STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

June 14, 2016

Dear Superintendents:

The mass shooting that occurred early Sunday morning in Orlando, Florida, is devastating and heartbreaking on so many different levels. We mourn with the friends and families who lost loved ones in the attack and pray for a speedy recovery for the injured. Proudly, we stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ and Orlando communities, who exemplify courage and resilience in the wake of such senseless, hateful violence.

As educators, the safety and well-being of our students, colleagues and school community is of paramount importance. Given this fact, I am sending this letter to provide specific resources that you may find helpful to share with staff and families in your districts and to provide information on ways the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) can be of assistance.

Written Materials

- *The National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement* at the University of Southern California developed a guide for parents and guardians on how to talk about the mass shooting in Orlando with children. This document helps explain for parents and guardians the importance of discussing the event with children and helps inform parents of common questions children ask in the aftermath of tragic events. Please find a copy of this document attached.

- *The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)* is a national education organization dedicated to ensuring safe, positive and inclusive school environments for students regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. They have compiled online resources with a focus on how to help support gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender students who might need assistance coping in the aftermath of the Orlando mass shooting. http://www.glsen.org/blog/addressing-orlando-shooting-your-school

- *The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS)* developed a guide for adults, "Restoring a Sense of Well-Being in Children After a Disaster: Tips for Parents, Caregivers and Professionals," to help reassure children and help them cope after a very traumatic event such as a mass shooting. This document is also attached.

- The third attachment, "Resources Addressing Trauma, Violence, and Grief in the Aftermath of a Mass Shooting," is a compendium produced by CSDE staff. Please consult this document for links to additional resources.

The aforementioned resources will be made available on the CSDE's website. In addition to these reference materials, state professionals are also available to assist you with questions or concerns that may arise in the aftermath of the horrific mass shooting in Orlando.

1. The Connecticut Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, School Safety Program, is available to meet with schools and school districts to review and provide technical assistance on their emergency operations plans. This assistance is available now and throughout the summer. For more information, please contact Bill Turley at 860-256-0849 or William.turley@ct.gov.
2. For questions regarding school psychology, counseling, social work, and health services, please contact the CSDE at (860) 807-2050.
3. For questions regarding school climate, please contact CSDE's Jo Ann Freiberg at (860) 713-6805.

Processing emotions and making sense of such catastrophic events can be very difficult for adults and children alike. However, the strength and resolve of the LGBTQ and Orlando communities serve as beacons of hope for us all. It reminds us of a truth we know too well ourselves—though heinous acts of violence may change our lives forever, these acts do not define us. In these moments, when we band together and ensure that our students, families, staff and communities are supported in having their mental health needs met, when we foster inclusive school environments that celebrate diversity, when love conquers hate, we are defined by our better selves.

As the academic year draws to a close, I hope that those who might need help coping with the traumatic event find the assistance they need. And I wish for you and your school community a safe, healthy and hopeful summer.

Sincerely,

Dianna R. Wentzell

Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell
Commissioner of Education