

---

---

# *Committee Meeting*

of

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“The Joint Committee on the Public Schools will meet to receive testimony from invited guests on school security and threat assessment teams”*

---

---

**LOCATION:** Meeting via Zoom

**DATE:** November 1, 2024  
10:00 a.m.

### **MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:**

Senator Joseph P. Cryan, Co-Chair  
Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Co-Chair  
Senator Joseph Pennacchio  
Senator Douglas J. Steinhardt  
Senator Michael L. Testa, Jr.  
Assemblywoman Linda S. Carter  
Assemblywoman Carmen Theresa Morales  
Assemblywoman Victoria A. Flynn  
Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis



### **ALSO PRESENT:**

Rebecca DiBenedetti  
*Executive Director*

Ivy Pomper  
*Executive Assistant*

*This transcript was prepared using an outside recording not designed for transcription purposes.  
Therefore, portions of this transcript may not be completely accurate as portions were inaudible and/or indiscernible.*

**Meeting Transcribed by**  
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,  
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

---

---



## SENATE

Hon. Joseph P. Cryan, Co-Chair

Hon. Renee C. Burgess  
Hon. Angela McKnight  
Hon. Shirley K. Turner  
Hon. Joseph Pennacchio  
Hon. Douglas J. Steinhart  
Hon. Michael L. Testa

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

P.O. BOX 070  
TRENTON, NJ 08625  
(609) 331-2485  
FAX (609) 292-4912

Rebecca DiBenedetti  
Executive Director  
[rsapp@njleg.org](mailto:rsapp@njleg.org)

Ivy Pomper  
Executive Assistant  
[ipomper@njleg.org](mailto:ipomper@njleg.org)

## ASSEMBLY

Hon. Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Co-Chair

Hon. Linda S. Carter  
Hon. Carmen Theresa Morales  
Hon. Benjie E. Wimberly  
Hon. Victoria A. Flynn  
Hon. Michele Matsikoudis  
Hon. Erik K. Simonsen

## MEETING NOTICE

**TO:** Members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools will meet on Friday, November 1, 2024 at 10:00 a.m., via Zoom to receive testimony from invited guests on school security and threat assessment teams.

The public may address comments and questions to Rebecca DiBenedetti, Executive Director, at 609-331-2485, or by email at [Rsapp@njleg.org](mailto:Rsapp@njleg.org)

Issued October 4, 2024

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Melanie Schulz Director of Government Relations New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA)	3
MaryJane Garibay, Ed.D. Superintendent Colts Neck Township Schools	4
David Cittadino Superintendent Old Bridge Township Public Schools	9
James Earle Superintendent Trenton Public School District	20
Amy Klinger, Ed.D. Founder and Director of Programs The Educator’s School Safety Network	35
Betsy Ginsburg Executive Director Garden State Coalition of Schools (GSCS)	44
Steven Forte, Ed.D. Superintendent Denville Township School District	44
Anthony Trongone Executive Director Great Schools of New Jersey, and Past President New Jersey Association of School Administrators	53

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

### APPENDIX:

NJASA School Safety & Security Report submitted by Melanie Schulz	1x
Testimony submitted by Amy Klinger, Ed.D	29x
Testimony submitted by Steven Forte, Ed.D.	39x
Presentation submitted by Anthony Trongone	41x
Testimony submitted by Jeffrey Gale Director New Jersey Department of Education Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning	75x
Testimony submitted by Jennie Lamon, J.D. Assistant Director of Government Relations New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA)	78x
Excerpts from <i>School Leader Magazine</i> Spring 2024 submitted by New Jersey School Boards Association	80x
mej: 1-70	

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Senator Pennacchio.

SENATOR PENNACCHIO: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Senator Steinhardt.

SENATOR STEINHARDT: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Senator Testa.

SENATOR TESTA: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman Carter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman Flynn will be in  
shortly.

Assemblywoman Matsikoudis.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman Morales.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MORALES: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson.

**ASSEMBLYWOMAN VERLINA REYNOLDS-  
JACKSON (Co-Chair):** Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: And, Senator Cryan.

**SENATOR JOSEPH P. CRYAN (Co-Chair):** Here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: All right,  
well, Senator Cryan, do you have anything that you want to say -- opening  
statements or anything?

SENATOR CRYAN: First off, I want to thank you,  
Assemblywoman, for bringing us together for this important topic, and I do  
want to give a shout out to Rebecca for all her work in organizing this.

Thank you to the speakers.

Last night, there was a mass shooting in Orlando, and it happened at 1:00 a.m. Two folks lost their lives. And, while that may not be directly related to a school shooting, it was also done by a 17-year-old who, frankly, could have been in high school, which I think is part of what the illumination of today is, is that there's a continued vigilance on school security, threat assessment.

Some of the data I think we'll hear today, at least to me, is of the Number 1 concern. The Number 1 volume concern is not actually gun-related, and that the growing concerns, particularly, are in areas of outside violence spilling into schools. And, we continue to be vexed, for example, by the amount of data that chose false reports.

So, there is quite a bit to learn and to grasp on today's hearing. I am looking forward to the speakers-- Again, Assemblywoman, I want to thank you for bringing us together, and for all the folks who brought us the data and helped us organize this.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much, Senator.

You really nailed it. And, I think as we listen to the experts today, we have to remember that every school safety decision impacts real students, real educators, real families, real lives. And, I know we have some-- Even in our Assembly colleagues, who have experience in our school districts, I'm sure are going to weigh in with some questions as well, but give us some real lived experiences. And, so, I think we're doing everyone a good -- just by having this hearing today; to be able to listen to our experts.

The only people I think are missing here is our students. I wish I would have been able to get a student on, but this is just the beginning of the conversation, not the end. And, so, we can try to do that intentionally moving forward.

But, with that, I think we have our first guest, is the New Jersey Association of School Administrators. We have Melanie Schulz, Dr. MaryJane Garibay, and David Cittadino. And, I am butchering your names, which I apologize. (laughter)

**M E L A N I E S C H U L Z:** Good morning, Senator Cryan and Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson and members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools.

My name is Melanie Schulz, and I am Director of Government Relations at the New Jersey Association of School Administrators.

I want to thank you for keeping school security at the forefront of your priorities. This is the one issue that keeps my superintendents up at night.

I am here to introduce two of those school leaders who have been instrumental in leading the committee that was formed at ASA in response to the aftermath of the school shooting in Texas at the Uvalde School District. Our ASA team was comprised of more than two dozen superintendents from around the state, and ultimately we issued a report in May of 2023. You should have that report; I know Becky had it and was distributing it to all of you.

I have two speakers who I am privileged to introduce to you. The first is Dr. MaryJane Garibay. She is the Superintendent of the

Colts Neck School District. And, the other is Mr. David Cittadino; he is the Superintendent of the Old Bridge School District.

They have a lot to share with you, and again, on behalf of NJASA, I want to thank you for the invitation to present.

And, always grateful to Becky and Ivy for doing the great work that they do.

Thank you so much.

I'll hand it over to MaryJane.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

MARYJANE GARIBAY, Ed.D.: Thank you, Melanie.

And, I, too, completely want to express my thanks and gratitude to all members of the Joint Committee for the Public Schools and NJASA for allowing us to continue this very important conversation.

I had the pleasure of sitting among this group last fall and talking about the presentation of it, and I was honored to come back again and represent school leaders. Where I am in Monmouth County, and across the state with David and Melanie, for helping facilitating that, with Dr. Bozza with ASA.

So, thank you so very much.

Conversations and considerations about school security are ongoing among school leaders. Yesterday, with Halloween, wanting to maintain those traditional elements and celebrations and welcoming parades and parties and things like that, and, at the forefront of all of that is, how do we do that in a safe way, where our community feels involved in our schools

while still maintaining control and security and safety for everyone -- all participants?

I want to thank, also, in advance, for the preparation and for the distribution of the NJASA School Safety and Security Report, which was a product of work -- as Melanie stated -- throughout the '22-'23 school year, and a response -- and, I don't want to say it was a response, because here we've heard so many times about mass shootings and school shootings, which hit us hard; they hit us very hard. Because, at any moment when you're talking about whether it's a Target or a Wal-Mart or wherever people gather, expecting to go in peacefully and go about -- conduct their daily personal business -- that's what the expectation is of our communities: That students come in, and they learn; they thrive; they're safe; they are able to develop and grow as they're intended to do. And, when something like a Uvalde or a Sandy Hook or a Parkland, or -- and, the ors go on and on -- happen, it speaks to us and it speaks loudly to us. And, the question we ask ourselves all the time: "Are we doing enough? Are we doing it well?"

And, that's why conversations like this that, collectively, we can gather to say, "Are we doing it well? And, what are our needs? And, what do we need to work together to accomplish, to help us answer those questions?" That's the one thing that we want to be able to say. That report allowed us to level set. It was a call to action -- wanting to know, are we doing enough? And, as school leaders, we strive to be proactive. That's the one thing that I think this group, the purposes of these meetings and conversations are. Yes, we reflect upon data, and yes, we are reflective practitioners. That's what we all do; we look at the information in front of us; we look at it to gather information. We ask, "To what do we attribute

results?” All of those things that go into action planning. But, remaining proactive in the conversations about school safety and security is one of the most essential components of being a school leader in New Jersey today and throughout our nation.

I do want to just reiterate -- and, I don't want to go, obviously, page by page and take the data of the report -- but, as you continue to go through it and note things and may have questions, this report contains findings -- data -- that were collected from school leaders in New Jersey throughout the '22-'23 school year about their facilities; their needs; their concerns. And, you can see, they have-- It's information that identifies not just personnel, but facilities, as well as mental health of students as well. So, school safety and security is a multi-faceted thing that we all kind of try to wrap our heads around. And, with every different situation that presents itself, it brings up another nuance that -- for consideration.

We're very grateful, as school leaders, for NJ -- organizations like the Department of Education, with their Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning, that does a great deal with offering training and resources and connections coming out to school districts to facilitate assessments and observations of our required drills and procedures and whatnot, to give us that feedback. Grateful for that.

Grateful to NJASA. So, from the time of the report, the publication brought even more information to school leaders about school safety and security. For example, NJASA facilitates an extensive new superintendent academy as new superintendents are coming on board. And, last year, I was privileged to be a part of conversations where they facilitated and were able to connect school leaders, new school leaders, in their roles

with experts in the field, as well as veteran -- I don't want to say veteran, because I'm one of them now, in terms of leaders (laughter) who are -- have lessons to share and things that we've learned.

As a former high school English teacher being responsible now for the safety and well-being is part of the role that I accept, and I take it very seriously. And, hearing the stories and experiences and what others have in practice is essential at NJASA. And, our county roundtables have been instrumental in facilitating those conversations. So, from the report, good things continue to happen. We're growing in those.

We also saw legislation about special-- The participation - - the *full* participation of students with disabilities -- and all of our security drills, which, you know, is also essential, because they, too, they are part of our school community and we need to know how, when we are responding to those, we need to respond differently with students with disabilities and specific needs as we would with general. That's another consideration we take. Transportation is an essential component of that conversation. If, for some reason, there needs to be an evacuation as well as a reunification, that is a struggling component of maybe districts that have to contract their buses. Or, as opposed-- Those are all nuances in considerations that we take very seriously.

We also wanted to talk about-- Oh, and then, August 1. I would be completely remiss if I didn't mention on August 1, NJASA facilitated its Summer School Safety and Security Summit with Middlesex County Fire Department. And, that was a collective where experts were brought in from around the country to speak to superintendents and school

leaders. So, the training component -- the more information; the connected conversations about school safety and security -- are happening.

And, today, we wanted to just come forward-- Again, grateful and appreciative for the considerations that go into our funding needs because that's that big pot of money that we all work with every single year. There is security aid that is distributed and part of our state aid packages and attributions.

But, one of the things I know my counterpart and respected superintendent David Cittadino will speak to, are those growing costs. We are-- Just like everyone else, we have to deal with inflation; we have to deal with costs; and, we have to deal with upgrades. I think one of the things you're going to hear from us today is when we do implement and have things like cameras in our schools, those cameras have to be replaced, and they are replaced at a higher volume. There is software-- There are software costs that continue to go up every year. There is a wage of a school security monitor, or a SLEO, that goes up, and we are competing for. So, those are different things that I know that David is going to be touching upon.

But, one of the things -- before I turn it over to David to share some of his thoughts and concerns as we continue to go through this process -- is back in January 8 of 2024, the Governor did sign into law, public law, 2023, which was the establishment of a School Safety and Security Task Force. I know that David, Melanie, and I collaborated, and, to the best of our knowledge, that task force has *not* been appointed. Members of that task force have not been appointed yet. And, that is something that we felt we do want to encourage and want to be active contributors to how we can continue

to get that done. Because then, at the State level, that task force, we hope, will take the information that we put together in the report, as well as other information that we may not have considered in this, to create a comprehensive recommendation that involves experts in the field of safety and security -- whether it be from our Department of Education -- I'm sure it will be -- and our Office of Preparedness and Planning; leaders in the field who experience it. Because Dave -- an experience that David may have in Old Bridge in a larger K-12 is going to be very different than what it looks like in my K-8 district, right? And, there are other considerations that he's going to speak to.

So, today, in addition to just being so grateful for the opportunity and to keep this conversation going and keeping our eyes on what our school leaders said in the report, is also in the establishment and moving forward with the appointments to the task force, so we can keep the conversation going, and we can hear the recommendations and do the work that will ultimately benefit every student and public educator in the State of New Jersey.

So, with that, I would like to turn it over to David, who is joining us today for this very important conversation.

**DAVID CITTADINO:** Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for having me today.

I am just very pleased to be here on behalf of my school district and the NJASA.

So, I just want to give you-- I think I have a very interesting perspective on this, and where it comes from. It's from a unique experience that's really heartfelt. My very first day as a superintendent in

2012, I woke up that morning thinking it was going to be a great day. I remember waking up excited to tell my wife -- I'm getting dressed in my new shirt and tie that I put on. And, if you remember back then, before cellphones did everything for you, I had the clock radio that woke me up. And, that morning CBS News came on as my wakeup call and told me there was a mass shooting in Old Bridge, New Jersey, in the overnight hours. I had little to think that it would do anything to me as a new superintendent as I got dressed and got ready for the day. And, then, within an hour, my phone started ringing, telling me that they needed me as a resource.

So, I soon learned that at the local Pathmark, a military discharged member with mental illness who had migrated from California to New Jersey was working in the overnight hours at that Pathmark, and two of my former students -- one who I was her principal all through middle school, all through high school. I had just given her her diploma. I became the new superintendent as she was going off to college. And, she worked that overnight shift just to make money to go to college, as it was getting ready to ramp up in September. They were working. One of the employees left that night around 3:00 a.m. for his dinner break and came back, and his store manager saw him walking back in in fatigues carrying an AK-47. And, he came in and shot through the building, killing those two former students of mine.

So, my first day, I had to do a support vigil and gather mental health supports and community support needs for a really tremendous vigil that actually was on the news across the nation.

So, my perspective was like, "Why did this happen? How does it happen?" And, I started doing a lot of research on these mass shooters

and what triggers them. And, if you read anything about this going forward, there's a book called *Stop the Killing* by Katherine Schweit. She is a former FBI Director who headed up the National Task Force on Mass Shootings. I've learned so much about her from that, and how a lot of this is almost preventable if we look at the interventions that we can do.

And, that's a conversation for a later day, but that's where a lot of my mindset comes from. So, building the proper school climate is important. An environment where students feel valued; and they want to be part of an environment; and they feel trusted; and they love their environment. So, if you love your teachers, and you love your principal, and you love where you go to school, if you hear something -- because in every one of these situations, someone always knows something or sees something, but they fail to report it. But, if you do hear that; you do see that; and you really love your environment, you're going to tell someone.

So, that's really one of the most important things. And, you look at the Adverse Childhood Experiences -- the ACEs scores. Even with adults -- and, I'm sure the young man in Orlando, as that information comes about him, you'll see he'll have elevated ACEs scores -- meaning that some of these adverse childhood experiences may have been indicators as to this happening later on in life.

So, going from there, I think that ties into something that we talked about -- the behavioral threat assessment teams. That, I think, is something that has really worked well and really speaks to that work that I'm talking about. I can only speak from my county. I did a little research in my county. Depending on the size of the school district, we're looking at two to 25 events in which the behavioral threat assessment team was assembled to

investigate a student who may have posed a threat to the district. I think that's working well. I hear from larger districts, where they want to remind our legislators that these people on these teams, they do other jobs in the school. So, when you have more numbers, it obviously takes them away from the other responsibilities, maybe more academic, maybe, that they're doing within the schools.

But-- And, one of the takeaways they said is, when we talk about the report and the targeted funding -- and, I know that MJ was really big on the NJ4S -- is that there needs to be support funds for those families because once an event is investigated, a lot of times there was referrals to families for mental health supports, and those families do not have the capacity or the insurance to cover that. So, that will be an area where we could really get some support on.

When we talk about the physical security and hardening the schools, I can speak from this perspective. Again, because in that unique experience that I had, after Sandy Hook, which was in the same year -- Sandy Hook Elementary took place in December, my event took place in Old Bridge in August, so I already have this mindset -- we have to do more. I was one of the first districts to hire SLEO 3s. I worked with my Chief of Police, and we recruited SLEO 3s out of Belmar, Point Pleasant -- places that had them in the summertime, and they needed to work during the school year. So, we were able to get them, and then, obviously, through expansions-- I'm sorry, those were SLEO 2s. And, then, the SLEO 3 program was expanded later on for more retired officers to come to support us in the schools.

So, when we started with our SLEO 2 program, the cost was \$24 an hour for those individuals. I am now paying \$45 an hour for

those individuals. And, I've seen a 51% increase across the board on this expansion. One of the things that's driving up that cost, obviously, is almost like this free agency kind of market that's taking place with them. There's only so many retired officers who want to do this work. And, when a township that's not far from me adopts this to expand to have SLEO 2s and SLEO 3s, they start paying \$40 an hour, and then I lose my guys and young ladies who do this work, and I have to try to recruit more, so I have to-- Now, I'm up to \$45, because in my shared service agreement the Chief of Police says, "I can't get you any more officers at \$40."

So, that's something that's really driving our cost up tremendously as we look forward. My overall security impact -- in 2020 I was \$1.4 million, just for human resource security in my schools. In 2024, I am at \$2.26 million. That's just to protect the school from the human resource capacity. I don't know if this is something we can look at in the future; maybe there's a retired military option for training to support in the schools; some kind of legislation to get these people who may be looking for work after being retired military to be supportive in the school; be licensed to work in schools -- that may be a helpful option.

Something else that we're really seeing -- especially since post-COVID -- soft-target events like school football games have become the new mall on Friday night. Parents used to drop the kids off at the mall on Friday nights, it used to cause bedlam. Now, kids don't want to go to malls anymore -- just like adults don't want to go to malls anymore. And, they're going to the Friday night football game; they're going to the basketball game. And, with social media -- and the ways kids expand -- they're really thriving,

driving into these events. Now, we have capacities that we meet and we don't let exceed, obviously, the building capacity or the venue capacity.

But, I'll give you an example of something that happened recently. Old Bridge was playing East Brunswick on a Friday night game. We had a theme about it, it was -- I think it was "support the military," kids were wearing red, white, and blue. And, all of a sudden, this TikTok creator -- who has about a million followers -- he says, "I'm going to go to the game. I want every one of my one million followers who can meet me, join me at the game." So, I had to-- I even heard from the police department, "Let's cancel the event." It's three hours before the football game, I can't cancel an event on something that may or may not happen. It's like-- So, we had, I think, seven officers assigned for that night; we drove it up to 12 officers. My cost for that game alone grown from \$3,000 to \$6,000 just to protect with police department staffing for that game.

And, the person arrived. By that time, we had already met our capacity, and I would say about 250 to 300 kids -- who weren't even from Old Bridge, just coming into the community. There was chaos all around, even though they couldn't get in the venue. There was chaos all around our school community and environment, from local businesses being disrupted. And, these are the kinds of things that are happening because of the social media impact -- impacting the way we can protect our schools.

Plus, there's an increased level of public expectation for safety and security. And, I don't blame parents; we are protecting their greatest commodity, the greatest value. Just like banks protect money, we have a greater value that we're protecting -- we're protecting the future; we're protecting children. And, you think of all the money that banks put out there

to protect cash; we have to do that to protect something that's even more valuable. So, when it used to be we needed security -- our armed officers -- to be at school during the school day, now there's a public expectation. We want them at a concert; we want them at the open house. We want them at everything in which the school is opened. And, that has driven up costs for that.

And, when MJ talked about the technology, that's true. Like, even things like our 3M film; it doesn't last forever. We all put that 3M film on our schools because we saw what happened in Sandy Hook Elementary, where he just went right through the door like it wasn't even there. So, this layer of film doesn't keep someone out, but it allows time for first responders to get there. That film has a shelf life, and it needs to be replaced about now, as it sits in the sun and everything. So, it's only guaranteed for so long.

We talked about cameras. We all put cameras in at the advent of this, because cameras were looking to become more proactive, like we want to be -- not to report something that we'd already seen and had a recording of it, but to prevent something horrible from happening. You needed better cameras. So, those cameras' life cycle are coming to an end as well. But, there's also this expectation -- and, once you see some new technology, you want to have it because you know what's best for our students. And, this is an area I'm excited about, because AI is something that -- if it's not security, it's the AI thing that we're constantly learning about and concerned about in the world of education. But, there's a great component of AI that actually works with our school cameras and it detects a weapon within a school within seconds. So, this AI uses your existing cameras and it

watches your cameras for you. There is a human -- obviously, there is a human element to watching a camera, especially when you have -- in my district -- you have 750 lenses. You can only watch so many at so many times.

But, this camera -- this AI -- is trained to pick up a weapon -- a firearm -- and only needs 10% of that firearm to be exposed, and it instantly picks it up, it sends that information to -- and, if you want to look at this, this is one component we're looking at, but it's expensive, it's called ZeroEyes. It sends it to their database where a team of ex-military look at that footage instantly and then send an alert to the school. So, I would get an alert; the police chief gets an alert; everyone on our security staff gets the alert of where a weapon is, and how to get to the person who has it.

And, this is valuable because Parkland, and other schools - - especially if I'm using Parkland as an example -- there was eight minutes between the person first brandished a weapon and started using it. That camera would have picked it up within the first 30 seconds, because he was in the hallway walking back and forth -- like, a stairwell -- walking back and forth, getting the courage. Now, imagine we had that time and we could respond to it? And, it takes away -- like, at Parkland, we saw there's human failure in there. It takes away part of that human failure.

So, this kind of component is -- we had it priced out at our district, \$100,000. I'm already an S2 district that lost lots of funding. I want to have this, and once I've seen it, how do I tell the parents I can't afford it? Because, again, I'm protecting their greatest commodity; their greatest -- something of the greatest value.

Some other things we've talked about -- we've all worked towards the-- I'm sorry, I just lost (indiscernible). I'm sure you're still there, I just--

DR. GARIBAY: That's OK, if I could jump in again while David is talking about that, with regards to monitoring cameras, our software that we use -- the programs that we use for our student information system -- many of us use one-to-one computers; we have devices that our students use.

There's an element of security that's also cybersecurity and keeping all of those things. And, if you're pricing out and using things with cybersecurity, there's also elements of 24-hour monitoring for self-harm, or harm to others, that we can flag. But, that's also resources and personnel, because that gets monitored; it gets reported at any given time, and then you have administrators responding accordingly to the information they received through their monitoring device. That is-- Those things aren't free, and those prices just continue to go up.

So, it's something that -- with regards to, again, exactly what David said -- you put them in and you're constantly striving to have, "What else can I do? What else can I do? What else can I do?" And, then, say, "OK, do I have to pick between a new textbook series and having this?"

MR. CITTADINO: Right, that's--

DR. GARIBAY: And, those are the choices that are -- and, whether it's appropriate or exaggerated or however it's perceived, it's a reality. There are choices that we make every year to fit within the confines of our annual budgets. And, these-- There are essential components of academics;

there are essential components of security; there are essential components of mental health; all of the things that go into those pots.

So, David, I'm sorry. I just wanted to jump in about the--

MR. CITTADINO: Thank you, you saved me. All of a sudden my camera went off and I couldn't see anyone, so that was very helpful.

Yes, and, especially speaking to that, the Gaggle interventions, or we use Linewize as well. And, both of those, in the past year, has tipped me off at least 11:00 p.m. at night, it was 10:00 p.m., and actually a student about to do self-harm. And, real situations. And, I was able to get police to respond there quickly, because again, these tools monitor the students when they're online and using any of our devices.

The other thing I just wanted to touch upon is the reunification. The reunification process is something that we've all been working towards, having the best reunification plan, because, again, we learn from the past. We saw that Sandy Hook did *not* have a great reunification plan, if any existed at all.

DR. GARIBAY: Yes, so, David, I just want to level set with that. So, when we go-- There are several different types of drills and practices that we go into. So, if you are unfamiliar with that, there are-- There's a shelter in place where business goes on in the district, but no one goes in and out. There are lockdowns, and that's kind of self-explanatory. There is an evacuation to evacuation sites. And, then, if there -- if need be -- there is a reunification.

And, what reunification means is that there is a responsible transfer back of custody outside of the normal operating building from where

students would normally depart, from a bus stop or whatever. So, if there's a scenario where you have a reunification site -- a school may have a reunification site -- they're being evacuated for whatever reason, there's a variety of reasons from a school to, say, a local community college; we develop plans that have reunifications that systematically, we transfer the custody of students back to a guardian in an alternate location -- which is a massive undertaking, because every child has to be accounted for. Just, I wanted to kind of level set with that.

SENATOR CRYAN: Very grateful for the insights, but if we can-- We have numerous speakers.

DR. GARIBAY: Absolutely.

MR. CITTADINO: Yes, so, that was going to be my last point with that, is that when you have these reunification events -- picture moving 3,000 students to another location -- you're going to need hundreds of vests; walkie talkies that you wouldn't normally need, because you're not doing that on a regular basis. That comes with cost, and has an impact as well.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you.

Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

Thank you.

Does anyone have any questions for our guests before we move on -- move forward? (no response)

I don't see any hands.

I just have one question about-- Has DOE increased, or is there a plan to increase your security funding? Because that is an issue, and school funding is, overall, an issue. But, when we look at these specific things, we have this task force; we've been having these hearings; I'm wondering, has that been elevated to them? They're not on the call today, and we can bring it up, but I just wanted to know from your perspective.

MR. CITTADINO: I have not seen an increase from the DOE on that.

Again, the training is there from the Office of Preparedness. They are giving us ample training, especially with the school safety specialists. But, additional funds often fail to come my way.

DR. GARIBAY: And, when you look at the budget with the allocations of State aid and their security, there are districts that receive increases.

In total, you can go back, and it'll show the amounts that are for and it depends. So, I think it's-- The answer is no; we have not heard anything with regards to increasing.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: OK, well, thank you so much; I appreciate you.

Assemblywoman Carter.

And, then, we'll move onto Earle James, Superintendent of Trenton.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Thank you so much.

And, I just want-- Thank you for the information that you shared, because, it's important. Being in a high school and going through the drills and everything, the one thing is very important that is it's OK to

continue to train, but we do need to see where we can get some additional funding to help that. Because technology changes so quickly, and once one year you put in the cameras and the systems, and two years later, literally, you have to change the entire system. Somewhere, we have to be able to do that to make sure that all are safe.

But, thank you for that information.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

Superintendent James Earle, Trenton Public Schools.

Are you on?

JAMES EARLE: I am; I'm here.

Thank you, Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson, and thank you for the invitation.

I just want to thank all the members of the Joint Committee, and really excited to be here to share -- echo much of what my colleagues just said.

It is daunting to keep up with security -- safety and security measures -- because they change daily, sometimes, and monthly. And, certainly, in a year, you can have a whole different setup for security that you weren't expecting to manage in a budget.

But, as-- In Trenton, I just wanted to talk a little bit about what we're doing. And, as Betsy Ginsburg with Garden State Coalition of Schools says, "There's no real security without student and sometimes family mental health." And, so, we've taken the position that we're going to work with the student *and* the family here in Trenton.

So, I just wanted to share about some of the things we're doing here, and then some of the challenges, which are similar -- rising costs -- and really talk about what it looks like in Trenton at this time.

In Trenton, we have Strategic Goal 3, and that's developing the whole child. And, that focuses on mental health. And, it's around building the capacity for adults and our students and our families to understand mental health -- how to manage that at home; how to manage that in-district; how we all see it. And, we want to move from punishing behavior, when we deal with students, to changing behavior. And, then, reducing anxiety. And, we believe that's the way to do it.

So, under Strategic Goal 3, there's several things that we've implemented and continue to implement. Trauma-informed care -- because we thought it was important for our staff to understand how students arrive to the building, and what's happening when they're walking around and pacing and won't go to class, can you ask those questions: "What's happening with you; why are you responding that way?" As opposed to, "We need to send this student to the office and to get them out." So, we're really asking that question about what happened, as opposed to, "Why don't you go to the office?" And, so, we're seeing some reduction in suspensions and office visits and those types of things, because we know that our staff is working hard now to ascertain that information.

We implemented restorative practices; we are really-- We are trying to help students and adults understand how to repair the harm. We have "calming corners" and/or reset locations in all 25 schools. We've asked the schools to identify either in the classroom or in the school, so that when students elevate any type of behavior or any anxious behavior, that we

give them an opportunity to calm before an adult maybe engages -- if that can happen. And, of course, there are going to be consequences when students violate, but we want to see if we can be proactive instead of reactive.

We've-- We have our threat-assessment teams, which my colleagues mentioned before. They've been tremendous. We've been able to get information about a student; about the family; about the home; about their true intentions around comments or actions that have taken place in the school. And, then, we were fortunate to be able to keep School-Based Youth Services, which is having clinicians on site, which was critical. And, I think I spoke to this unit maybe a year, a year and a half ago, about how critical it was for us to have that close, at home, in Trenton. Because when the behaviors or the activities started, it was important that we address them immediately, and have no delay. And, so, we were seeing tremendous results, and the relationships that are built often with the clinicians in our high schools and middle schools have been outstanding, and have -- in many cases -- kept some of the safety and security concerns from ever happening, because we're able to make those connections.

One of the areas we have put robust dollars into is chronic absenteeism. We believe that if we can get our students away from home, those who don't come often back into school to be able to access some of the work that we're doing, they're better off with us sometimes, and we know it's a challenge. We serve a population that's more transient; they're coming in from other areas; sometimes the challenges are much greater than we're prepared to deal with.

But, we're all ready in Trenton when they come to work with families and work with students. So, in our chronic absenteeism

structure, we have CARE team meetings; each school has a CARE team. CARE stands for Chronic Absenteeism Response and Engagement. Every student identified as chronically absent, we meet with them, and if we can get family members and someone who loves them, we'll meet with them. We've had multiple meetings, and all we're doing is trying to find out the true root cause of this anxiety, or these actions that sometimes create the safety and security situations that get blown way out of proportion, because we just needed to know what's happening in the home.

So, we found some really interesting data over that time, and kept that data that tells us it's not about transportation; sometimes, it's about illness. And, when you work in Trenton, health is critical here, and families' access to health and clinicians and things like that. So, we're really working. The CARE team meetings have given us more information, and we believe has really assisted us in being proactive in the approach that we take to reducing some of those safety and security concerns. But, we do have them in all 25 schools. We have monthly meetings to get data. The assistant superintendents and myself, we are out checking to see what's happening in our schools.

And, we partnered with Rutgers and implemented the New Jersey School Climate Improvement Survey, in all 25 schools. We piloted a few schools two years ago. Last year, we did a re-pilot with those schools with two major issues they found with that data, and this year, we're in all 25 schools because that's how we learn about our culture -- what's happening in our schools, in our community, so that we can address it, so that we can hopefully reduce or eliminate some of the safety and security issues.

And, in terms of personnel -- I heard that mentioned -- no different than everyone else. That's a rising cost, and it's a moving target. We started the year with security officers when I came here three years ago, and we've had to add bodies simply because our public was saying, "We don't *see* the presence of security." Now, here's where we stand on that. In Trenton, for those of you who know Trenton, and hear how Trenton is spoken about, we don't want it to be a security state, or a police state, where you walk in and you see all these armed officers at every event. We're doing our best to partner with local agencies to be -- to work in the community with them more often, so when they *do* show up, it says that we work together on solving some of these issues.

So, we hired security personnel, or safety officers. We upgraded -- and, they're not armed -- but we upgraded who we were looking for. Retired police officers; potentially retired military; someone who had a background to look at the full environment and say, "Here are the areas you need to harden; here are the areas of high traffic; here's the areas that are concerning during the day, after school, at night." And, we've seen huge benefit because we're getting regular reports about our environment to make sure that we can be proactive in addressing it. Now, it hasn't stopped things from happening -- it's reduced it. So, we know that being on that track, maybe more safety officers -- but, again, that's a rising cost that we're not prepared to manage going forward.

So, one of the-- I wanted to give a quick example. This year, we have gone through several football games. And, if you know Trenton, we would never have a game without having armed officers, as my colleague talked about a few minutes ago. And, we realized that a mechanism

changed in how we get the officers -- something about doing it online, and our AD missed that part. And, we had gone about four weeks without having an armed officer at a game -- a home game, which freaked me out, of course, and I reached out and said, "We need to do that." I talked to the director; we were able to get officers for homecoming and then for the rest of the year. But, what happened in the four games? It let us know that if we do this work from a mental health perspective -- working with families, working with the community -- we might be able to manage some of it, but we need more people doing that work. And, then, of course, we do not want a situation to come up where we do not have armed support of the people in Trenton, and to be able to keep people safe.

So, just quickly-- Oh, and one of the community areas that was really impressive, two years ago I started meeting with a couple of community groups, and we added community street teams. We have two organizations; we have them in our middle schools and high schools and some in our more challenging areas, where you can see the-- For about a mile, these people are walking the street. And, it gives students -- because we heard students felt unsafe; again -- safety and security about coming to school. So, that's not a cost that comes from the district. However, when grant funding for that structure runs out -- wow. We have to consider, "Can we somehow support that?" Because it's been so beneficial. We haven't seen the large-scale events that we used to see when I got here four years ago, or three years ago, and some of the things we were responding to, simply because the adults on those street teams are working with kids; talking to them; starting to reduce some of that anxiety. Because anxieties sometimes keep -- create some of these things, and some of the issues that students are going through at

home. We want to try to see if they can express those with us when they're here, and help parents understand how to do that.

So, the areas of challenge, as was mentioned by my colleagues, is facilities -- aging buildings, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology and structures, that keep people away, or keep them safe, or help them gain entry the right way. We have schools that may not be able to hold -- what is it -- a security vestibule, if we wanted to add those. Some of our schools may be at the shelf life that it's more difficult to start going into walls and into floors and into spaces. Although, we'd love to have those types of things. So, we have to think about facilities -- that's a cost.

And, then, one of the things that's the most striking for me is, I drive-- I'm in district early, and I drive around our schools, grades four through 12 in Trenton. It's been a commitment, when I got here, and I haven't changed it, although it's weighing on my heart that our kids in fourth grade go through metal detectors all the way through senior year. And, sometimes the first time they don't walk through a metal detector is when they go to college. And, so-- And, we will not relinquish that, because we know what the public, from a front-facing view, they see it as very positive. But, we-- I think about myself, I don't worry about getting dressed *except* when I go to the airport. I think about what I'm going to wear; how I'm going to go. I check the bookbag; the luggage; I go through to make sure I didn't leave a boxcutter in it because I was working on something.

And, so, I think our children are exposed to that in a way that creates that anxiety. So, I would love to-- And, we're also seeing it happen past the start of school; 20 minutes later, they're still checking in. And, that could be the late crowd, but how do we reduce that? And, we know

there's technology -- as was mentioned by my colleagues also -- there's technology out there that can allow -- that can detect weapons, and students can enter a building, maybe in larger masses, and be able to get into classrooms on time so that we can get engaged in instruction.

So, there's so much more to do, but we feel like we're doing as much as we can. Our biggest concern is what happens when grant funding and those things -- a lot of this was done on the back of ESSA funding and those types of things.

So, thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much.

You did bring up a lot of things that I was thinking about that cultural experience. Some districts, they don't go through metal detectors so soon, and then how do you feel-- How do you take that with you throughout the rest of your school career?

And, I just wanted to touch on -- now, did you -- you sat at a homecoming games, you had -- not homecoming; I think you said you had four games where you had *no* armed security, is--

MR. EARLE: Correct; correct.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: And, there were no incidents either?

MR. EARLE: No, no incidents at--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: How are we capturing the data, like you said, so that you can be able to see what's happening when we do and when we don't? Is there a way, when we're

talking to students, security, faculty -- is-- How are we collecting this information?

MR. EARLE: So, it kind of happened by mistake. So, we started capturing after the fact to say, "OK, so what happened? How did people feel?" And, I talked to the security team--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: But, did they know? Did they know?

MR. EARLE: They did; they knew we didn't have them, but no one brought it to my attention, because I had access directly to the Director of the Trenton Police Department, and he was able to get me officers immediately when I called about homecoming.

But, we had two night games starting, and it was dark when we left, and kids-- But, we said we would place adults strategically in locations to respond immediately -- and, of course, we have -- if you come in as a student, you have to present ID, and you have to sit in a specific location. So, that's creating a student section at a football game, or a basketball game, but it is also for crowd management. And, then, our adults, they just managed it. And, I didn't know it-- I was at two of the three, four games--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Wow--

MR. EARLE: --and I didn't notice and thought, "Wow." And, then, when they called about homecoming, I went, "Oh my gosh, I never saw police officers at the games." And, then they told me about the situation.

So, we're assessing that now, but I went forward thinking, my goodness, if there's an incident I didn't want to have to answer that question to the public, because, I wasn't prepared to do that yet. But, we did have -- in Trenton -- several opportunities without armed guards.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

Senator McKnight.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Hi; thank you so much. I loved listening to your testimony.

I have a question in reference to security. So, one of the schools in my district is a middle school; so, there's two schools -- one is K-5, and then the next, the adjacent building, is 6-8. So, I noticed this, I was dropping off my grandson to school -- he's in the first grade -- so I'm waiting, and I see that there's a *long* line at the middle school, and I asked my daughter, I said, "What's going on over there?" She was like, "Well, they're checking the bookbags."

MR. EARLE: Correct.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: So, my concern, my question is, how long does it take for that long line? It was like, two lines. And, the kids were getting their bookbag checked before they entered the school. How long does that take? And, what time does instruction actually start? And, is there a way that that can be mitigated?

MR. EARLE: Yes, so, we're working on that. And, what we did, starting last year, was said like earlier in the year, make sure -- because we wanted a structure of consistency for how you check bags. And, some of the schools, we offered the clear bookbag option, which gave the security officer a little bit of relief to be able to see what's in the bag.

A lot of this has to do with the comfort of the administration, and then the security officer, and then *our* training. Us saying, "We want to get students in the school quicker." And, I'm riding

around and I'm seeing that lines are outside the door, and I want to get people into instruction, so I'm asking, "Are we opening early? Do we have enough people?" Again, more personnel. And, so-- And, then, do you have -- like, at the high school, we have six entry locations, trying to reduce the number of lines.

So, those are things that we're looking at. Increase the number of personnel checking bags; increase the number of locations of entry, so that you can reduce the line size. And then, to be quite honest, I'd say on this call -- I know it's being recorded -- I'm not a proponent of metal-detection systems. Because, there are a lot of schools that don't have them. But, I don't work for *me*, I work for the public, and the people in Trenton, and there's a firm belief that we need to screen students when they come in.

There's no easy way about this. I was talking to a colleague who *just* implemented it, and he stopped me at a meeting and said, "I need help. I have lines out the door beyond instruction." And, I said, "That's our issue." And, in a place where we struggle academically anyway, you miss 30 minutes of the first period. So, we are working diligently, and looking for ideas. That's why I said we need to be able to allow masses of individuals to come in our buildings without being stopped, and there's technology -- AI technology and other technology -- that may be able to help us do that. So, we're considering some of that, but we have to wait a year, because it wasn't budgeted, and so we're going to-- And, we're telling them, "Once you get to know students, and you don't select them -- do spot checks." Do every three bags, so that makes it quicker.

And, about this time of year, I start to see lines die down. Now, to be clear, many of those *are* late, and so you do see a lot of late. I'm

more concerned about who came before an 8:00 a.m. start time and didn't start at 8:00 a.m. because of the check-in -- what you're expressing. So, we have some work to do there.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: All right.

And, if they're late, then that's another problem--

MR. EARLE: Right--

SENATOR McKNIGHT: --because they're getting to school late, and there's two or three lines of children who are late--

MR. EARLE: Correct.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: --so, there's a lot to unpack, but we definitely need to look at that. Maybe it is increasing the number of people who are checking bags.

And then, also, on the other side, is to figure out why they are late.

MR. EARLE: Yes; yes.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Thank you.

MR. EARLE: So, as an anecdotal note, some of the data that we found in our CARE team meetings, the Number 1 reason for kids 7-12 not to come to school, or to be late, was they don't get up on time. You wouldn't believe -- it's in a *high* percentage. (laughter)

And, we were like, "OK, is that a school issue?" So, we're working with parents on, here's some strategies. And, we even considered, with no budget, to buy alarm clocks for everyone who said that. So, we're thinking out of the box to see if we can get students to school and get them there on time.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much; thank you.

Assemblywoman Matsikoudis.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: Hi; thank you so much.

And, thank you for your testimony.

What I loved that you were talking about is you were talking about developing the whole child, and how important it is when you start with mental health. And, the other-- There were just so many things that you said that I loved. You talked about the partnerships between the families and the school. I think that is just uber-important; I can't even stress enough. And, the fact that you have results to back this up; that you've been able to quell anxiety in some places, as well as those-- I'll say, there's anxiety-ridden, knee-jerk, impulsive responses of these kids, and you've been able to get in front of them.

So, I would love to dive deeper into the data that you've collected.

MR. EARLE: Sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: I don't know if you have it in such a way that I could ever -- any of us could ever take a look at it. Because, I think it's so important that we worry about the safety and security of our students. We also need to figure out how to stop it before it even begins, and I do think mental health is a huge component of this.

So, if there's any way for you to share that, I personally, for one, would love to see it.

MR. EARLE: I can. We have it in a way that's readable, and will work with -- we present it publicly, and then at the Board level. So, I'll be able to share that with you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: Perfect.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much.

And, I think-- Becky, can you compile a list of questions for myself and other members that we can send over to DOE also, to be able to follow up on that? Because, I think that's an important topic.

Thank you.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Morales.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MORALES: Hi; good morning, everyone.

Thank you for your testimony so far.

I am a former high school principal; currently the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for my district, but I am also the trained School Safety Specialist in my district, as well part of creating the School Safety -- the School Threat-Assessment Team as well.

What I want to know is, do we have a list of the schools that actually have and utilize metal detectors in their school districts? That's something that I would like to know more about. I know, my district, we have-- My district, we have metal detectors in all three high schools. It works very well; I mean, the timeframe of students coming in, putting their

bookbags through the metal detector and getting to class right on time is a breeze -- simply a breeze. There's no issues; no parent issues; we've never had any concerns regarding our metal detectors.

I just want to know, just for the State of New Jersey, how many school districts -- where they are, like, what areas -- are using metal detectors, versus schools that are not using metal detectors. And, then, we could see the number of threats in those types of schools, versus those who don't have it. I just want to know, do we have something like that in place?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you; great question. Great question.

We'll definitely get that over to them.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: I'll make sure to ask.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Well, thank you so much.

Senator Cryan, did you have a question?

SENATOR CRYAN: Very briefly.

Doctor (*sic*), do you use-- Is the hub-and-spoke model implemented with your folks in Trenton and in Mercer County, and, if so, is it working?

MR. EARLE: Yes, so we do use-- We use our current School-Based Youth Services model, and the hub-and-spoke model.

And, we find-- I think the issue was delay, but it's not major to the point that we would say there's a concern. I think once you build a relationship with the clinician, and you have the contact numbers -- I think early on, there was a little bit of delay, but I haven't heard it from the

principals who have accessed it; they are comfortable with the services they received.

SENATOR CYRAN: So far, so good.

MR. EARLE: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: OK, thank you.

MR. EARLE: That's what I can report.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much, Mr. Earle. I appreciate you -- your time and your expertise.

MR. EARLE: No problem.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Next, we'll have the Educator's School Safety Network, Dr. Amy Klinger, the Founder and Director of Programs.

**AMY KLINGER, Ed.D.:** Hello; thank you.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

I am going to try to be as brief and concise as possible, because I am kind of taking a 30,000-foot view of this issue.

I want to start, though, by saying that what you have heard from the superintendents thus far is what we hear from the individuals who we work with every day throughout the United States. So, much of the struggles in New Jersey are not in any way unique to New Jersey. I hear this all day every day.

So, I wanted to do a little bit of introduction very quickly. I am Dr. Amy Klinger; I am the Founder and Director of Programs for the Educator's School Safety Network. We're a national nonprofit organization. We have a very simple mission: to provide education-centered violence

prevention and crisis response; both resources and support to educators. But, I wanted to give you-- I wanted to take just a very brief moment to give you a little bit of the educational perspective that I bring to this work, because my background is as an educator with more than 38 years of experience as a teacher, a building principal, a central office administrator, and a college professor in educational administration. I recently retired as a Department Chair and Director of the Educational Leadership Program here at Ashland University in Ohio.

In addition, since 2006, we've been conducting research in the area of school safety and crisis planning, and also developing resources and courses. I have been a certified DHS instructor and course developer, and a member of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals. So, that education perspective is clearly a significant element that, frankly, is missing in many, many of the discussions that happened about school safety and security.

So, I want to kind of look at the philosophical underpinnings, or the big ideas, that I believe the Legislature needs to consider. While you've heard a number of specific issues and initiatives, I think it's really -- there needs to be -- I would recommend, perhaps, some shifts in some of the focus. So, I wanted to focus on that single question of some of the issues and concerns.

So, the first is timely, accurate data on the actual reality of school safety concerns. There is a lot of media reporting; personal experiences; perceptual biases that really color our perspectives of what's actually happening in schools. And, so, we started doing research -- unfunded research -- in 2016. And, I attached the report that we do every single year,

I attached that to the documents that I believe were sent to you. So, I don't want to spend a ton of time on that, but, I do want to point out a couple of the key findings, when we look longitudinally this year, is, while the number of threats, theoretically, has decreased over time -- as you saw on the chart -- clearly the number of violent incidents continues to increase.

I think the decrease in threats is a false hope. I think it has much more to do with we have come to accept threats as just the way things happen, and the way that we do it. And, it is not any more newsworthy, so it is not typically reported in the media anymore. But, I will say -- as I'm sure the superintendents here can attest -- there is a cost to our students. There is a cost to us financially, academically, emotionally, socially, to have our students constantly -- and, our teachers and administrators -- constantly reacting to threat after threat after threat. Whether it's swatting with false reports -- which we did a lot of research on last year -- or whether it's the ongoing potential threat of violence.

Conversely, though, the second key finding is that the majority of incidents that educators in New Jersey and nationally face are not gun-related. So, I wanted to sort of point that out; and, I'll talk a little bit more about that, but, when you look specifically at New Jersey's data for last year, 74% of the incidents -- the occurrences that we tracked -- were threats of violence, not actual violence. That doesn't mean that there wasn't a cost or a consequence -- there certainly was. Forty-seven percent of those threats were bomb threats. So, we still see both the ongoing swatting, and the bomb threats as being a significant impact on New Jersey schools. Twenty-one percent of the incidents were something other than gun violence, and 5% of

them involved a gun; only 2.5% gun found on campus, and 2.5% of the actual shots fired.

The point of that is, if the only thing we talk about is active shooter, we are training people to respond to anywhere from 5-7% of the incidents they're going to face, and leaving them unprepared for the 90%+ of incidents that they actually *will* face. And, so, I'll talk a little bit more about that. But, I do want to point out, our research *only* includes man-made threats of violence. It does not include much more frequent but equally deadly things like accidents; medical emergencies; severe weather events; community-based disasters. And, I think that is something that is -- really requires a little bit of a shift of mind.

When a child is killed by gun violence, it is an incredible tragedy. When a child dies because we couldn't find the AED, that is an equally horrific tragedy. When a child dies because we didn't have enough supervision and they got hit by a bus, that is an equally horrific tragedy. Gun violence tragedies are not more tragic. The death of a student is the ultimate tragedy, regardless of how that happens.

So, I want to really look at the idea of an all-hazards approach to school safety. Gun violence is a horrific problem, *but*, it is not the most common crisis event that schools in New Jersey typically will face. And, we've had a lot of discussion and testimony today about school security, and the whole idea of software, hardware, cameras, security devices. And, I really caution that we really take a hard look at the role that those play -- which, clearly, there is an important impact -- but also to understand that there are a lot of people making *a lot* of money selling *a lot* of security systems where the efficacy and the effectiveness of those have not actually ever been

measured or tested. There's figures that currently -- in the last few years -- school security is the most profitable of any of the security sectors. So, there's a lot of companies making a lot of money, and I really caution us to make sure that we are purchasing things that actually work, as opposed to security theater, that just makes us feel better.

And, I think Dr. (*sic*) Earle's discussion about metal detectors is spot on. And, I would call your attention to the RAND Institute study on school safety technologies, that indicated that metal detectors are the only thing they could actually measure as not effective. The other security technologies, they couldn't prove the efficacy of those. So, that might be something that would help to supplement the work that you're doing in looking at those kinds of things.

Typically, school safety approaches-- I think we need to really think about school safety as a people issue; it is not just a hardware issue. Whether we buy something or not; whether we have a camera or not, we always have people. We always have teachers; we have support staff; we have students; we have a community of stakeholders who we need to invest in, instead of investing in hardware. So, I'll talk a little bit about that, but, in general, I think my point is that we have to-- As educators, we have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time, meaning that we need to be able to respond to these horrific gun-related active shooter incidents, even though they are statistically rare. But, we also have to be able to respond to the all-hazards; to the things that are actually occurring every single day in a school. That is what I hear from teachers and administrators across the country, is they -- yes, they are concerned about school violence from a gun perspective, but they are also equally paralyzed and concerned by violent,

aggressive student behavior; violent and aggressive parent behavior; mental health crises; the things that are occurring every single day that do not involve a gun. And, they have not been trained and given adequate support to be able to respond to that.

The good news is, when you adopt an all-hazards approach, it's a win-win, because you also end up being more prepared for an active shooter, in addition to being prepared for the things that are occurring almost on a daily basis in our schools.

The training piece is really, really significant. What we find -- one of the concerns that I always have is that we are training people for the thing that is least likely to happen, but not training them for the thing that is most likely to happen. We typically are not training on de-escalation; we are not training on identifying individuals of concern; we're not identifying on behavior management, all of those kind of things. And, I know that New Jersey has a robust program of training as part of your school safety initiatives. So, again, I'm not making a value judgement, I'm just challenging us to kind of look at that.

One of the criteria that I put in the document that you received is really looking at, critically, the training. Is it education-focused, or is it law enforcement? And, this is not a knock on law enforcement, but it is a special set of circumstances with educators. We should not have law enforcement people teaching us how to manage the behavior of kids in a classroom. We should have education professionals teaching us that. Law enforcement has a role to play with criminal activity; education should be centered on everything else. So, is the training conducted by educators, not just law enforcement? Is it ongoing, not just one and done? Is it focused on

all hazards, not just active shooter? And, critically, does it deal with prevention, not just response? Unfortunately, we oftentimes are very heavily involved in response, and not adequately focusing on prevention.

We do-- One of the things that I would ask the legislators to think about is if we really want to solve this problem long-term, we make sure that we are training adequately and appropriately training pre-service educators and pre-service administrators. Currently, most students enter the field when they graduate with not one minute of safety training; not one minute of training on the thing that is going to end their lives or end their career, depending on the decisions that they make. So, our organization currently just -- as an FYI -- is a possible resource. We do have an online, on-demand module that universities such as North Carolina State, University of Texas at Austin-- They are folding into their teacher and administrator preparation programs to ensure that people coming into the field to work for Dr. (*sic*) Earle or Ms. (*sic*) Garibay are coming into the field with the training that they need to help lead those initiatives and respond to those events.

We talked a little bit about that balanced approach of violence prevention and crisis response, and then I think one of the things that really needs to happen, especially in a state like New Jersey where you have been doing ongoing safety initiatives, is to really impact -- examine the impact of what you're currently doing. We are finding an incredible mental health impact, a lot of negative climate and culture associated with a lot of the initiatives like hyper-realistic drills, ongoing -- the security, the surveillance mentality; we are watching you; we are viewing our students as possible perpetrators. And, no one does those things intentionally, but we have to measure the impact. Even as simple as-- I was in a school two days

ago; they went into lockdown. All the students were told they were in lockdown. You know why they were in lockdown? Because they brought the drug dogs in for a drill, which was a training for the dogs. No one else knew; everyone else went, “What’s going on? What’s wrong? I wonder if it’s an active shooter.” We went-- Everyone went to the worst-case scenario.

And, we-- That school subjected those students to that anxiety and trauma for over half an hour before finally telling them what it was that was actually happening, and that it was a drill for the drug dogs. So, preventing violence--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Dr. Klinger--

DR. KLINGER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: You definitely bring up some very, very poignant questions. I know we are recording this as well, because it’s a lot of things that we definitely need to follow back up with DOE on.

And, I think you bring up -- and, Dr. (*sic*) Earle brought it up as well -- this is about supporting the students and the administration. This isn’t about locking them up; this isn’t that. And, when you talk about different programs, when you talk about the security systems and the educators versus the law enforcement model, I think those are very, very important, that we need to make sure that’s at the top of the conversation.

So, I appreciate all of your expertise that you have given us today.

And, we have all of your information as well.

I just want to open it up, because we're getting a little late. I wanted to see if we have anyone else who wanted to ask Dr. Klinger any questions. (no response)

I don't see--

SENATOR CRYAN: A very quick one; a very quick one, Doctor.

And, thanks for your insight.

The other preventable measures outside a gun -- some of the stuff here, 74% of incidents are non-gun related. Some of that data is pretty-- Do you have any idea of the extent of the amount of training it would take for a teacher to actually be aware of the major situations that they would have to be that would file under "other?"

DR. KLINGER: Yes, we do it every day. It's the nature of the training that we do.

You start with the prevention and the response, and it's really-- Depending on the nature of it, it falls under violent and aggressive behavior; it falls under de-escalation; it falls under the threat-assessment conversation you've had; identifying individuals of concern; and providing appropriate supports and interventions.

It's not that you need a whole other universe of training. It's expanding the reach and the scope of the training that you're already doing to have it include more than just active shooter conversations.

SENATOR CRYAN: Gotcha.

And, just in the interest of time, Madam Chair, the data that shows that violence outside the school is creeping into the school, and

that's a growing concern, maybe should be of interest for us all. That's all, really. We've got time issues.

But, thank you. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much, Dr. Klinger.

We're going to move onto Garden State Coalition of Schools, with Betsy Ginsburg and Dr. Steven Forte.

**B E T S Y G I N S B U R G:** Yes, thank you.

I am only here to introduce our member, Dr. Steven Forte, who has been Superintendent of Schools in Denville for 14 years. Prior to that, he was Superintendent in Verona. He has been a teacher; he has been a coach; he has done many jobs, but has developed a security and student resources in Denville for a decade now.

And, I will turn it over to Dr. Forte.

**S T E V E N F O R T E, Ed.D.:** Thank you.

I appreciate the Garden State Coalition for asking me to speak with this group, and I appreciate all of your time here.

And, I-- Please don't take the fact that I'm going to be concise and brief as that I don't care about this. I'm just going to move kind of quickly, because I know it's getting-- It's getting a little late.

It was great to hear from my colleagues, too. We also have a strategic plan in our district, and one of our goals is called "Carrying Culture," and that weaves right into all these things we're talking about with the students. Our community helped develop that plan, and it's a three-year plan -- it's a five-year plan started in 2023.

I want to start with two personal stories, because this-- This is really where it really got me; and it's difficult to talk about some of this stuff, but I will talk about two personal things. My son, Anthony, who is 20 years old now -- he was 8 years old at the time of Sandy Hook. I was superintendent in Verona at the time. I remember that day so vividly, because we were at an Applebee's, because he liked those little boxes on the tables where you could hear the different TV channels. So, I couldn't shield him from what was going on on the TVs, and he looked up at the TVs, and he said, "Dad, what's going on?" And I said, "A horrible thing happened in Connecticut; someone shot a bunch of first graders."

I mean, when I saw the look in his eyes, I realized at that time that there's no more of this just pretending it's OK. We have to figure out *something* to do -- whatever it is, no matter what -- keep the kids as safe as possible. Because, even the kids who aren't in that school at that time when that tragedy happened are impacted. I was able to see it just in my son's eyes.

Now, this next story -- it was very interesting to me. I just thought of this. My daughter, who is 23 now, she completed her student teaching on 195<sup>th</sup> Street in the Bronx. She went to Manhattan College. So, she's -- she's been in some areas. Even though we live in Denville, in the suburbs, she's used to being in the urban environment, the city environment, and seeing a lot of different things. But, her experience in the suburbs is the thing I'm talking about now. When she graduated college, she moved to A Coruña Spain, which is in the northern part of Spain. She got a job teaching English to -- as a second language in this Catholic school.

So, her first day there -- because she knows that I'm all involved in this -- she went up to the principal and said, "You know, I really

want to know what the plans are for emergencies.” And, the principal looked back at her like she didn’t know what she was talking about. She said, “You know, like, when somebody tries to come in the school to shoot the kids?” This is what my daughter says, at 23 years old. She said that the principal looked at her like, totally in disbelief. I think it’s really important because we talk about this just like it’s a normal occurrence and it’s not like that everywhere. So, I mean, it just really was -- it really struck me, and I thought it was really important to share with you.

So, after Sandy Hook, we created a plan in Denville. We put it in a wheel, because we really want to make sure that everybody realizes every piece of this is just as important as the other piece. It’s not, that, like, having police in a school is more important than mental health -- they’re all just as equally important. So, I’ll go through the eight parts.

Number one: It’s the top priority of our entire community, no matter what. Every single person -- the mayor, Chief of Police, teachers, parents -- Number 1 priority: Keeping the kids, the students, and staff safe.

The police and school relationship. It’s so important, and I’ve seen a lot of improvement in this area throughout the state. It was, at one time, people would be like, “Oh, security is not my problem,” but I don’t see that anymore, so it’s been really helpful. Police and school relationship is so important. But, we have to get past our egos. For some reason, if the chief and the superintendent don’t get along, then make it lieutenant and assistant superintendent -- whatever it is -- but you have to make sure you have that relationship.

Third thing: Communication. Making sure you’re communicating to the staff and students the importance of this, the

importance of all the measures, and the reason why. And, don't be upset by questions. It's OK for people to question you.

Next one: Student and staff behavior and trust. This is a free thing, but it's super important. You know, one of the-- People say, "You can have all the security you want, but you leave the doors unlocked, well, that's pretty bad." Or, you're putting a rock in the door, that's pretty bad. In our town, this is something that we consider, like, our main thing. There is no putting a rock in the door. Yesterday, there was a door that was broken that wasn't working properly -- literally, it has to be fixed in two hours; that's it. And, while it's being fixed, somebody stands at the door. It's an emergency; doors have to be locked.

And, we have this mentality that if you see someone, say something. And, you have to react to everything, no matter what, because people won't see something, say something anymore if you don't do anything about it.

Facilities and technology. Making sure your doors are locking right; vestibules; cameras; all those different things -- it's important to have that.

Preparedness. Ongoing professional development drills; frequent discussions. Reworking this; rethinking it; always taking whatever new thing is out there, considering it, and -- like Dr. Klinger said -- not all of it is something that you want to -- you need to do right away. There's a lot of money to be made in this. If there was something as easy as just spending money on it, we'd all do it, and it'd be over, but it's not.

Behavioral health. Again, like I said, these are all just as important as the other. We have -- we started these assessment teams well

before the mandated assessment teams from the State. This was something that we had going for a long time, because we realize that the behavioral health is a big part of school security and safety. We have-- We happen to have Saint Clare's in our town, which is a very large behavioral health hospital system in this area. It's very highly thought of. We use them; we have them in our schools. As a matter of fact, we have one therapist in each one of our schools almost full time that they're contracted through us to handle mental health with students.

We're working right now on a community book study of *The Anxious Generation*, because we feel like that's also important. There's a part of that book that talks about what can you do, and there's actual decent ideas that you can do without, like, waiting for the Legislature to fix it, or without waiting for some new greatest and latest thing coming out, that you could actually do some things now.

The last one -- I purposely put this at the end; not because it's not as important -- but security personnel. We do have Class 3 officers in each school, and it's something our community wants. I wanted to preface all this by, this is what's good for our town; I can't say if it's good for everybody's town. Our town is unique, just like everybody else's town is unique, and we were able to get this stuff done.

I'll talk a little bit about the barriers to all this now. Obviously there's always some kind of catch. So, these costs-- The costs are ongoing. They're growing, too. I know my colleague from Old Bridge talked about when they first hired their Class 3s, I think he said they were \$25 an hour, now they're \$40. Same thing here. These costs just keep going up.

And, when we brought this to the Board and the Board voted on it, there was a couple comments I'd like to share with you.

One of them I thought was-- One of my Board members says, "It's always too much until it's not enough." I remembered that; I thought that was important. And, another one said, "You know, once we vote this in, to have Class 3 officers, no one is going to vote it out. So, somehow or another, you've got to make it work."

So, for right now, our district has four buildings and three schools. For the current year '24-'25, our annual recurring costs for security and mental health -- and, this is -- these are new things; these aren't things that we have, like guidance counselors -- usually, those therapists I talked about, and our Class 3 officers, the recurring costs are \$520,000 just for those two things. And, remember, our school district is pre-K to 8; 1,750 kids. So, it's not-- This is not a large city district; it's not a suburban district. And, we don't even have a high school. And, it's still \$520,000 a year. Just to put that in perspective, the 2% cap we have -- that's about 1.5% of our 2% cap, just for that.

Also, since 2017, just as a -- just to put this in perspective, we've spent over \$3.5 million on security. That's including facilities, technology, and personnel. And, since 2021, we spent over a million dollars on those Saint Clare's counselors I spoke about. Obviously, we'd always love to have a little bit more money from the State. I think the State, and everybody-- We all feel like this is really important. In our community, we think it's the *most* important.

And, I would be willing to take any questions you have on this subject. I could talk about this subject literally for five hours. MaryJane,

a couple of our colleagues on here, we were on the same committees before; I just happened to be speaking for Garden State Coalition this time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much. I think you bring up some really interesting points.

Quick question for you: Do you utilize any county facility to share any -- county resources for your district?

DR. FORTE: We did have something that was great, but they don't have it anymore. There was a County Office of Homeland Security we did utilize for certain things, and they did help us a few times. Unfortunately, that person passed away, and I don't believe that there's someone new in there yet.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Got it; thank you.

Senator McKnight.

SENATOR MCKNIGHT: Yes, I'll make this real quick.

I just want to just confirm what you said earlier, Assemblywoman Verlina Jackson.

So, you mentioned-- David, you were talking about your daughter and having her voice heard, and talking to -- going to the school and talking to the principal to find out what is the protocol to protect the students. And, the Madam Chairwoman said earlier, "We need to have youth on this Zoom."

So, the next time, I'm recommending that we -- the next time we have a meeting -- that we at least have a youth. Because we're missing their voice; we're missing their voice. And, going through the metal detector; going -- having their bags checked. What is-- How do they feel about this?

We are adults, we can come up and think we know everything, but we don't, because we're missing that particular voice.

So, I just highly recommend that, moving forward, we have a youth presence on this call so that we can get a holistic approach so that we can move forward.

So, I appreciate everyone who came on today, all of your insights. I have taken some notes, and I appreciate everything that you do to make sure that our children, as well as the faculty and the community, is safe and they're receiving quality education.

So, thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you, Senator McKnight.

Before we wrap up, I just have one last question. And, this is for any of the panelists. Are there any Federal dollars available to help offset the cost, or update our school security systems?

MR. CITTADINO: I'm glad you asked that question.

So, something I would say -- so, there is Homeland Security grants. I just applied for a Homeland Security grant; I think it-- The application deadline was the end of September; I'm waiting to hear back.

And, also, it's a great resource for any of my colleagues on here -- the TSA. You wouldn't think of this, but the TSA does free security assessments for your transportation system. We only think of the TSA working out of the airports, but they are actually responsible for all ground transportation, including school buses, and they will come in and they will do a training with your school bus drivers; they'll do a drill with them, in

which they put backpacks on the school bus early in the morning before the drivers get on, just to see if they check the bus for backpacks and so forth.

So, these are great; it's a great resource that I was able to find this year. And, if you reach out to me, I'll put you in contact with their representative who comes out and helps you with that process.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON:  
Awesome.

Thank you so much.

Any other questions or comments from my colleagues?

(no response)

All right, seeing none, Senator Cryan, any final remarks?

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman--

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (indiscernible)--

MS. DiBENEDETTI: --we still have one more presentation.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Sorry, we do.

I'm sorry, we sure do. I apologize.

Great Schools of New Jersey, Anthony Trongone -- Executive Director.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: This will be a PowerPoint presentation as well.

ANTHONY TRONGONE: And, I'll be quick. Well, I won't be quick, but I'll be as fast as I can go, and I have some pretty good information for this Committee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

MR. TRONGONE: If you could have my slideshow up, and I'll go from slide to slide to slide. I'll just say "next" when it's the next slide.

So, again, thank you to the Committee, Assemblywoman, and Senator Cryan, for having me up here today to testify.

Thank Julie Borst, for allowing me the knowledge to testify today from Save Our Schools.

I am the Executive Director of Great Schools of New Jersey; I am past President of NJASA. And, also, I am the New Jersey Commissioner for Military-Connected Kids, where I work on the transitions when they come in and they -- what they call "PCS," permanent change of station. They move into the state, and there's a lot of issues. I have one just now who came in, that they're not treated very fairly. And, so -- it is emotional.

So, I can go to the next slide, please.

So, hardening of schools, we talked about that. We talked about the security guards, the shattering of -- the shatter-proof glass; the vestibules; the key-card entry. And, also, the metal detectors, and for the solution-- I was Superintendent of Millville; I was the superintendent for 15 years; I've been an administrator for 20. And, we did have to put metal detectors in Millville High School, and we had the Garretts, which is like, that -- what you see in the picture there. But, then, I went to a Phillies game, and they had these towers -- they're called open gates. Because, we're experiencing the same thing with the Garretts, those enclosed ones, where it

was just bogging everybody down, so we purchased open-gate metal detectors. It allows more kids in, and that improved the flow of entry into the school tremendously, where it eliminated any type of issues with kids coming into school late; and, cameras.

So, we've gone through that, and it's going to be a struggle, again, with the cost. Next slide, please.

So, the human aspect. People have touched on it, but I want to go first to the emergency preparedness and training and drills. Jeff Gale and Tom Gambino have been in my school districts; they've done a fabulous job educating myself as superintendent, and my principals. They'll go through a whole process involving teachers, and go in through a drill. There's a lot of good things that those guys are doing, so when we do have a security report that needs to be updated, please make sure that they're going to be a voice in that.

Obviously, we're working on communication tools. I think we have that down pretty well, where we have our student information system text parents to let them know what's going on, and also our staff, so they know what's going on. And, also, more importantly, is Dr. (*sic*) Earle talked about community and parent involvement; making sure they know what's going on. And, then, also, the anonymous reporting systems. And, I guess that's where people are going with this.

And, then, we just touched on the mental health aspect of it -- mental health services, behavioral intervention programs. And, with those two, I'll just mention -- as I'm sitting here -- Columbine, 1999, involved students. Sandy Hook, Parkland, Uvalde, Michigan -- all former students; they all came back, and they all had some type of mental health issue. And,

I don't want to make a blanket statement, but when you look at the research, there was an issue of mental health with those perpetrators, affecting their schools. And, so, I'm going to go into that after I mention this.

So, funding-- We all mentioned funding. So, Millville is a high-needs school district, and that's why Great Schools is an advocate for school districts of high need. And, so, we were able to get a Stronger Connections Grant, and also a professional mental health support grant from the U.S. Government. We also did get a school -- a Homeland Security grant for half a million dollars, also. So, you've got to get grants; you've got to turn over rocks and find the money. And, also, re-appropriate existing general fund positions.

But, now, I'm going to turn to the staffing. Next slide.

And, you'll see that -- oh, it's not showing up, maybe -- oh, there it is.

And, so, you'll see that these are the staffing, where they're at. But, when you look at counseling, social worker on down, for each category of elementary, middle school, and high school, they are grant-funded positions. Because, when you look at the process of identifying kids of need for mental health support, the existing people in your district are already overloaded with all the tasks they have, and so something happens. Our kids have to meet somebody. They have to be there; it can't wait a week, or I'm going to meet you on Wednesday during your open block. You have to have people -- professional mental health people -- to meet the needs of the kids. So, we hired nine people; there's nine people that we've hired through the grants. And, so, again, school funding should be an issue.

Also, Assemblywoman Carter mentioning the funding of all this -- there's supposed to be an educational adequacy report out in February, in regard to school funding, but I don't think it's going to include the magnitude of what we need for security and for special ed. and technology. It's just going to update the cost-per-student, but not necessarily all the things that go into it, now. I think there needs to be a comprehensive educational adequacy report done by the Department of Ed., or facilitated by the Department of Ed., that they did in '08-'09. Because things are much different from 15 years ago.

Now, next slide, please.

What we did -- and, this was a lot of -- burning a lot of capital -- is, on the next slide, is we implemented a universal screening tool called BIMAS-2 Assessment. And -- next slide -- and, in that particular assessment, we -- it's a 34-chain sensitive items, and they're used for universal screening, and then it tiers them -- the kids -- into Tiers 1, 2, and 3, for support. And, again, when you say you're going to do this, you run into Board members, they're like, "Ah, I don't think we should do it." So, it was going to be a voluntary self-assessment by the kids.

Next slide, please.

So, there was reticence on the leadership of the district, but we plowed through. And, so, at the high school, we had 38% of the kids take part in that universal screening assessment. And, there were 82 kids who were either in Tier 2 or Tier 3. Out of those 82 kids, 21 were on our radar; the others were not. *And*, that day I was real nervous, because I was waiting to see what we were going to uncover. Twenty-four kids -- you can see in the blue -- 24 kids in Tier 3. We administered a secondary assessment

called the Columbia Suicide Assessment. After another professional assessed those seven -- all 24, but seven came out needing to go into crisis; going to the hospital. That was sober-- That was a sobering moment for me, as a superintendent, that this is something that was not on our radar, but through the universal screening, this is what popped up.

So much so, that what we had to do was postpone the middle school, which was Lakeside, because we had to deploy our staff to meet the needs of the kids in the blue, in the high school. So, then, we did administer it at the middle school, and we had 40 kids in Tier 3, and six were referred to crisis *that day*. So, we had more kids during the year, but these were big chunks of -- at the high school, seven, last fall, and six at Lakeside last fall.

And, then, the elementary teachers were very, very hesitant to do it, because they had to implement the assessment and score it. But, they saw the effect of what happened at the middle school and high school, so they partook in it, and we had 90% of the students assessed. And, the reason why you had 90 is because some of the populations we couldn't -- like, there's the severely autistic non-verbal kids, that type of population. So, we almost got almost the kids in elementary, but the bottom line is this is what you saw last fall, and now we're going to do it twice this year in the fall -- we just did the high school; we'll do it in the fall and the spring. So, these are the results on this universal screening.

And, then, I'm going to move quickly. So, it also gives you, like, what the school district needs. So, for that high school, you can see I have social anxiety -- I'm sorry, next slide, please.

You'll see it gives you data. So, the fourth triangle over, you can see that 32% of the kids -- this is an example, I just pulled it out. But, 32% of the kids at the high school need some help in social anxiety. So, when you look at the School-Based Youth Services Program, or DCF, and NJ4S -- this is what we can tell them; this is our data; and this is what we need for, like, assemblies, or bigger group instruction on what they need, in regards to support and mental health. That's a Tier 1 type of situation.

Next paragraph -- next paragraph; next slide.

Then, the middle school, the same thing. You can see the anxiety was higher -- 43% -- and they could see some academic functioning. And, then, the next slide. And, then, the elementary was more towards the academic functioning. It was done by the teachers, but, again, this gives us a prescription of where we need to go in order to improve or meet the needs of our kids, as far as mental health.

Next slide.

And, then, Senator Cryan was talking about the data and the threat assessment, so I'm going to talk about that, because I think we have to really hone in on what we report to the State in regard to that. It used to be EVVRS; now it's SSDS. And, so you have the Columbia Suicide Assessment, and then you have, just, overall threat assessments that are happening. So, in the State language Department of Ed. put out, there's abhorrent behavior -- which is like, a threat to themselves or others, which is pretty severe. Then, you have concerning behavior, which is mostly at the elementary school, where they get frustrated, a kid gets frustrated, "I'm going to go home and get a gun." We have to make sure we do that threat assessment and do an evaluation on that student. And, then there's also

concerning communication, as far as what's going on on social media. We have to make sure we're meeting the needs on that also.

And, we put that on our Navigate 360 portal. There's other companies, but we have a portal that we're keeping track of our assessment data for Columbia Suicide Assessments, but also our threat assessments that are not mental-health related.

And, again, there's also targeted violence, where you could have a -- for, when I went to school, a hit list, and they want to target a certain group of kids or teachers. And, that's another piece of a threat assessment. We put this in place in April of 2023, and we're just starting to collect the data to see some results of it.

Next slide, please. And, again, forgive me for going quickly, because I know you've been listening for an hour and a half.

So, I want to talk about the Columbia Assessment. I think if you're not familiar with it, it's right there. And, Rebecca told me she gave you the handout.

Next slide.

And, this is what we saw. So, I hear people talking about threat assessments. We -- I presented what Mary -- Dr. Garibay -- talked about, in the summer. I presented at that security summit, and this was an eye-opener for the 150 people who were in that room. We had 244 assessments, Columbia Assessments. Two hundred and forty-four. And, then, we got to compare to other districts there -- "We did 77;" "We did 120;" "We did 2." So, it's different on the demographics of your school, and the issues are if people are doing it at all. And, we saw that that third and fifth grade was our highest number. And, again, they were for concerning

behaviors -- things that maybe were tolerated 20 years ago that we don't tolerate today, because that kid goes home and says, "Johnny said he wanted to stab me with a knife." Well, we have to -- we have to act on that. And, sometimes, it's just de-escalated into, like, a Level 1 threat assessment at the building level. But, some do get escalated, and goes to the district level.

Next paragraph please. And, again, I apologize for going quickly.

And, then, we also broke down our assessments by school. And, you can see that the middle school, Lakeside, and then the elementary school, Holly Heights, had the greatest number.

And, next slide.

We broke it down by gender. And, by gender, we had 140 males and 102 females and two other. But, out of the 86 students that were sent out to crisis -- out of the 244 -- 45 were female and 41 were male, which was another interesting fact.

Next slide.

And, then, we also broke it down by month, because we wanted to see what the trends are; we don't know what's going on in the community. And, just trying to make some type of sense of what's going on.

Next slide, please.

And, then, we look at kids in crisis by month, and we see that more kids are going in crisis during the winter break; during the holiday season. And, if you work in a district like I worked in for nine years, those kids do have issues losing that structure during the break. You have to be sensitive to that.

Next slide, please.

And, then, we broke it down by school. And, then, we have to deploy our resources to what this data tells us what we need to do.

And, then, lastly -- I'm almost done -- Handle With Care.

Next slide.

This, Handle With Care -- next slide -- is a statewide directive from the Attorney General that was put in in 2020, that says that a form must be completed by law enforcement after responding to or encountering an incident involving a traumatic event where a child is present -- present; sorry -- and, then, what Senator Cryan talked about, the outside events that affect schools. This is really something we should do statewide, because Cumberland County has a central database for the municipalities and the State Police, for schools that don't have a police force in their district, and they have to report this data.

And, so, next slide, please.

So, what Dr. (*sic*) Earle talked about, like, what happens to kids? We get -- *I was getting* -- I get the information sent to me that this child was exposed to a traumatic event, and you can see that these are acts of violence. There could be displacement; an arrest of someone who lives in the home; and that kid's not ready to learn. And, what do we do? We push the kid, and the kid acts out, and he gets suspended. So, this is also going to take root in how we look at discipline, because we want to meet the kid when they're not ready to learn, and send them to one of those nine people, because something happened and we have to know -- we had to be -- identify and be aware of why they're not ready to learn, and not exasperate the situation.

Next slide, please.

So, in Millville, sobering -- another sobering event. There were 1,028 impacts in Millville last year, involving 708 students. We had one third grader who had 10 traumatic events in his home, and he was under a threat assessment for a severe threat, and there's a connection -- the bleed over from the home into the school. And, that police-to-school information is what we need, but we need to have all the counties doing that, because we're blessed in Cumberland County that we have this mechanism to look at what's happening the night before. I had 10 kids one night -- well, here, there was an incident at the homeless shelter in Vineland. Now, I know, and we let the principals know. The data goes to the principals; the data goes to the social workers in that building. So, it's built to where they get the student information ID and it goes to that school. And, then, I also got it as the superintendent.

Next slide.

And, then, we break it down. We break down, handle it - - Handle With Care by school. You can see the high school had the most events -- over 300.

And, next slide.

Then, we look at the percent of events for the population. So, even though the high school had the most events, we had one particular elementary school -- 15.1% of the students were affected with some type of traumatic event at home. And, now we know, and we have more staff in that school to meet the needs of those kids, and we have to understand where they're at, and help be a partnership with that family.

Next slide.

Again, we also broke it down by month. Nothing here to report yet, because this is our first full year.

Next slide.

And, then, we also do it by grade level. So, we're trying to parse through and see where the issues are with these issues with mental health, as it applies to school security and safety. And, it's -- it's starting to make sense in Millville, for the people in Millville, I can tell you that.

Next slide.

Then, we break it down by race and ethnicity. And, we have to look at that, and then have conversations with our equity team, but -- our child study team -- leadership has to look at that and say, "What can we do? What can we do at the county level, folks? What can we do at the municipal level, folks?" Because there is definitely a problem, and the data speaks for itself. And, again, this is not the school self-reporting; this is a policeman who doesn't even know -- he knows my name, maybe -- he's putting that information and giving that to me.

And, then, next slide, please.

Then, we broke it down by incident type. So, the majority were involved with violence, but you can see there was fire; forced removal in the home; drugs; child abuse.

Next slide, please.

And, then, we broke down the violence, it was domestic violence -- I still don't know what "general" is -- but there was sexual, and weapons.

Next slide, please.

And, we're reviewing the data, but we know our Tier 1 supports are not going to be informed in our health curriculum and our mental health fairs; NJ4S hub-and-spoke; the BIMAS assessment data, we'll do again; and our positive behavioral intervention and support program is going to be tailored toward the data to meet the needs of the kids.

Next slide, please.

Tier 2, where you need targeted support -- and, again, I apologize for what it looks like on your screen -- but we had to enlist an in-site health for counseling, diagnoses, evaluations, because if you're in schools, you know that if you have a kid who needs to be evaluated, they're not going to get evaluated for at least two or three weeks. And, it's tough for them to get transportation to get the evaluation, so we took it upon ourselves to have an entity where the families can go to and cut down -- and get that appointment in, like, two days. Because if something wasn't interested -- an inappropriate comment -- that kid could be back in school. But, you need to have that resource to have the counseling, and then have the evaluation to get that kid back in school. Like I said, we also have the School-Based Youth Services program; the IRS process; performed care and after-school counseling.

Next slide, please.

And, then, Tier 3. So, we have in-site health -- I highlighted that -- but we have crisis referral; we have weekly counseling, and it's short-term, and it's solution-focused. And, it's also the Child Study Team referral.

Next slide, please.

And, then, for-- Like, I've been at a couple meetings, and there's people out there thinking mental health, that we're going to do all these things -- indoctrinate the kids. So, this is what we're doing in Millville. If you're Tier 1, green, they don't get the support, but they'll have some type of assembly; they'll get some type of support in regards to whatever the needs are that comes out of our universal screening. But, the parents will be notified through email that they're going to partake in this particular event.

Tier 2, which is some risk -- a general ed. student will see those kids who are -- not kids; those counselors who were paid through a grant -- and the classified students will see their Child Study Team member. And, we'll have a meeting with the school and parents about it. And, then, Tier 3 -- which is the red -- it's a general action plan with our crisis coordinator and the folks -- the professional mental health people we hired through the grant. And, then, they have a meeting with the parents; they review the action plan; and we have a parent's signature on what the plan is going to be for that child.

I'm done. I tried to get it done as quickly as possible, but it--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Tony, you did a fantastic job.

MR. TRONGONE: (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Really, really good.

MR. TRONGONE: It's the passion.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: It was very informative, and I was taking notes along, too.

And, I think your -- the tiers; how you broke out the School-Based Services; the insight -- on-site -- counseling, that you can get. I think you really tried to remove the barriers--

MR. TRONGONE: Yes--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: --that exist, to be able to get those students the help that they need. Student *and* family, right -- it wasn't just the singular, but it was the ability for faculty to recognize the signs, and how do we step in? We're not going to wait until you build up all of these incidences. We're trying to start now -- start as soon as possible.

MR. TRONGONE: And, also, when you have that relationship, then there's an issue I -- again, I've been in education a long time -- that some of the parents come in ready to knock me out. But, when they realize there's a relationship now, and we care-- Because maybe their experience in school wasn't good. At least in Millville and Pemberton.

So, I'm not kicking them off the porch. I'm telling you, "I got it." You've got to do your part; I'll get my part. And, then, before you know it, you have a relationship with the parent, or the grandmother, or the guardian, and it's-- They're like, "We're not here to hurt you; we're here to help you." And, that helps with -- as far as school security, because you look back at some of the events, it was always, "The school screwed me over somehow, and they're the enemy." And, we want to -- we want to simmer that down to say, "We're not the enemy, we're going to be there to help you."

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Parents have trauma from schools, too, right? So, you know, you get--

MR. TRONGONE: Exactly. They bring that back--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: --from the school, it's a bad thing. And, it's like, "Oh, no, no, no, we're trying to help." And, it's a difference; they pause and, like, "Oh, wait, they're not in trouble? Oh, I'm not used to that."

MR. TRONGONE: Yes, right from jump street, they're elevated, and you've got to say, "We're here, we're here to help you, and let's come up with a plan."

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Well, I definitely want to thank you for your insight, and all of the information -- the slides, the presentation -- to all of our speakers. It was very, very informative.

Becky, I'm glad we're recording this, because we have lots of questions to send over to our friends at DOE to be able to follow up.

And, we're going to be having more hearings to come.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: I think Assemblywoman Carter did have her hand up.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: She does.

Assemblywoman Carter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: I just want to say thank you to Tony, because you really did hone in on a lot of things.

And, the biggest thing is that trust and relationships with our parents and our students. Because, a lot of times, you know what, they also come in very judgmental, based off of what the student goes home and says. But, versus when you actually have that conversation with them, they're coming and they're, like, ready to get us. And, it's like, "Time out; let's take

a look at this. I'm trying to help you. We're trying to get you the resources you need, and you need to -- you know what, know that we have the resources here."

Especially when we have School-Based Youth Services. That is such a critical component for us to make sure that we maintain them in our schools, right there. Because once they walk out of that door, there's no telling what happens, and they don't go where -- and get the necessary resources and help they need. But, by having that School-Based right there, in our facilities; right there, and being able to get there directly, our students have a better chance of when their mechanisms go off, they go away; let me go; can I just have a moment? And, if you don't give them that moment, that's when it goes, and it's an--

MR. TRONGONE: (indiscernible), right--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: --escalation point, at that point.

So, thank you for that information and that data.

MR. TRONGONE: Thank you, thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Senator Cryan.

SENATOR CRYAN: Just a thank you.

I know it's been a long hearing, but, wow. What an amazing amount of information and insight.

And, Tony, thanks, man.

MR. TRONGONE: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR CRYAN: Great work.

Thank you, all.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Well, this is my conclusion of the meeting.

I thank you all.

I think, also, to Assemblywoman Carter's point, we had to fight to keep Youth-Based School Services in the State budget. We're going to be starting up soon in January -- I think around February, March we'll hear the Governor's State of the Budget -- but, you have definitely given us a lot of things to think about, and how to support our schools and our children.

So, I want to thank you -- all of our speakers -- for being on the call today.

Becky, to you and your team, thank you for the information that you got to us, and the continuation and the follow-up will definitely be there.

So, I thank you all.

And, if you have any questions in between, after we hang up, you all have our contact information; send it back in. Because, I know I'm going to be calling a few folks myself.

So, thank you very much.

Enjoy the rest of your day.

**(MEETING CONCLUDED)**