



AZTEC MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

"Building a Foundation of Success"

Office of the Superintendent

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April 16, 2018

Dear Honorable Chair Senator Mimi Stewart and Legislative Education Study Committee Members:

First of all, thank you for your dedication and service to the great state of New Mexico. Your job is not easy, but know that it is appreciated.

As you well know, on December 7, 2017 we lost two students due to a school shooting. We cannot thank the Governor and the Public Education Department enough for the support they have provided to our district during this horrific time in our district. They were very supportive in helping us emotionally, financially and worked with us and our students to get through some academic issues, as well as making sure we could concentrate on the important aspects of our mental health issues. We will be forever grateful for their efforts and support and thank them from the bottom of our hearts. In addition to this, we also thank you and your fellow colleagues in the Legislature for your recognition of two of the many heroes and the Memorial that you passed in their honor to their heroic acts on the day of December 7, 2017.

I write this letter today with a heavy heart that is still on the mend. It is a new normal at Aztec High School as we move forward, but please know that is what we are doing. We are stronger and more united than ever before, because this act will **not define us nor will it defeat us**. No evil coward will change who we are or what we do. This act did erase boundaries among school districts, shrunk the state, and the country because of all the support we received and still are receiving. We are not walking on this healing journey alone. Casey and Paco lost their lives on December 7, 2017 in a hallway, but they are both heroes and angels because they saved a lot of lives on that day. They will never be forgotten and will always be Aztec Tigers. United we stand and as we move forward we will **STAND AS ONE** as a tribute to our Casey and Paco.

Today I am writing you this letter, asking that as we are in the interim of the work of the legislature, that we work to look at legislation that will help schools do five things:

1. **Funding Armed Security** - Better security by appropriately funding schools to have armed guards, SRO's and other trained professionals, other than teachers, to campuses in our state. Hardening our campuses with fencing, entrances, and other capital improvements is only one part of the formula. We must also utilize other deterrents such as armed personnel, not teachers that can act in the event something happens and do so in seconds not minutes. A coward wants to inflict most amount of damage, shortest amount of time, least amount of effort, on the softest target. This is the definition of an active shooter, and so we must develop a defense against this type of cowardly act and evil. We should look at programs that allow for a type of school marshal program, similar to an airline marshal program, so that we can protect our schools on perimeters and in open areas where most shootings start. We must have these individuals able to monitor inside and outside as needed. As we make considerations to this, we must maintain our approach to protecting and balancing a positive learning environment. We have been at the center of this argument and I can tell you that parents, students and teachers have all had input on this issue and stated that teachers with weapons in the classroom will be very disruptive. I have even had parents tell me that if we were to proceed with allowing this, they would pull their students from our schools. I realize that we have a sufficiency issue in funding education in our state, but in this argument we must also include security.
2. **Return to Work Changes** - Look at specific legislation that may be prohibiting return to work of law enforcement and other highly trained individuals that could specifically be hired by schools to help provide protection and safety. I have had law enforcement employees inform me that they cannot come to work for schools as security officers because they have just retired and their retirement will not allow them to do so. If this is the issue, we need to see how we can change some of the rules restricting this. These

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individuals would be perfect candidates that could be deputized and would be ideal for a type of School Marshall. In many cases they may not need benefits and may only want to work for nine months out of the year and working for a school would be ideal. With their training back ground they would have the expertise necessary for the type of person to protect a campus and to work with school districts and the SRO to continue to train staff to improve safety. This is something that needs to be investigated and more importantly changed.

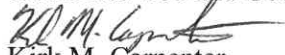
3. **Capital Improvements** –Securing a campus with fencing, cameras, building entrances etc. is critical and goes hand-in-hand with armed personnel. This is specifically true with a campus such as Aztec High School, and other campuses that are open and have buildings that are not connected with one entrance. The Legislature has done a good job of setting aside some funding for school districts to apply for to make some Capital improvements. As we move forward on this I hope that these funds will not be restricted by the ‘offsets’ that some districts have in order to qualify for the funding through Public Schools Capital Outlay Council. While I do understand that many districts have benefited from money and projects and that is why they have the offsets, I also believe that when it comes to the safety of districts and projects related to safety that offsets should not be a limiting factor and that ‘need’ should be the primary factor considered for this funding. Otherwise I think that many districts will have to wait until they can bond for improvements, ours included. There are many districts that cannot bond right now and have limited mill funds. If they are affected by the offsets this will limit their ability to apply for funds. Offsets should not apply to these grants when we are dealing with life safety issues.
4. **Mental Health** – The fourth part of this issue has to do with ensuring that districts are able to adequately address student’s mental health needs at an early onset and treat them adequately. This means having the resources both internally and in the community to make sure that when a student starts showing signs of needing assistance they can get identified, get assistance and the family can become an active, engaged partner with the school and the counseling agency to help the student get better. In most cases, the students that have caused harm in school shootings have been identified as some point as being in need. It comes down to having the resources, training, and partnerships, with mental health agencies, law enforcement, schools and the family established in a meaningful way to make sure the student gets the help they need and that there is follow-through. We must also make sure that laws don’t prohibit communication between agencies.
5. **Threats on Schools**– Since our school shooting we have had 2 dozen or more schools that had to have delays or closings because of threats of violence to their schools. Today if a student threatens to bomb a school it is a fourth degree felony, but yet if the same student threatens to shoot up a school, which unfortunately is probably more likely, it is a misdemeanor. This needs to be changed. We must make these acts a felony and then punish these students so that we continue to have deterrents as yet another measure to stop senseless acts of violence and create another step to help prevent school violence.

There are other things that need to be done, but it is something that is going to take many of us coming together and working on and it cannot wait, if not us who and if not now when? We hope and pray this does not happen again to anyone. But **hope** is not a strategy that will protect our children, so we must act now.

I apologize that this letter is so lengthy, but as you can imagine this topic is close to my heart. We cannot change what happened in our district, but we have full control how we move forward. We are not going to wait for change, we are going to be a part of it, but we also need your help. I am committed to do whatever it takes, so please know that, and let me know how I can help. Our hearts are mending and we are **AZTECSTRONG** and we will always have **faith** over **fear**.

I know that we will be meeting in Aztec in June. We hope that you will be able to be with us then as we look forward to giving you a tour of our school, sharing with you the things we have been doing in our area around safety. Thank you for what you do for our students and for serving the great state of New Mexico.

God Bless You and God Bless our Aztec Tigers!


Kirk M. Carpenter
Superintendent

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