

Dear Mr. Dean:

Thank you for your recent communication to Secretary Arne Duncan expressing your concerns about youth violence and how to address it, as well as sharing information on your book and website. Your message has been forwarded to the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) for response.

Please know how deeply concerned and upset all of us at the Department are about youth violence and the effect it is having on communities: we know that each and every young person is precious, and are determined to do everything in our power to keep them all safe from harm.

Towards that end, the U.S. Department of Education provides funding and other resources to educators, community-based organizations, and other agencies to promote effective programs and strategies designed to address school and community violence (for more information on OSDFS programs and initiatives please visit: www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs).

Our violence prevention efforts are coordinated with other federal agencies such as the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services. There is much good work going on. But we and everyone in the Obama administration know that we need to do more. We are actively working to identify ways the government can have a positive impact in reducing violence.

At the direction of the president, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education officially launched in 2010 the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention (the forum) along with participating localities and other federal agencies. The administration created the forum as a context for participating localities to share challenges and promising strategies with each other and to explore how federal agencies can better support local efforts.

At a working session in October 2010 teams from the cities of Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, Tenn., Salinas, Calif. and San Jose, Calif. met with federal agencies and each other to share information and experience about what works in preventing youth and gang violence. Participating cities have pledged to develop or enhance comprehensive plans to prevent youth and gang violence in their city, using multi-disciplinary partnerships, balanced approaches, and data-driven strategies. The cities' comprehensive plans will be presented at a Youth Violence Summit to be held in Washington in spring 2011. These plans will aim to reduce violence, improve opportunities for youth, and encourage innovation at the local and federal levels. Participating cities were selected on the basis of need, geographic diversity, and willingness and capacity to engage. Along with Justice and Education, participating federal agencies include the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor and the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

"We know that if children aren't safe, then they can't learn," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who met with the forum participants in October. "We all have a stake in public safety and a responsibility to keep our children out of harm's way. This administration is committed to working with community and school leaders to identify core causes of crime and violence in and around our schools and to build the most effective solutions. This forum is an

opportunity to better learn how we can provide the tools and resources that communities, administrators, teachers, parents and students need to keep our children safe."

Furthermore, in his FY 2011 budget President Obama has requested \$410 million for a new Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students program. This program would support student achievement to high standards and help ensure that students are mentally and physically healthy and ready to learn, by strengthening efforts to: improve school climate by reducing drug use, violence, and harassment, and by improving school safety; improve students' physical health and well-being through the use of, or provision of access to, comprehensive services that improve student nutrition, physical activity, and fitness; and improve students' mental health and well-being through the use of, or provision of access to, comprehensive services, such as counseling, health, and mental health services, social services, and innovative family engagement programs or supports.

As proud as we are of these investments related to violence prevention, Secretary Duncan has emphasized.. This is not about the money. Money alone will never solve this problem. It's about our values. It's about who we are as a society. And it's about taking responsibility for our young people to teach them what they need to know to live side-by-side and deal with their differences without anger or violence. Here at the Department of Education, we are constantly examining what our responsibility is and how we might do more to reduce youth violence.

I applaud you, even while serving time in prison, for stepping up and taking responsibility for helping find a solution and I strongly encourage you to continue to work with local officials in your area to find ways to make our communities safer and to foster positive relationships with our youth. If we are to succeed, we must involve everyone -- parents, students, teachers, law enforcement, business, faith organizations, and others in the community -- in the creation of safe schools and communities.

Thank you for sharing your concerns and thoughts with us.

Kevin Jennings

Assistant Deputy Secretary of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools
550 12th Street SW, Room 10087, Washington DC 20024-6121 (202) 245-7830