

Welcome to the
**Safe Schools and
Communities
Conference**



2026 Safe Schools & Communities Conference

June 9-10, 2026

Great Crossing High School,
Georgetown, Ky.

Hosted by



www.kycss.org

Tuesday, June 9

- 7:15 – 8:15 a.m. DARE Mandatory Training (**ROOM 115**)
- 8:00 a.m. Registration opens (Donuts and Coffee – KYASRO)
- 9:00 – 9:15 a.m. Welcome (**AUDITORIUM**)
National Anthem – April Brown, Fayette Co. Public Schools

9:15 – 10:30 a.m. KEYNOTE SESSION: “School Safety and Threat Assessment in Schools” (AUDITORIUM)
Scott Poland (*See page 7 for bio*)

School personnel, such as administrators and counselors, are increasingly faced with complex situations where students have made violent threats towards others or even the entire school. Dr. Scott Poland has been involved in several legal cases where school personnel, including counselors, were sued over their management of a threat of violence, and he will share lessons learned from these cases. This workshop will provide step-by-step guidelines in a case format to help school personnel classify threats and to take appropriate investigative actions to reduce the likelihood of violence. Dr. Scott Poland has served on national crisis teams such as Red Lake, Minnesota and Littleton, Colorado and has responded to school shooting as far away as Brazil. He has many practical ideas about how to make schools safer and the important role in prevention for students. The importance of working collaboratively with local authorities will be stressed. Participants will learn practical strategies and tips that they can implement in their school system to manage threats of violence



10:30 – 10:45 a.m. Break

10:45 – 11:45 a.m. General Session: “Update from the Office of the State School Security Marshal” (AUDITORIUM)
Shannon West, Kentucky School Security Marshal

This session will cover an overview of the 2025 - 2026 risk assessments completed by the Office of the State School Security Marshal. It will also cover any new legislation that concerns school safety and security. The session will cover any new initiatives or concerns for the SRO's before starting the 2026 - 2027 school year.



11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Award Announcements – KYASRO and DARE Boards (**AUDITORIUM**)
SRO Promising Programs – Jon Akers

12:30 – 1:30 p.m. **Box lunches provided in the cafeteria**

1:30 – 2:30 p.m. Breakout Sessions #1

1. Guide to Recovery – NASSP Principal Recovery Network (BAND ROOM)

Patricia Greer, Director of the Resource Center, Kentucky Center for School Safety

This presentation provides an overview of the "Guide to Recovery" developed by the NASSP Principal Recovery Network—a resource grounded in the lived experiences of principals and assistant principals who have led schools through recovery after a shooting. The guide is a collection of personal best practices and practical advice, organized around five critical areas that typically demand immediate attention in the aftermath of school violence. Rather than serving as a step-by-step checklist, the guide offers thoughtful, experience-based guidance to help school leaders navigate the complex emotional, operational, and community challenges that follow a traumatic event. Participants will gain insight into the real-world lessons learned by school leaders who have faced these circumstances and will explore strategies to support students, staff, families, and the broader school community during recovery.



A door prize will be announced at the end of the last general session on Tuesday and Wednesday.
You must be present to win.

EILA, approved for 5 hours on day one and 5 hours on day two. EILA certificates and attendance certificates will be emailed to you after the conference.

2. Everyone's Role in Safeguarding Youth in the Digital Age (LIBRARY/MEDIA ROOM)

Scott Poland

Dr. Scott Poland is an internationally recognized expert on youth suicide, school crisis, and youth mental health. Social media and technology play an important and almost unavoidable role in the lives of our youth. Dr. Poland will review numerous research studies on youth mental health and social media, including the notable 2023 US Surgeon General Advisory on Social Media and Youth. It is most obvious now that there are many concerns about the impact of social media on youth, as it affects their sleep, their ability to interact in person with others, and may make them think they are not good enough or rich enough. There are also many concerns about the role social media plays in youth depression and suicide. The presenter will share many practical tips on the important role of schools and communities to help youth balance technology usage and to recognize when someone is at-risk for depression and suicide.



3. Hidden Struggles: Recognizing Signs of Mental Health Issues and Substance Use in School Students (ROOM 114)

Stephanie Carson, Clinic Manager for School-Based Services, NewVista

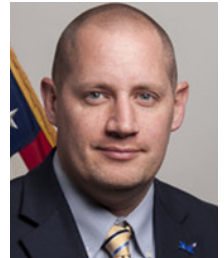
Hidden Struggles is a brief training designed to help school staff recognize early signs of mental health challenges and substance use in students. Participants will learn how these concerns may show up in behavior, academics, and relationships—and how to respond with empathy, support, and appropriate referrals.



4. Addressing Grooming Behaviors in Schools - and Getting it Right! (AUDITORIUM)

Chris Barrier, Director, Customer Partnerships, Centegix, and Former Chief of Police, Montgomery Co. Schools

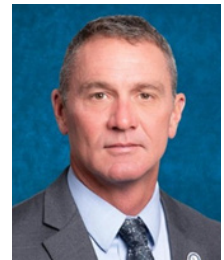
This training breaks down the newest legislation impacting schools and explains how these changes will strengthen protections, support classroom professionals, and enhance district wide readiness. Participants will also gain a clear, up-to-date understanding of the state and national landscape of grooming behaviors, including what trends educators must watch for, how grooming tactics evolve, and what proactive strategies help safeguard students and staff.



5. REUNIFICATION - What IS your Plan? (CHOIR ROOM)

Wanda Absher, KCSS Consultant and KYASRO Board Member
Toby Young, Chief, Pulaski County Schools Police Department

REUNIFICATION is not just for Fire, Severe Weather, or Critical Events. Sometimes, it can be for something as ordinary as a Utility Failure or Disruption. Whatever the reason, a PLAN should be in place AND practiced with key staff. A Reunification Plan is often overlooked, but it is an essential step that should be planned for like any other emergency procedure. This session will focus on the Why, When, Who, and How of a Reunification Plan. Take back to your school, practical step-by-step information on setting up a plan for your school.



6. School Resource Officer Roundtable (ROOM 115)

Bill Rudie, KYASRO President, and KYASRO Board Members

This roundtable will explore the evolving role of School Resource Officers (SROs) within today's educational environment. Participants will engage in meaningful discussions about current trends in school safety, including prevention strategies, collaboration with administrators, and the balance between safety and supportive school climates. The session will also address emerging challenges facing schools and how SROs can proactively respond while building positive relationships with students and staff.



2:30 – 2:45 p.m. Break

2:45 – 3:45 p.m. General Session: "Be The Agent" (AUDITORIUM)

Mark Leinweaver, Beverly Hills Sports Council

BE THE AGENT is a passionate, direct message about self-representation and making an impact in the lives of others. The presentation is designed to educate & inspire – and remind everyone of how important they are to the students and families they serve. Every educator shapes the culture. THEY set the example. This session is a fast-paced reminder of how powerful their influence can be while proving that they are a celebrity and, as such, have an agent. The daily path to success begins with leadership from one client: YOU!

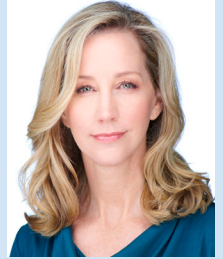


Wednesday, June 10

7:30 a.m. Registration opens (Donuts and Coffee – KYASRO)

8:00 – 10:00 a.m. KEYNOTE SESSION: “School Safety: A Parent's Perspective” (AUDITORIUM)
Michele Gay (See page 7 for bio)

Michele tells her personal story and recounts the lessons she learned on December 14, 2012, and in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook School tragedy. She shares the inspiring way she has chosen to help school communities improve school safety in honor of her daughter, Josephine, and the memory of the other 19 children and six teachers lost on December 14, 2012. Michele’s perspective, as the mother of a special-needs child and former elementary school teacher, provides unique insight and inspiration for parents, administrators, school staff, emergency responders, and community members who strive to make their schools safer. Michele Gay and the Safe and Sound Foundation bring an important message to our communities and represent a powerful presence in our national school safety community.



10:00 – 10:15 a.m. Break

10:15 – 11:15 a.m. General Session: “Behavioral Trends in Students: An Update on Mental Health and Substance Use” (AUDITORIUM)
Geoff Wilson, Lexington Counseling and Psychiatry

This training will provide attendees with an update on current trends related to mental health, behavioral, and substance use with youth. Onset of use, the impact on brain functioning, and the importance of early intervention will be highlighted. The rise in youth mental health issues will be addressed along with warning signs for suicidality. The need for family intervention will be discussed with an emphasis on early screening, assessment, and referral for care.



11:15 – 11:30 a.m. Break

11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Breakout Sessions #2

1. Promising Safety Practices Implemented Throughout Kentucky (LIBRARY/MEDIA ROOM)
Matt Moore, Legislative Liaison, Kentucky Center for School Safety

KCSS has the privilege of spending significant time in school districts across Kentucky, where we observe a wide range of innovative and effective school safety strategies. Through this work, we have identified many impressive practices that are making a meaningful difference in school communities. This session is designed to highlight some of the most impactful approaches we’ve seen in action. Our goal is to share practical ideas and proven strategies that you can take back and adapt within your own district to strengthen safety efforts.



2. Guide to Recovery – NASSP Principal Recovery Network (Repeat) (BAND ROOM)
Patricia Greer, Director of the Resource Center, Kentucky Center for School Safety

This presentation provides an overview of the "Guide to Recovery" developed by the NASSP Principal Recovery Network—a resource grounded in the lived experiences of principals and assistant principals who have led schools through recovery after a shooting. The guide is a collection of personal best practices and practical advice, organized around five critical areas that typically demand immediate attention in the aftermath of school violence. Rather than serving as a step-by-step checklist, the guide offers thoughtful, experience-based guidance to help school leaders navigate the complex emotional, operational, and community challenges that follow a traumatic event. Participants will gain insight into the real-world lessons learned by school leaders who have faced these circumstances and will explore strategies to support students, staff, families, and the broader school community during recovery.



3. Connecting the Dots: Protecting Drug-Endangered Children (DEC) Through Coordinated Prevention

(CHOIR ROOM)

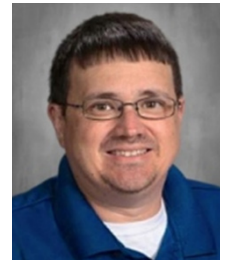
Andy Belcher, Ed.D. Founding Partner, Equus Leadership Solutions
Robert Carter, Ed.D., Founding Partner, Equus Leadership Solutions



What if the information that could change the trajectory of a drug-endangered child already exists—but is scattered across systems no one can see? This breakout session invites participants to move beyond traditional substance-use prevention approaches and into a data-informed, prevention-first model designed to support young people at their most critical moments. Led by practitioners working at the front lines of school safety and student well-being, the session examines the often-hidden connections between mental health and suicide risk, substance use, and school violence and how intentional, coordinated approaches can transform support for DEC when it matters most. Participants will explore how a first-of-its-kind digital case-management model is helping schools and communities identify risk earlier, align information across agencies and partners, and respond with clarity, speed, and compassion.

4. Safe, Smart, and Prepared: Our School Safety Plan (ROOM 114)

Leslie Cable, Guidance Counselor, Highland Turner Elementary School, Breathitt County Schools
Jeremy Hall, Principal, Highland Turner Elementary School, Breathitt County Schools



This presentation outlines Highland Turner Elementary School's comprehensive safety plan designed to protect students, staff, and visitors. It highlights emergency procedures, prevention strategies, communication protocols, and student-friendly safety practices. Our goal is to promote a safe learning environment where everyone knows their role and feels prepared, confident, and supported.

5. Legal Update - Hot Topics and Horseshoes (AUDITORIUM)

Wayne Young, Kentucky Association of School Administrators

This session will be a fast-paced overview of trending legal topics and a look into the crystal ball of what might be on the horizon in the school safety arena. It will include a look at new legislation, court cases, and other recent developments around the country.



6. Combatting Nihilistic Violent Extremism (ROOM 115)

Federal Bureau of Investigation Intelligence Analyst (IA) Elizabeth Bauman

IA Elizabeth Bauman currently serves on FBI Louisville's Joint Terrorism Task Force, supporting the Domestic Terrorism, International Terrorism, and Weapons of Mass Destruction programs. The task force has supported numerous FBI investigations into Nihilistic Violent Extremism activity in Kentucky and across the US, and regularly provide outreach to increase awareness and prevent future victimization. This presentation will provide an overview of Nihilistic Violent Extremism and how violent online networks target vulnerable and underage victims across the US and the world. Key points of discussion include warning signs and indicators, online safety and prevention, recommendations for intervention, and how to contact FBI Louisville for assistance.



12:30 – 1:30 p.m. **Box lunches provided in the cafeteria**

Conference Website

Scan the QR code for the conference website where you can download handouts.



Conference Evaluation

Scan the QR code to complete an evaluation on the conference.



1:45 – 2:45 p.m. Breakout Sessions #3

1. We are All on Duty – The Sequel (CHOIR ROOM)

Chele Gillon, District Lead Counselor, Barren County Schools
Lori Downs, Student Assistance Coordinator, Barren County Schools



School security is a topic that is on everyone’s radar as mass acts of violence continue to spearhead the news cycle. What do we need to do to keep everyone safe? What warning signs do we need to recognize? What are the potential pitfalls that we need to avoid? In this session, we will discuss the answers to these questions and more as we explore the power of building relationships, the need to train students and staff on how to report concerns, and the crucial role behavioral threat assessment plays in school safety. We Are All On Duty...The Sequel.

2. Building Effective Relationships: So, What Can We Do Together? (ROOM 114)

Chris Barrier, Former Chief of Police, Montgomery County Schools
Robert Carter, Hopkins County Schools (retired)



In 2026, school safety requires more than strong policies, it requires strong relationships. As schools navigate rising mental health needs, evolving safety concerns, and increased public scrutiny, collaboration between school administrators and law enforcement has never been more critical. Building Effective Relationships brings School Resource Officers (SROs) and school administrators together to strengthen trust-based partnerships with student safety and well-being as the shared priority. This session focuses on how effective collaboration works in real school environments where decisions must be timely, coordinated, and grounded in professional judgment. Participants will examine proven partnership models from education and public safety that emphasize communication, role clarity, shared responsibility, and accountability. Through real-world scenarios and practical discussion, attendees will gain strategies they can apply immediately to improve coordination, reduce friction, and support safer, more unified school communities.

3. Kentucky Legislative Updates Related to School Safety (LIBRARY/MEDIA ROOM)

Matt Moore, Legislative Liaison, Kentucky Center for School Safety



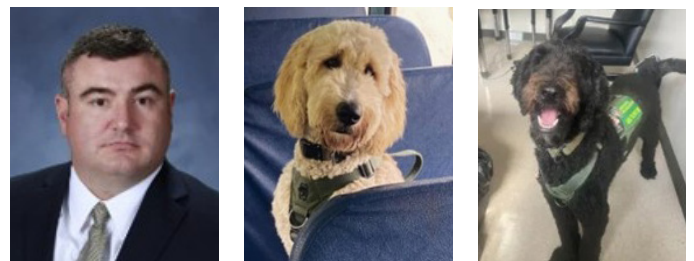
Legislators play a vital role in promoting the safety of students and school staff across the Commonwealth. In this session, KCSS will review key safety-related bills passed during the most recent Kentucky legislative session and outline the expectations these new laws place on school districts. Additionally, the session will include discussion of previously passed unfunded mandates and an overview of notable bills that did not advance this session, helping districts stay informed and prepared for future legislative developments.

4. K9 Therapy Dogs: A Deeper Look (BAND ROOM)

Larry Priddy and Vader, SRO, Bullitt County Schools
Aaron Brown, SRO, and the canine team (Ase & Max), Menifee County Schools



This presentation will highlight the impactful work of canines in schools, focusing on both the significant moments and the small, everyday interactions that make a lasting difference. Attendees will gain insight into how a therapy dog supports students and staff, enhances school climate, and contributes to overall well-being through consistent presence and connection. Participants will learn about the careful selection and acquisition process for therapy dogs, the temperament testing they must complete, and the rigorous training and certification standards required before placement. In addition, contact information and guidance will be shared for individuals or schools interested in obtaining a certified therapy dog.



5. Legal Update – Hot Topics and Horseshoes (repeat) (AUDITORIUM)

Wayne Young, Kentucky Association of School Administrators

This session will be a fast-paced overview of trending legal topics and a look into the crystal ball of what might be on the horizon in the school safety arena. It will include a look at new legislation, court cases, and other recent developments around the country.



6. Preventing Violence Before It Happens: Threat Assessment Teams and the FBI Partnership (ROOM 115)

FBI Training Staff

This presentation focuses on the proactive identification and management of potential threats through the development of Threat Assessment Teams. Participants will gain insight into behavioral indicators, investigative approaches, and structured assessment models used to evaluate persons of concern. The session will also outline how local agencies can leverage FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) resources and Threat Management Coordinators for advanced case support and training to School Resource Officers. Attendees will leave with actionable steps to implement effective prevention strategies within their own organizations.



Have a safe trip home. Please fill out your evaluation form online.

Meet the Keynote Speakers

Dr. Scott Poland

Dr. Scott Poland is an internationally recognized expert on youth suicide, school crisis and youth mental health. He has authored or co-authored seven books and numerous chapters on the subject, and he has provided direct assistance to numerous schools that have experienced terrorism, natural disasters, school shootings and suicides. He is a past Prevention Division Director of the American Association of Suicidology and Past President of the National Association of School Psychologists. Dr. Poland has testified about the mental health needs of children before the U.S. Congress on four occasions.



Michele Gay

Mother, educator, and co-founder of Safe and Sound Schools, Michele Gay chose to take action after losing her daughter Josephine Grace on December 14, 2012. Since that time, Gay has channeled her work as an advocate, improving safety and security in schools and communities across our country. Now a nationally and internationally recognized public speaker and school safety expert, Gay reaches audiences and consults with all levels of community institutions – schools, municipalities, houses of worship, educational and public safety leadership, state and federal governments, law enforcement agencies, and top news media sources. An educator by training – and fueled by the heart of a mother and community member – Gay is uniquely positioned to help others prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from tragedies of their own. Gay remains inspired by Josephine every day. She dedicates herself to honoring Josephine's memory through this work to ensure that every school, every child, and every community is truly safe and sound.





**KENTUCKY CENTER
for SCHOOL SAFETY**

Below is a list of resources that are available free of charge from the KCSS website:

Contact KCSS Form

kycss.org/contact-kcss



Request KCSS Resources Form

Available Resources Include:



Trainings Available

- Principal Mentoring Program
- SRO Mentoring Program
- Threat Assessment Trainings
- And More



Safe School Assessments

kycss.org/safe-school-assessments-and-reports/safe-school-assessment



- Emergency Management Resource Guide
- Emergency Management Quick Reference Guide
- Green-Red Flip Sign
- Elementary School Lockdown Workbook
- Safety Star Stickers
- Lockdown Star Poster
- Lockdown Door Poster
- Door Hangers
- HB 48 Emergency Contacts Poster
- Emergency Contacts Poster (English and Spanish)
- Emergency Contacts Card (English and Spanish)
- Principal Mentor Flipchart

kycss.org/kcss-request-form



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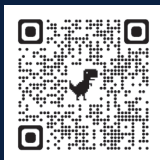
[REPORTS](#)

Promoting SCHOOL SAFETY

Across the Commonwealth

Click on Top Navigation to Access KCSS Resources

Check our website for materials and resources on **Kentucky Safe Schools Week** coming in September



Visit Kentucky Center for School Safety online: www.kycss.org

Handouts, PowerPoints, Resources, Brochures *and More*

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