

Johns Hopkins to offer school leaders safety programming

May 6 2019, by Carolyn Thompson

A Johns Hopkins University initiative announced Monday will offer short courses to principals and other school leaders as part of an effort to create standards around school health and safety.

Topics including student mental health and security technology will be offered through the Center for Safe and Healthy Schools launched by Johns Hopkins' School of Education.

The new center is being created as a recent poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that most Americans consider schools less safe than they were 20 years ago.

Dean Christopher Morhew said the new center will draw from university research to inform kindergarten through 12th grade school leaders who face decisions about keeping students healthy, engaging the community and securing schools against threats.

"What we're trying to do is really build a comprehensive approach to looking at safe schools, which is something that we see missing," Morhew said. "There's a lot of focus on security technology. There's a lot of focus ... on safety drills and other kinds of things but not a focus on a comprehensive approach to safe schools, and there's really an urgent need for that right now."

More than two dozen Johns Hopkins faculty members from disciplines ranging from public health to applied physics will work toward

identifying best practices for administrators tasked not only with hardening buildings in an era of school shootings but also with identifying and addressing root causes of the violence.

"We dig in and start thinking about what it means to be a safe school on an everyday basis," said Amy Shelton, associate dean for research. "It takes you out of that realm of how to protect against an active shooter and into the realm of saying, 'What are the qualities that make an environment feel safe to any given child?'"

Shelton said school leaders know that lots of students are under high levels of stress just getting to and from school on a daily basis or are undernourished.

"When you talk about the whole landscape of what it means to be safe, you can talk about mental health at the more severe end," Shelton said, "but you can also just talk about the daily issues of mental health and wellness of a child."

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