Keeping Our Schools and Communities Safe

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the singularly most disruptive force in our communities in a century, especially in public education. Yet, despite the trauma, pain and suffering that the pandemic brought, it also taught us we can overcome significant challenges when working together as one community.

As longtime residents of Guilford County, we were proud of how our community came together during the pandemic, supporting one another. However, our work is not done here. We are just beginning to understand the impact the last two and a half years have had on our schools and communities. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, we lost years of academic progress, faced many mental health challenges and witnessed increased violence nationwide.

We are committed to providing a high-quality education for all Guilford County students, which means supporting their success and building pillars of support that extend far beyond the classroom. As parents, educators and leaders, keeping students and staff safe at school and in the community is a vital part of our work to provide every student an opportunity to have a great life.

Following school closures due to COVID-19, we have seen an increase in the number of individuals fighting in schools. Although many of these incidents include students, some incidents also include parents. This type of behavior does not belong in our schools.

Recent community violence trends have also raised alarms and it is clear that we must do more as a community to address violence.

Just two weeks ago, our community lost two young people to senseless gun violence. And just as we, as adults, feel the profound impact of these tragedies – so do our students. Our children simply cannot focus on academics until they first feel safe.

Firearms have become the number one cause of death for children and adolescents in the United States, surpassing even motor vehicle deaths. Additionally, data from the FBI Uniform Crime Report shows the violent crime rate in North Carolina increased by 11 percent between 2019 and 2020, and the homicide rate increased by nearly 30 percent.

While we cannot solve the region’s or the nation’s gun safety crisis on our own, we are taking measures in our schools to keep students and staff safe. Our efforts include the installation of security screeners, upkeep of school bus cameras, upkeep of cameras in school buildings, safe entry points, a clear bag policy at large gatherings, additional mental health support for students and staff and more. We have also begun working with leaders across the community to solve this issue. Solving this important issue requires a multi-layered approach and long-term commitment from our community as a whole.

We know schools are a microcosm of the community at large. We cannot keep our students and staff safe until we address the root causes of the issues impacting our community. Tragedies like the shooting two weeks ago require us to unite and work together as one community. We can’t sit by helplessly and watch.
Guilford County is a resilient community that makes things happen. We do not wait for others to solve our issues. While there is not one solution to solve the challenges we face today, we hope you will join us in working together for the betterment of our community. We are convinced Guilford County is on the verge of a new chapter post-pandemic – one full of opportunity and promise. But to fully capture that opportunity, we must unite. We know that by working together, hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder, we can make Guilford County a safe and thriving community where every student has equitable access to everything they need to succeed.