



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

January 25, 2024

Dear School Principals and District Administrators:

Nothing could be more important than protecting the lives of children in our schools.

As a former school principal myself, I know how heavily the possibility of violence in school weighs on us as educators and administrators. I understand the immense pressure of trying to ensure your students, teachers, and staff are safe – all while knowing that, ultimately, no school lock is a match for an AR-15. While recognizing that a range of strategies and actions are needed on all fronts to keep our students safe, *I write to you today to emphasize a strategy where school principals and district administrators have a unique capacity to help save lives: encouraging safe firearms storage.*

In 2021, firearms were the cause of 16 percent of deaths among those aged 1 to 17, making them the leading cause of death for children.¹ Firearm suicide among young people ages 10 to 24 is at its highest rate in more than 20 years.² This is heartbreaking and unacceptable, especially because these deaths are preventable. Safe firearm storage is one of many important and effective prevention tools and emergency preparedness strategies that we can use to help keep our schools, homes, and community spaces safe and prevent and minimize the risk of suicide, shootings, and the death or injury of our children and loved ones.

Research has found that approximately three-quarters of perpetrators in school-based active shooter situations acquired their firearm from the home of a parent or close relative.³ Parents, families, guardians, and caregivers play an important role in helping keep firearms out of the wrong hands, which can in turn help to better keep our nation's schools and communities safer. Safe firearm storage can also help reduce interpersonal violence and prevent unintentional fatal and nonfatal firearm injuries that can take place when unauthorized adults, children, and teens gain access to firearms.

As school principals and district administrators, you have credibility in your community and trust in your schools and districts that uniquely position you to help save lives. You play a vital role in conveying crucial information to students, parents, and families about school safety and emergency preparedness, and safe firearm storage can be part of these discussions. We encourage all school building and district leaders to share key information about safe firearm storage because doing so has the power to save lives.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *About Underlying Cause of Death, 2018-2021, Single Race, Ages 1 to 17*. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10-expanded.html>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022). WISQARS™ — Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System. <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>.

³ National Threat Assessment Center. (2019). *Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence*. U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security. <http://bit.ly/3SfmSgw>

As a resource, the U.S. Department of Education’s Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center has developed a customizable letter template that principals and district administrators may choose to use to provide parents, families, guardians, and caregivers with important information about safe firearm storage. You can download and modify the template as needed or use it as a resource as you communicate and engage with families on this topic. We encourage all school leaders to consider taking steps to build awareness in your school community about safe firearm storage, such as:

- Share information about safe firearm storage with parents and families in your school communities. You can use the enclosed letter as a resource for parents, families, guardians, and caregivers—as well as teachers and school staff—to help build awareness around safe firearm storage, including what people can do to safely store firearms in their homes and spaces that children may occupy. You can also customize the letter to better meet your community’s needs.
- Partner with other municipal and community leaders to help improve understanding of safe firearm storage and broader gun violence prevention efforts.
- Engage other organizations and partners within your community, such as parent organizations, out-of-school time program leaders, nonprofit agencies, and other community-based youth-serving entities who routinely interact with children, teens, families, guardians, and caregivers, to inform them about the importance of safe firearm storage.
- Integrate information about safe firearm storage into your communications with families, guardians, and caregivers about overall emergency preparedness and school safety.

Everyone has a role to play in reducing firearm violence in our communities and preventing deaths and injuries from firearms. We will continue to work with State and local leaders around the nation to prevent gun violence, enhance supportive services for young people impacted by gun violence, and to ensure every young person feels safe, supported, and welcome in their community and school. Building awareness about effective, safe storage strategies and devices can be a key complement to this work and can help our children and our communities thrive. I encourage you to educate the whole school community about the importance of safe firearm storage. Let’s work together to save lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Miguel A. Cardona". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education