

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI-NR 2022-51

Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2022

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## When we'll know our schools are safe

*In this guest editorial, a Wisconsin family calls for gun law reform as the school year starts*

Back to school season is here, and we're preparing our sons for their first day. We wish that just meant buying their school supplies (which we haven't started yet), but this year, it also means a lot of worrying.

Their supply lists include three-ring binders, packs of pencils, earbuds - the usual - and the good thing is, we already have some of these, the ones we keep re-using every year because the boys haven't used them up yet. But even that makes us worry. It makes us think about how lucky they are, lucky that they've never had to use their three-ring binders as shields, lucky that they haven't had to hurl the pack of pencils at someone invading their classrooms with a gun in hand. Lucky that they haven't had to use their earbuds to block out the sound of gunfire in his school.

As parents of two - one a sixth grader and one a ninth grader - our job is to do everything in our power to make sure they go to school with all they need to learn. We believe the job of our educators is to help that learning along in environments where our children feel safe and supported - and where our educators themselves feel safe and supported, too.

We believe it's the job of our elected officials to ensure that our public schools are safe places to learn and work, and that includes passing laws that protect people - especially our children - from gun violence. This is where we feel that at both state and national levels, so many of our elected officials have fallen short.

It's still too easy to get an assault style weapon in our country. That makes it too easy for someone to enter a school and threaten the lives of our children and educators as they practice their math, play their instruments and eat their lunches.

It's still too easy to obtain a gun without going through an extensive background check on every sale. That makes it too easy for someone with a history of violence to obtain and use a firearm to hurt our most vulnerable in the places they should be safest.

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It's still too easy to own a gun and not store it safely. That makes it too easy for guns to fall into the hands of children and young adults with no training or understanding of how to use them responsibly.

Our boys know so much of this already, even if they don't always voice it. Our oldest son recognizes that school is a place where he and his classmates should feel safe; after all, he says, they spend the majority of their waking hours at school. But when he reads or watches news about school shootings and regularly practices active threat drills, he recognizes that schools aren't as safe as they should be - and that gun law reform is the path to real safety for him and his classmates. Our youngest son says that the educators in his school make him feel safe, but knows that, despite the best efforts of educators, students in other schools have still experienced violence in their classrooms. To ensure that kids all over our country are safe at school, he believes it's important to make sure all people get firearm safety training and go through background checks before being able to buy guns.

Discussions with our sons about gun safety remind us that while we hope that academics, music and friendships are top of mind for them when they head back to school, we know the threat of gun violence is a real and constant weight they have to bear. And that's an injustice - one only we adults can address, and one we need to take complete responsibility for as we organize, advocate and ultimately vote for leaders who feel the same sense of urgency we feel to preserve the lives and futures of our children.

When parents, guardians, educators, and elected officials have all done our jobs - when everyone's done all we can to make our schools safe places to learn and laugh and dream - then maybe we can say that the school supply list we've been given is enough.

*The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is choosing to keep the authors of this editorial anonymous to protect the family's safety.*

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