

Dept. of Public Instruction: We must protect our children

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MADISON — The most foundational value we hold as educators is that we must keep our students safe.

Kids need to be safe in their schools. Educators need to be safe in their schools. Parents and families trust schools to keep their children safe. And right now, they are not safe.

It is why we work so hard to foster welcoming communities in our schools and protect the emotional well-being of our students through social-emotional learning, mental health services, and so much more. But with the reality of school shootings in America, no school policy or anti-bullying lesson or mental health support can achieve student safety in the face of rampant gun access in our country. Educators cannot keep children safe without the rest of us holding our leaders accountable to more than thoughts and prayers; we must hold them accountable for real policy change and significant reform of our gun laws. But as a society, we have enabled a culture where gun violence is accepted. We've allowed pro-gun organizations to hold elected officials hostage and dictate our gun and safety laws, usurping the will of the citizens of the United States who elect individuals into office to protect our best interests. This must change.

The painful fact that gun violence and other societal challenges continue to spill into our schools requires me to engage in issues that extend beyond traditional school policy. The education of Wisconsin students and the safety of our children and educators in our schools must be addressed – not tomorrow, not next month, and not after the next loss of life. Every day is the right time to protect the lives of children; the day after a school shooting is already a day too late.

Today, tomorrow, the next day and until our children are safe, I call on all levels of government to enact policy to reform gun laws in our state and our country. They must take action to urgently protect our children and communities. That is our job as adults, as parents, as leaders, and as a society: to protect our children. What

type of society are we, and what does that say about us as a civilization, if we refuse to support policies that protect lives and instead strengthen laws that value weapons more? Our students cannot learn if they are not alive. It sickens me that I have to say that, but I will keep saying it until our kids are safe.