are expectations for the media at schools.

It also includes using verified factual information to quickly communicate with the school community and address rumors and misinformation.

Providing regular, accurate updates regarding the crisis situation and then also engaging the school community by communicating information about public services, planned memorial events and resources for recovery.

As you consider recommendations about school safety and specifically the role of media, I would like to offer some -- the following recommendations.

Federal leadership in this area is critical. Collectively we can uphold the First Amendment and help schools understand best practices around media engagement to the press and social media outlets about responsible media coverage of violent school events.

The Federal Commission on School Safety could assist in disseminating guidance, much like the NASP document entitled "Responsible Media Coverage of Crisis Events Involving Children and Youth" that clearly articulates best practices in covering school crisis events.

Media in all forms can play a valuable role in how information about school crises are communicated. While irresponsible reporting can cause harm, responsible reporting can help communities heal.

I want to stress that once again NASP does not support limiting or controlling media. However, we support meaningful dialog to support best practice reporting as well as best practice media engagement for schools.

We all play a role in supporting school safety. And when we speak, the media listens. We're a part of the news cycle and we have a responsibility to promote accurate, evidence-based information that supports the wellbeing of all students and communities.

Thank you and I'm happy to answer questions and NASP is happy to serve as a resource.

Q&A DISCUSSION

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you, Mr. Fernandez. And thank you, Dr. Johnston. I'm cognizant of our time. So I'm going to ask if any of my colleagues have one burning question to pose to this duo.

MS. GRADY: I do have a quick question relative to the -- you were talking about the media contagion effect. You mentioned the time factor associated with tweets and tweets that follow.

Is that more likely to occur regionally or nationally? My question I guess is, is it more isolated to the community that was most impacted or was it really a national effect that you saw.

DR. JOHNSTON: So the studies that have looked at national news media and just looking at whether incidents cluster in time indicate that it's within two weeks, around that time, with school shootings up to about 30 days even.

The study that looked just at social media, that was regionally based. So the effect seems to be both. We know, for example, with the Parkland shootings, the LA County School District had a rise of

like 63 threats compared to the normal 20 that they have. So it's definitely a national effect as well as local and regional.

SEC. DEVOS: Again, thank you both very much for being here, for your presentation. And we have really run out of our time this afternoon unfortunately.

So I'm going to ask my colleagues if they have any closing comments to make before we do conclude.

CLOSING REMARKS

ATTY. GEN. SESSIONS: I want to just thank you. This is a very, very interesting discussion and gave us some insight that I had not had and maybe that can inform our discussions and policy decisions.

MS. GRADY: I want to thank all of the panelists, particularly having the differing perspectives on issues or approaching the topic from different perspectives is really valuable as we look at the possible solutions to a very challenging situation. So I just want to thank all of you all for your insights.

MR. HARGAN: Yeah. Again, thank you all, and

particularly thank you, Secretary DeVos and everyone for assembling such a great set of experts here today. And I think we've heard a great variety of perspectives here on what's a very important topic for us to address. The President has asked Secretary DeVos to helm on this front. So appreciate the perspective. I think we've learned a lot here today. Thank you.

SEC. DEVOS: Thank you all very much. And on behalf of the Federal Commission on School Safety, I'd like to convey our sincere gratitude to all of today's participants.

We've really appreciated hearing your insights. I know you've also all submitted some written testimony. And I think there will be opportunity for some casual conversation afterwards for those who can stay behind.

I also want to thank my fellow commissioners and their representatives for being here today and for their continued work.

You can find more information on today's hearing, including a video, transcript and information on future events at ed.gov/school-safety and we

encourage members of the public to submit their own ideas for solutions to safety@ed.gov. And again, thank you all for being here today. We are concluded.

(Whereupon, at 3:35 p.m., the meeting was concluded.)

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I, NATALIA THOMAS, the officer before whom the foregoing proceeding was taken, do hereby certify that the proceedings were recorded by me and thereafter reduced to typewriting under my direction; that said proceedings are a true and accurate record to the best of my knowledge, skills, and ability; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which this was taken; and, further, that I am not a relative or employee of any counsel or attorney employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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June 25, 2018 _____

DATE Benjamin Graham