To offer recommendations aimed at fostering schools as safe learning environments.

Learning occurs best in an inviting, safe, and orderly school setting. Principals accept that their first responsibility is to foster such a climate, and the public continues to confirm that priority.

Two areas that have received particular attention by school leaders, the media, and all stakeholders are acts of school violence and bullying on school grounds. In the first decade of this century, the United States experienced an average of 4.9 school shootings per year. Since 2010, that average has already risen to 23 (Paris, 2014).
Bullying is a form of youth violence, has also continued to evolve with the advent of electronic and digital media. In a 2011 nationwide survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012):

- 20% of high school students reported being bullied on school property in a 12-month period
- The problem is particularly prominent at the middle school/junior high level, which accounts for the highest level of incidents reported
- 16% were victims of electronic bullying.

During the 2009–10 school year:

- 23% of public schools reported that bullying occurred among students on a daily and/or weekly basis.

Furthermore, in a 2013 survey principals reported increased instances of bullying:

- About 50% of middle school principals reported in a recent survey that physical bullying has become less of a problem in their schools over the past three years
- 72% of them also reported that electronic or cyber-bullying increased during that time, and studies show that it happens most often outside of regular school hours and off school grounds.

Other reports put the numbers much higher, but one of the problems endemic to the issue is inconsistency in measuring and reporting bullying incidents in schools. A recent initiative by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the US Department of Education produced a uniform definition that will empower principals to develop appropriate proactive and responsive strategies to address the issue. This definition encompasses empirical data contributions from a variety of agencies and involved a panel of research and practitioner experts, including NASSP’s president. In the report *Bullying Surveillance Among Youths: Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements*, bullying is defined as:

Any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm. Bullying can occur in-person and through technology. Electronic aggression or cyber-bullying is bullying that happens through email, chat rooms, instant message, a website, text message, or social media. (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014, p. 7)

There are some overlapping features between bullying and harassment, but it is essential that school leaders are able to distinguish between the two because they must be able to respond effectively and appropriately to the legal requirements associated with harassment.

While many educators are able to recognize potential aggressive behavior, they are hampered by inefficient and nonintegrated behavioral, mental health, and social support services and systems.
Students and educators have a right to attend schools that have a safe and orderly learning environment.

Trusting relationships in school are the most effective means of ensuring school safety.

The NASSP Breaking Ranks Framework calls for a personalized learning environment as a condition for student voice, engagement, and achievement.

The federal government, states, localities, school districts, and individual schools should use the uniform definition of bullying established by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control and the US Department of Education to ensure consistency in measuring and addressing the causes and the impact of bullying and bullying prevention efforts.

As a member of the National Safe Schools Partnership, NASSP has endorsed federal policy recommendations to prevent bullying and harassment in our nation’s schools, which will have a dramatic impact in improving school safety and, correspondingly, student achievement for all students.

School leaders must develop proactive systems to address school safety that include all stakeholders. This includes creating a personalized, safe, orderly, and inviting school environment predicated on nurturing relationships and shared responsibility.

School and district leaders should develop responsive systems to support school safety in partnership with all stakeholders. This includes a uniform code of conduct that contains clear policies regarding bullying and harassment and meets all federal state and board requirements pertaining to investigations, recording, and reporting.

Localities, school districts, and individual schools should use the uniform definition of bullying established by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control and the US Department of Education to ensure consistency in measuring and addressing the causes and the impact of bullying and bullying prevention efforts.

School and district leaders should maintain ongoing staff development regarding school safety, bullying, and related mental health issues.

School districts should use emergency preparedness plans that follow the National Incident Management System for Schools developed by the US Department of Homeland Security.

School leaders should complete the Introduction to the Incident Command System for Schools (IS-100. SCA for Schools) course, which was designed by the US Department of Homeland Security in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education and which is available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Emergency Management Institute [http://training.fema.gov/EMIWebYSIS/courseOverview.aspx?code=IS-100.SCA].
School leaders should regularly administer a schoolwide climate survey of students, parents, and school personnel. The climate survey should measure the degree to which collaborative leadership exists; the personalization of the school environment; and the strength of the school’s curriculum, instruction, and assessment—factors NASSP believes lead to a supportive learning environment and increased student achievement.

School and district leaders should establish curricula for grades K–12 that addresses violence prevention and bullying, including electronic aggression.

School and district leaders should collaborate with parents, law enforcement agencies, public and private social service agencies, and other agencies to develop programs and services to foster caring schools and communities.

School districts should ensure that school resource officers receive specialized training that mirrors the proactive and responsive systems delineated above to ensure a safe, orderly, and inviting school environment.

School and district leaders should partner with all stakeholders, including the news media, to ensure transparency and responsible dissemination of information regarding school safety.

Federal and state governments should remove barriers between education and local health service agencies and encourage local communities to focus on schools as the hub for delivery of mental and other health and social services.

States should not enact policies that would allow principals or teachers to carry firearms in school.

Federal and state policy makers should bolster programs to prevent bullying and harassment in our nation’s schools and provide adequate wraparound mental health and behavioral services to address social-emotional development.

The federal government should give states and local communities the ability to combine federal and state funding from separate agencies to address mental health and school safety issues at the local level.

Federal and state governments should invest in programs and the human capital needed to support school counseling programs, comprehensive school safety initiatives, including readiness and emergency management, mental health services, substance abuse prevention, and healthy childhood development.

Federal and state policy makers should assist schools in recruiting and retaining school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists to support school-based interventions and the coordination of services.