



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: May 25, 2022

To: Local Educational Agency Leads, Administrators of Approved Private Schools for Students with Disabilities, Administrators of Nonpublic Schools

Route To: Principals, Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Curriculum Supervisors, School Counselors, School Social Workers, School Psychologists, Student Assistance Coordinators, Educators

From: Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner

## **Responding to the Tragedy of the Robb Elementary School Shooting**

As we all mourn the loss of 21 beautiful lives at Robb Elementary School, families, students, and educators across the country have borne witness to another senseless act of gun violence. Such tragedies undermine the most basic feelings of safety and security we all expect from our schools and workplaces. I believe in the power of our educational community to triumph over stark adversity, but in this moment, even I am shaken by the shooting that occurred yesterday.

Educators are more than individuals trained to deliver curriculum to students. Educators are caregivers who love their students, their families, and the communities they serve. As an educator, school leader, and as the Commissioner, I am still contending with how I would provide a safe space for my students to unpack the traumatic events that occurred yesterday. Yesterday, my colleagues who began their day believing in the safety and security of their school buildings may now contend with feelings of uncertainty. Individuals who make up our school community from inside the walls of our schools must also grapple with the multiple roles we have as fathers, mothers, family members, or friends, all empathizers of the thoughts and feelings of those at Robb Elementary School.

I encourage all educators and families around the state to engage with their students in developmentally appropriate conversations concerning school safety and security and explain the incident that took place yesterday in Uvalde, Texas. I encourage all educators to engage in open discussion with students in a forum that allows expression of their thoughts, reactions and feelings.

I urge our school administrators to work closely with our students' families to support them in engaging in conversations at home that discuss yesterday's tragedy. Families may feel especially vulnerable following this traumatic event and will want reassurance regarding the safety of their students. They may also contend with students who express feelings of being unsafe or insecure about attending school in response to this incident. It is important to acknowledge those feelings and explain how the school community is prepared to respond to emergency situations. Over time, continue to check-in with the family and consider providing additional counseling services to support the student.

Below is a list of resources that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) can reference as we continue process and heal from the incident in Uvalde, Texas, here in New Jersey as we continue to keep the community of the Robb Elementary School in our hearts.

Resource	Description
<a href="#">Talking to Children About the Shooting</a>	Resources developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network to help children, families, educators, and communities navigate what they are seeing and hearing, acknowledge their feelings, and find ways to cope together
<a href="#">Talking to Children When Scary Things Happen</a> <a href="#">Talking to Teens About Violence</a>	Resources to support educators in facilitating discussions when crisis occurs
<a href="#">Helping Children Cope with Frightening News</a>	Resource developed to assist adults in engaging in conversations with students around topics that may instill a sense of fear

Below are resources available for students or parents seeking additional assistance for social, emotional, or mental health needs:

- **Children’s System of Care:** Call this number to find out about services for children and teens with emotional and behavioral health care challenges – (877) 652-7624
- **Crisis Text Line:** Connect with a crisis counselor to help defuse a “hot” moment or crisis—Text “HOME” to 741741
- **NJ Hopeline:** (855) 654-6735 -Through the hotline, chat, email, and text services, the goal at the New Jersey Suicide Prevention Hopeline is to lessen the amount of distress you are currently experiencing and work collaboratively with you to develop a resolution to whatever stressors prompted you to contact the Hopeline.
- **2nd Floor:** (888) 222-2228 – 2NDFLOOR is a confidential and anonymous helpline for New Jersey's youth and young adults.
- **Traumatic Loss Coalition:** The TLC provides support to communities affected by traumatic events such as homicide, illness and suicide.

c: Members, State Board of Education  
 NJDOE Staff  
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 Garden State Coalition of Schools  
 NJ LEE Group