Members of the Education Writers Association, education experts and leaders, faculty, friends, and supporters:

On behalf of the Johns Hopkins University, including our colleagues at the John Hopkins Press and the Center for Talented Youth, welcome to Baltimore.

As America’s first research university, Johns Hopkins was founded on the principle that by pursuing big ideas and sharing what we learn, we make the world a better place.

We are honored to host your 72nd national seminar.

Education writers have a vital role to play in advancing the national conversation on improving student well-being, safety, and success.

Your work—and ours—is especially relevant because communities around the nation—and the schools to which they entrust their children—are facing a bewildering new landscape of challenges.

Columbine. Sandy Hook. Parkland.

...and Santa Fe, Texas. ...and Roseburg, Oregon. ...and Charlotte, North Carolina.

And Baltimore—Johns Hopkins’ hometown—where, this past February, a staff member was shot in Frederick Douglass High School, just four miles away.

Grieved, politicized, the tragedies borne by these communities—our communities—have been woven into our collective experience. They have changed the way we think about our students’ safety.

As the professionals who cover the education beat, you know all too well how the fear of violence has penetrated the fabric of our school systems.

We are in danger of raising a generation of children who are afraid to go to school.

Yet, policy debates and initial reactions set off by school shooting events—in urban, suburban, and rural districts alike—have gravitated toward narrowly focused and reactive solutions: Biometric scanners. Bullet-proof lunch trays. SROs armed with AR-15s.
The research tells us—and most teachers and school leaders will confirm—this narrow focus on trying to prevent—and even anticipate—gun violence does not take into account the broader array of complex challenges that affect the safety and well-being of students, teachers, and schools.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people between the ages of 10 and 24. It results in about 4,600 deaths per year\(^1\).

In 2017, more than 20% of students ages 12 to 18 say they were bullied in school\(^2\).

Black students accounted for 15.5% of all public school students last year, but represented 39% of students suspended in disciplinary actions\(^3\).

Rates of depression among teens have soared by more than 60 percent between 2009 and 2017.\(^4\)

Meanwhile, 14 million kids attend a school with a dedicated school-security officer—but no mental health professional.\(^5\)

The truth is that disciplinary actions, bullying, suicide, mental health, and other challenges of student safety and well-being are related.

Gun violence is part of that web of influence. But it’s seldom understood that way—even by many school leaders across the nation.

Last year—as some of you probably reported—a district superintendent in Pennsylvania said he would supply his classrooms with five-gallon buckets of rocks to ward off armed intruders.

Understandably, the idea was ridiculed—understandably, but maybe unfairly singled out. As foolish as it may sound, the big-bucket-of-rocks response is only one of many knee-jerk reactions that typically emerge after violent events grab the headlines.

Why? School leaders are responding to fear—the understandable fear expressed by parents, staff, and communities that motivates them to do something—anything—to ease minds.

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1 “Suicide Among Youth,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, September 15, 2017.
5 “Cops and Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students,” American Civil Liberties Union Report, March 4, 2019.
But fear **cannot** be the basis for effective education policy or practice. We need to do more to ensure that school leaders have the training and resources to create and maintain safe and healthy schools.

When school shooting incidents have occurred, in my role as dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Education, I’ve sometimes been asked by reporters—maybe even some in this room—to talk about what we’re doing to solve the problem. To date, I haven’t felt satisfied with my answer.

Schools of education have often been criticized for not adapting to the times; for conducting research that is **not useful for school communities and school leaders**.

That needs to change now.

That’s why we are officially launching—**today**—the Johns Hopkins **Center for Safe and Healthy Schools**.

The center is dedicated to addressing the complex and urgent issues of creating safe and healthy environments with comprehensive, evidence-based solutions for districts and schools.

Other universities are making important contributions to understanding facets of these issues. Johns Hopkins is the first higher education institution to pull the many pieces of school safety and health together in one cross-disciplinary center dedicated to addressing them **comprehensively**.

We have gathered a **world-class team** of researchers from across Johns Hopkins—education, public health, arts and sciences, and applied physics—to apply their expertise around practices, programs, tools, and policies integral to safe and healthy school environments.

We are moving **siloed conversations**—about pressing issues like suicide, trauma, bullying, and gun violence—into a more holistic discussion about how we, as a nation, can make schools safer.

We are building on our knowledge and tapping our deep bench of experts to design effective solutions for districts and schools across three critical areas:

**Health and wellness**

**Schools and community engagement**

**School security and technology**

Over the next few days, you have the opportunity to engage with a dozen of Johns Hopkins’ **faculty and alumni**—**leading thinkers** on reducing school absenteeism, restorative practices, adolescent mental health, community-based suicide prevention, and other important issues.

And in the months ahead, we will be **releasing new research**, best practices, tools, and resources that can be used by districts and schools nationwide.
We will be embedding safe and healthy schools programming into our core curriculum in counseling, teacher preparation, special education, and administration and supervision—to make it an integral part of training the next generation of educators. This is a definitive, 21st-century education issue, and I think you’ll see many schools of education beginning to follow suit.

We will be sharing our knowledge with teachers and school leaders nationwide through a pioneering suite of micro-credentialing courses in safe and healthy schools.

We will be working with the only national, comprehensive study of school security and technology from the Applied Physics Lab, and translating the evidence to help practitioners make informed decisions about school safety.

We will also be announcing a new director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Safe and Healthy Schools, a national leader in the field who can guide our comprehensive, holistic effort.

In the late 19th century, the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine led the way in transforming the practice of medicine.

In the 20th century, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health led the way in protecting populations from illness and injury by pioneering research and practices in public health.

In the 21st century, the School of Education will lead the way toward evidence-based transformation of education. The Johns Hopkins Center for Safe and Healthy Schools is a critical part of that vision.

All students deserve to go to school in safe and healthy environments, where they can learn and thrive.

I look forward to partnering with you to continue this important conversation.

Thank you.