

Education, Privacy, Disability Rights, and Civil Rights Groups Release Principles For School Safety, Privacy, and Equity

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and 39 other education, privacy, disability rights, and civil rights organizations released [ten principles to protect all students' safety, privacy, and right to an equal education](#). The principles are meant to serve as a starting point for conversations with policymakers and school officials about how to keep students safe while respecting their dignity and encouraging their individual growth.

“School safety measures such as monitoring should be evidence-based and focus on real threats of harm, not speculation,” said Amelia Vance, Director of the Education Privacy Project at the Future of Privacy Forum. “Unfairly labeling students with disabilities as potential threats based on little or no evidence does nothing to keep our schools safe.”

Many recent state school safety proposals call for increased surveillance in an attempt to reduce school violence and students' self-harming behaviors. But studies show that school surveillance can disproportionately affect students with disabilities and students of color.

For example, a report submitted in January by Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission recommends sharing information about children's mental health and disabilities with threat assessment teams and allowing school resource officers to access student records more easily. The proposals may intend to protect students, but their effects are often different and can make it difficult for parents and students to discern where the school ends and the police begin. Students are still maturing and need to know schools are safe spaces where they can ask questions, think creatively, and make mistakes.

“School safety measures that target students because of their disabilities are not effective and they undermine these students' opportunities to receive a quality education and to be treated fairly,” said Jennifer Mathis, Director of Policy and Legal Advocacy at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law.

The [Principles for School Safety, Privacy, and Equity](#) state that:

- Schools must not discriminate, and school safety measures should not reinforce biases against, or rely on profiling of, students based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other similar characteristics.
- The fact that a student has a disability diagnosis, a history of receiving services for a disability, or an individualized education program (IEP) or 504 plan that addresses disability-related behaviors, does not mean the student is a potential threat to their school community.
- If school safety measures include monitoring of students (physically and/or digitally), such measures should be evidence-based, subject to ongoing evaluation, and focus on threats of actual harm. They should be transparently developed in consultation with experts and community stakeholders, including students, parents, and educators.
- Algorithms used for school safety are imperfect, often based on historical and biased data, and can produce false positives and replicate bias. Final decisions about whether a student is categorized as a threat and the actions to take should be made by school administrators, who are able to take into account the student's particular needs and circumstances, and not by algorithms.

[Read the Future of Privacy Forum's blog on the principles here.](#)

The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law is a national legal advocacy organization advancing the rights of people with mental disabilities.

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Signatories of the Principles for School Safety, Privacy, and Equity:

- AASA: The School Superintendents Association
- American Association of People with Disabilities
- The Advocacy Institute
- The Arc of the United States
- Association of Educational Service Agencies
- Association of Latino Administrators & Superintendents
- Association of School Business Officials International
- Association of University Centers on Disability
- Autism Society
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network
- Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
- The Campaign to Keep Guns off Campus
- Center for Public Representation
- Council of Administrators of Special Education
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
- Disability Independence Group, Inc
- Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
- EPIC
- Florida Association of School Psychologists
- Florida League of Women Voters
- Florida Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
- Future of Privacy Forum
- Intercultural Developmental Research Association
- Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Learning Disabilities Association of America
- Mental Health America
- National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
- National Center for Learning Disabilities
- National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools
- National Center for Youth Law
- National Disability Rights Network
- National Education Association
- National PTA

- National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
- National Rural Education Association
- Public Advocacy for Kids
- Sandy Hook Promise
- School Social Work Association of America
- Southern Poverty Law Center
- TASH