

ARMING TEACHERS INTRODUCES NEW RISKS INTO SCHOOLS

Seeking a response to the tragedy of school shootings, legislators in some states have eschewed proven solutions that approach the problem from every angle and have been seduced by the risky and false idea that arming teachers and school staff will make our schools safe. In fact, an armed teacher cannot, in a moment of extreme duress and confusion, be expected to transform into a specially trained law enforcement officer. An armed teacher is much more likely to shoot a student bystander or be shot by responding law enforcement than to be an effective solution to an active shooter in a school.

Our leaders should instead pursue an evidence-based intervention plan that addresses what we know about school gun violence. For more information about evidence-based school safety solutions, visit: everytownresearch.org/school-safety.

INTRODUCTION

Arming teachers is opposed by school safety experts like law enforcement, and teachers and parents.

The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association are the nation's two largest teachers' organizations representing millions of educators and staff. They oppose arming teachers.¹

The National Association of School Resource Officers strongly opposes proposals to arm teachers due to the risk it would pose to law enforcement, students and the school community, as well as the risks to the armed teachers themselves.²

The President and Executive Director of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, which represents 75 police forces from large cities in the USA and Canada, both agree that arming teachers is *"not a good idea"*³ and say, *"The more guns that are coming into the equation, the more volatility and the more risk there is of somebody getting hurt."*⁴

A March 2018 survey of almost 500 U.S. teachers found that **73 percent** oppose proposals to arm school staff.⁵

Another survey found that **63 percent** of parents of elementary, middle, and high school students oppose arming teachers.⁶

The notion of a highly trained teacher armed with a gun is a myth.

Law enforcement officers receive an average of **840** hours of basic training including 168 hours of training on weapons, self-defense, and the use of force.⁷ In states that have laws aimed at arming school personnel, school staff receive significantly less training. In some of these states there is no minimum training required at all.

Even some of the most highly trained law enforcement officers in the country, those of the New York City Police Department, see their ability to shoot accurately decrease significantly when engaged in gunfights with perpetrators.⁸

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THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS INCIDENTS WHERE GUNS CARRIED INTO SCHOOLS WERE MISPLACED — GUNS LEFT IN BATHROOMS, LOCKER ROOMS, SPORTING EVENTS, EVEN AN INCIDENT WHERE A GUN FELL OUT WHILE A TEACHER DID A BACKFLIP.

KEY FINDINGS

Students will access teachers' guns.

Research strongly supports the idea that children will access guns when guns are present.

- One study showed that the majority of children are aware of where their parents store their guns. In fact, more than one third of those children reported handling their parents' guns, many doing so without the knowledge of their parents.⁹ Nearly a quarter of parents did not know that their children had handled the gun in their house.¹⁰

There have been numerous incidents where guns carried into schools were misplaced — guns left in bathrooms,¹¹ locker rooms,¹² sporting events,¹³ even an incident where a gun fell out while a teacher did a backflip.¹⁴

There are also multiple incidents where guns were stolen from teachers by students, or cases where guns were misplaced and later found in the hands of students.¹⁵

The risk of shootings increases.

Access to a firearm, irrespective of age, **triples the risk of death by suicide** and **doubles the risk of death by homicide.**¹⁶

There have been several incidents of guns intentionally or unintentionally discharged on school grounds by school staff. This includes both intentional and unintentional shootings such as:

- A janitor who killed two of his colleagues at a performing arts school in Florida.¹⁷
- A Spanish teacher who was fired and then returned to school with an AK-47 in a guitar case that he used to kill the school headmaster and then himself.¹⁸
- Firearm suicides by faculty or staff at schools.¹⁹
- Unintentional incidents, by both school resource officers in schools and teachers who accidentally discharged their firearms.²⁰

Arming teachers introduces new liability risks.

When several districts in Kansas sought to arm teachers, the insurance companies informed them that they would not insure such a dangerous practice.²¹

School policies may expose teachers to criminal liability in the event policies are not consistent with state law. It is also unlikely that insurance companies would indemnify schools from monetary claims in these cases.

State immunity laws cannot exempt schools from all legal liability, particularly federal civil rights liability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The best way to protect American schools from mass shootings and gun violence is to adopt an evidence-based intervention plan like the one proposed by Everytown, The American Federation of Teachers, and The National Education Association.

Using what we know about school gun violence, our organizations have put together a plan that focuses on intervening before violence occurs. The first part of this plan focuses on preventing shooters from getting their hands on guns by enacting sensible laws including:

1. Extreme Risk laws

Laws that empower family and law enforcement to petition a judge to temporarily prevent a person from having access to guns when they pose a serious risk to themselves or others. These laws empower family members and law enforcement to act on warning signs of violence, which most active shooters exhibit before shootings at school.

2. Responsible firearm storage laws

Laws that require that people store firearms responsibly when they are not in their possession in order to prevent unauthorized access. These laws, along with building public awareness of responsible storage, can address the most common source of guns used in school gun violence.

3. Raising the age to purchase semiautomatic firearms to 21

These laws raise the age to purchase all semiautomatic firearms to 21, to match the age to purchase a handgun from a licensed gun dealer. Most active shooters at schools are school-aged. These laws can prevent minors from easily obtaining guns.

4. Requiring background checks on all gun sales

Under current federal law, background checks are only required for sales from licensed gun dealers, but not for sales between unlicensed individuals. This gap enables people exhibiting warning signs, minors, and people with dangerous histories to evade gun laws and get their hands on guns at gun shows or from strangers they meet online. Requiring a background check on all gun sales is the foundation of any comprehensive gun violence prevention strategy.

The second part of the plan focuses on evidence-based and expert-endorsed actions that schools can take to intervene and address warning signs of violence and to keep shooters out of schools. Schools can do this by:

1. Establishing threat assessment programs

Threat assessment programs are school programs to identify and manage potential threats of violence. These programs allow schools to understand and intervene when a student is a risk to themselves or others.

2. Implementing basic security upgrades

Basic security measures that prevent unauthorized access to school buildings, grounds, and classrooms, including access control measures and interior door locks, can intervene to prevent access to a school and give law enforcement time to respond.

3. Planning in advance for emergencies

Effective emergency planning, which facilitates communication, can empower staff to immediately lock out schools and allow law enforcement to respond quickly.

4. Establishing safe and equitable schools

Schools should review school discipline practices, establish community schools, ensure threat assessment programs are not having a disproportionate impact on communities of color, and promote effective partnerships between students and adults in order to keep schools safe.

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