

This week, the San Diego community marks a tragic anniversary. It has been 40 years since the first school shooting in city history, the attack at Cleveland Elementary School on January 29, 1979. The shooting took the lives of two brave public servants: Principal Burton Wragg and custodian Mike Suchar from San Diego Unified. A brave police officer was wounded, as well several students. I met one of those students today at a small event hosted by San Diego Unified. Chris Stanley is now a teacher -- a recognition of the fact his life was saved by an educator on that terrible day 40 years ago. I met gun safety advocates and members of law enforcement who have dedicated their lives to protecting others from gun violence.

Schools find themselves at the center of the issue of gun violence because of the horrific frequency with which campus shootings occur. Last year was the worst on record for school shootings in the nation, according to Sandy Hook Promise, who counted 94 incidents. Our young people are living in fear, and it is up to all of us to confront this issue with courage. There are no simple answers, and schools cannot resolve the issue alone. However, I believe schools are the right place for this conversation to begin.

San Diego Unified has launched an effort to expand the community conversation around guns. In addition to the event I mentioned with the Cleveland Elementary survivor, our students are participating in several conversations next month to mark the one year anniversary of the Parkland shooting. Student-directed efforts are especially powerful, and our community should be very proud of the leadership our young people have shown. Now, it is up to the entire community to do its part.

Our district is sending every parent three key information items to push the gun safety conversation forward. Working with the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, we are reminding families to store legal firearms safely and reminding parents to ask whether there are any weapons when their children visit a friend's house. These conversations can be uncomfortable, but as advocates correctly say, if you're willing to ask about pets, pools and peanuts in a home, you should ask about pistols or other firearms.

Most importantly, we plan to email parents information on how to get guns away from those who are a threat to themselves or others. Gun violence restraining orders are a relatively new tool in the fight against gun violence, but they are an important asset. They give parents the ability to restrict weapons access from young people facing mental stress or other issues. They empower neighbors to protect neighbors from harming themselves. These restraining orders can save lives, but very few families are aware of the option. And here, I should credit our City Attorney Mara Elliott with doing a heroic job to keep San Diego informed.

There is a bench outside the Education Center that I pass on my way into every school board meeting. It honors the San Diego Unified employees who lost their lives at Cleveland Elementary. It reminds us all of their sacrifice and obligates us to do our part in protecting children. Now is the time for us all to start having those difficult conversations around gun safety and what we can do to protect and care for each other.