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OPINION

How To Prevent A School Shooter: *Start with building a caring community*

BY DAVID SOLEIL

Imagine you are an 8-year old student in elementary school. Your teacher tells you, "Today, we are having a lockdown drill." She talks in cryptic language explaining that if something bad happens at school, she wants everyone to be safe. You practice hiding in the closet with all of the other students and you sit "criss-cross applesauce" while the teacher bars the door. Or maybe you have a special cabinet to hide in. One of my friends told me how proud her daughter was about her hiding space in a cabinet for lockdown. This scenario plays out every day in our schools.

But what are we really teaching our community? We are teaching parents, teachers, and students to live in constant fear for their lives because "the shooter" is coming. Not since the Cold War have we surrounded our children in such an environment of reactive fear where they literally hide in the closet. "Duck and cover" used to be the rallying cry from Bert the Turtle for students to dive under



their desks because Russia could drop an atomic bomb on the United States any minute.

School shootings are serious and complex issues. There is no single key that can unlock a solution for our communities. (Can we collectively be done with "silver bullets" please?) As a founder of a K-12 school myself, and a consultant in Nonviolence Leadership, I have some perspectives that could be helpful as schools and communities wrestle with how to address the potential threat of violence.

Let's back up, long before a shooter shows up anywhere, and ask, how is our community caring for each other? How are we taking time to validate the inherent worth and dignity of every person in our learning community? So often, we get caught up in our day-to-day jobs as teachers, parents and administrators that we forget about how important relationships are to our community.

Strong communities are built upon trust, caring and love. These interpersonal relationships are

your community safety net when issues come up and they take significant time and attention. It's much like fundraising in the nonprofit world. The wisdom of fundraising says, "If you are going to ask for money one month each year, you must spend the other 11 months building relationships." The same thing is true for community building. Invest time every day in building strong, caring relationships that will support the community in times of crisis. This strategy is not about "shooter management." It is about "shooter prevention" long before anyone picks up a gun.

Martin Luther King Jr. said that "A riot is the language of the unheard." I would say the same thing in this context, that school shootings are the language of the unheard. Many times, school shooters are also students. So let us be intentional that our schools can be "communities that hear." Consider how your school community can open lines of communication. Let's allow students to talk and allow them to feel. Let's allow students to discuss what's going on in

our world without having to have a test, a homework assignment, a grade or a learning outcome.

You can't measure caring with a rubric and you won't test your way to a safer school. We spend weeks preparing every student to take standardized tests. Can we give some attention to validating the humanity and feelings of each student? Even better, can we focus our time on building a loving community instead of so much testing? How many shootings could we prevent if students in despair felt their school was a place of caring rather than cold indifference? If we do not make time for this important work, we will continue to hear the tragic "language of the unheard."

Two years ago, Antoinette Tuff stopped a school shooter who carried an AK-47 and 500 rounds of ammunition in my hometown of Decatur, Ga. She didn't use a gun. She used much more powerful weapons: listening, empathy and love. No one was hurt. No one was killed, not even the perpetrator. She is a living example of the power of love, empathy and non-violence.

What if we trained every teacher in empathic communication or Nonviolent Communication? What if instead of lockdown drills, we had empathy drills? Instead of teaching students to hide in a closet, what if we taught our students and teachers to reach out to each other, every day, and help each other when people are sad or hurting? What if instead of living in reactive fear of death that we engaged in the pro-active, life-affirming love of building a caring community?

The issues of school shootings are as complex as the solutions. Building a loving, caring community is an important solution that can catch students in despair and bring them back into the community long before they decide to pick up a gun.

Antoinette Tuff was a single unarmed person who stopped a tragedy with love. Imagine a whole school of people like Antoinette. We would never hide in the closet again.

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Expanding Healthcare Coverage for Everyone

Every state can make progress

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Recently released data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows the Affordable Care Act is working and helping get people health coverage. This is a welcome stark contrast to census data showing children remain our poorest age group and the younger they are the poorer they are.

Clearly the ACA has had positive effects on the uninsured. There were 8.8 million more people insured in 2014 than in 2013 and the percentage of people without health insurance coverage decreased from 13.3 percent to 10.4 percent. Nearly 1 million more children gained health coverage, but the overall rate of coverage for children was at a lower rate than seniors.

Adult gains in coverage mean extra gains for children because when parents are covered children are more likely to be covered and

receive needed preventive care too. The high rate of coverage for children is also evidence that Medicaid and CHIP are working for children and should be preserved as we work to expand protections for children in private coverage.

Although progress was made for large numbers of children, some lag behind. Hispanic children were more likely to be uninsured than children of other races and ethnicities and the uninsured rate for noncitizen children in 2014 was 20.8 percent—about 3.5 times greater than the uninsured rate for native-born citizen children. Assuring universal coverage for children, requires providing coverage to undocumented children and to citizen children of undocumented parents who fear deportation if they seek health coverage for their children.

This summer, California took an historic leap towards providing health coverage to every child — the culmination of more than a de-

cade of relentless advocacy by the Children's Defense Fund's California office and other child health and immigrant advocates.

Starting May 1, more than 170,000 undocumented children will gain access to health coverage they need to survive and thrive and grow up ready to contribute fully to California's workforce and economy. The progress in California reflects a bipartisan recognition that the state is stronger when everyone has access to health care including immigrant children and families.

California child advocates know the fight is not over and are continuing the "Health for All" effort to ensure all Californians — adults and children — get health coverage. With its recent advances California joins Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Washington State, and Washington, D.C. in covering undocumented children. Every state should do so.

States that have taken the Affordable Care Act's option to expand Medicaid to more low- and middle-income adults also saw

important strides in 2014. Although all 50 states and Washington, D.C. had a decreasing number of uninsured people between 2013 and 2014, the greatest gains were in the states that took the ACA's option to expand Medicaid.

We can increase this good news for all who need health coverage. We need to push hard for Medicaid expansion in all 50 states and push all states to follow Cal-

ifornia, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Washington State, and Washington, D.C. in covering undocumented children.

The progress made on reducing the number of uninsured people should inspire us to keep going until every child and adult has needed health coverage.

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