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**Protecting Public Schools Against the Reoccurring Threat of
Domestic Terrorism**

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ABSTRACT

Today, public schools are being faced with violence committed by active shooters who intensify the threat level of domestic terrorism. More often than not, public schools are not equipped to protect themselves from the violence committed by active shooters. Many times, this is due in part to tight budget constraints in public school systems and the lack of funding to assign school resource officers or school marshals.

This nation shares a common concern and agreement that there is an immediate need for solutions to implement heightened security measures to protect students and teachers. Therefore, to combat current and future challenges of the growing threats of domestic terrorism committed against public schools by active shooters, qualified teachers should be properly trained to carry firearms in the absence of school marshal's or school recourse officers. Implementation of this suggested solution has the potential of increasing safety for students and teachers wherein no current security measures are in place.

Arming teachers in schools to protect school grounds in the absence of law enforcement is a promotional idea and solution that is leading headlines. With this idea comes a source of hot debate in which some school administrations have already adopted while others do not want any part of it. However, due to the numerous pros and cons, the decision makers are racing to find a compromise to the right answer with regard to this issue. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal is to stop, prevent, deter, or reduce the catastrophic consequences of future active shooter incidents.

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INTRODUCTION

Repeated and continuing surges of gun violence attacks on public schools are compromising the safety of students and teachers in this country. Year after year, all across America, the toll of deaths or serious injuries to children and teachers are rising with the increasing random acts committed by active shooters. The violence dealt by an active shooter when they target a gun free school zone is tragic. An act of domestic terrorism damages the very core of American freedom and the effects are felt nationwide.

Public schools remain a leading location for debate on how this country can protect its children and teachers. Each one who is in one way or another victimized by these crimes are often affected on a very personal level when the pains inflicted by these events strike at home. When an innocent child is hurt in some way by an act of terror on school grounds, the nation grieves and its pain is deep and immeasurable. But with this grief, each event brings the demand for answers, solutions, and justice. The common goal is to prevent or at the very least combat another random act of domestic terrorism against public schools.

Every American affected by these attacks either as a victim or witness demand solutions so it never happens again. Unfortunately, there are no solutions that can possibly ensure that. It must be accepted that somewhere, someone is contemplating an attack right now and plans to prevent or combat an attack need to be implemented. Whatever the solution is, children need to be able to feel free to go to school to learn but not feel imprisoned by measures that are taken to prevent the consequences of an active shooter.

In light of the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School attack, law enforcement and other government officials along with public school and community leaders have been extremely proactive in searching for solutions to conquer this very problem. One solution in particular leading headlines is the promotional idea to arm teachers in schools to protect school grounds in the absence of law enforcement. This idea has become a source of hot debate in which some school administrations have already adopted while others do not want any part of it. However, with no clear solution at hand due to numerous pros and cons, the decision makers are racing to find a compromise to the right answer with regard to this issue. The ultimate goal is to stop, prevent, deter or reduce future occurrences of active shooter incidents.

Without a doubt, in this day and age, there is no chance that these attacks will stop. However, if school district administrators were to agree to train and arm teachers, it is highly probable that the attacks would be considerably deterred or best case scenario the targeted school will be ready to fight back if it comes under fire. Therefore, to combat current and future challenges of the growing threats of domestic terrorism that occurs against public schools, teachers and select school staff officials should be properly trained to carry firearms where school marshal's or school recourse officers are not assigned or readily available to provide protection.

POSITION

Based on the complexity of the problem with active shooters attacking schools, it is absolutely necessary that if there is going to be a gun fight, the only way to level the playing field is that the aggressor be met with equal or greater aggressive responses to counter an attack. This can be matched with better training and weaponry. According

to a study conducted by Cowan & Rossen (2013), "Reasonable physical security measures, response protocols, crisis drills, and solid relationships with community public safety responders are critical" (p. 10). But that is not enough. Arming teachers or select school staff in the absence of a school recourse officer or school marshal will decrease the murderous abilities taken by an active shooter.

Without a gun vs. gun policy approach, the individual that is unarmed is guaranteed to be forced to surrender or in the worst of case scenarios, murdered. In most cases of active shooter incidents, the motive was to kill select targets. In the majority of school shootings that have occurred across the United States where schools were unprotected, the attack resulted in numerous victims who were severely wounded or killed and the location was a gun free zone. In 2011 in Tucson, Arizona, "The attack against Congresswoman Gabrielle Gifford was the only public shooting recorded since at least 1950 in the United States where more than three people were killed and it was a permitted location for carrying a gun" (Lott & Landes, 2013, p. 30). Every other location where three or more people have been killed in a public shooting occurred in a gun free zone.

If an attacker was to determine or suspect that a school had armed individuals who were there standing ready to protect the school's student body and faculty staff, it would be an absolute deterrence to make that particular school a primary target. In 1999, a famous study was conducted that revealed, "one of the characteristics of mass shootings is that they generally occur in places where firearms are banned" (Lott & Landes, 2013, page 30). The study was conducted by John Lott of the University of Maryland and William Landes of the University of Chicago.

All in all, the active shooter does not want resistance but is in search of soft targets. Therefore, the active shooter would most likely look for a lesser fortified and unprotected target. Lawrence Fitzgerald, CPP, PSP suggested schools employ layered security measures. According to Fitzgerald (2013), "Protection in depth otherwise called layered security requires an aggressor to employ different skills and tools to penetrate multiple layers of different types of security measures" (p. 26). For example, a school that practices lock down drills, participates in police responses to active shooter scenario training at school and arms teachers and select faculty staff members has layered security measures in place. This makes for a more difficult arena to carry out an attack. In fact, if a public school is attacked by an active shooter and the school is not protected with armed law enforcement, security or other personnel, the only alternative for school leadership is to rely upon layered security measures that are in place and that have been practiced and planned for deployment in the event of such an attack.

If no measures are in place, someone who knows an attack is in progress will have to notify the police to respond. The time it takes from the point of notification to the time of a first responder's arrival on scene and engagement of the threat is critical. All being said, first responders know that while precious time ticks by a tragedy is more than likely unfolding where no one is armed to engage the attacker as a trained responder. One can only hope and pray that the cops get there before the attacker gets to the students or teachers. It is evident that without a gun in the hand of a teacher to serve as protection at the point of the attack, a school shooting incident almost guarantees a tragic outcome.

It is also known that public schools commonly practice lockdown drills for preparations of “just in case” scenarios. In Sandy Hook Elementary School, they too had practiced repeated drills and actually followed procedure when the school came under attack. However, students and teachers alike were still seriously injured or killed because no one there was armed with firearms to combat the attacker.

Several locations of past active shooter attacks were that of churches, shopping malls, restaurants, movie theatres and public schools all of which are commonly known to be unprotected gun free zones with no armed security in place. On occasion, when one of the targets did have armed individuals on scene at the time of the attack, the plan was foiled altogether or serious injuries and death were avoided or drastically reduced. Therefore, a location of such would be considered a hard target. Additionally, a hard target would be considered a location where heavy resistance would be met and it would not make it very high on the list of objective strikes for an active shooter. For example, the probability of an active shooter going into a restaurant with three marked police cars parked outside with intent to murder everyone inside would be highly unlikely. Of course, that is unless the police were the specified target of the shooter. The attacker would also have to know that chances are high that they would be met with a hail of return gunfire, thereby making the restaurant a hard target. Thus, it is imperative that public schools take swift action to prevent at best heavy losses to students and faculty by implementing staff that can shoot back.

According to NRA Executive Vice President, Wayne LaPierre, “The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun” (Feldmann, 2013, p. 1).

Teachers and faculty staff members that have passed background screening and have been trained properly in a standardized training program and have demonstrated clear ability to qualify with a firearm should be permitted to carry concealed handguns in and on schools grounds. The program to arm teachers would serve as a key to lowering protective response times for engaging the threat of an active shooter. A gun that is carried by a properly trained teacher will make the school a harder target and reduce the number of casualties by keeping students and faculty safe. According to the NRA's National School Shield Task Force Director and former Congressman Asa Hutchinson, "The program to arm teachers would be voluntary but crucial to halting an active shooter in a school and could save lives" (Feldmann, 2013, p. 1).

The NRA has also agreed to provide a standardized training program to teachers and law enforcement alike to carry firearms to protect public schools. Far too many times students and teachers have been lost as a result of an attack by an active shooter. Following the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Semeiks (2013) stated that "Newtown families of victims affected most hoped to gain changes from their leadership that might have redeemed the horrifying deaths of their children in some small measure" (p.16). Certainly, arming teachers would be worthy of a try if it prevents an attack or even saves one life of a student or teacher. For instance, "Picture this: If Adam Lanza had encountered a teacher with a gun when he blasted into Sandy Hook Elementary School, maybe 26 students and staff who were killed or incapacitated would have survived and a tragedy prevented." (Scherer, 2012, p. 1). Public school children are precious and the teachers who educate are invaluable to this country's future and success. Therefore, until such time as school administrations and law enforcement

leaders can assign a school marshal or school police resource officer to every school within an independent school district, select teachers should be trained and armed with a firearm to protect the school from active shooter(s).

COUNTER POSITION

The opposing sides of arming school personnel often argue that a gun free zone means should be just that: a place where no guns are allowed and no school or any institution designated to provide education to children should be permitted to have guns present. According to Brian Siebel, an attorney at the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, he pointed out that less than 1% of children who are killed by someone else are attacked at school. Some opinions indicated that, "Putting guns into those classrooms increases the risk that the guns might be taken and misused." ("Up In Arms," 2008). However, the chances of survivor rates will increase if firearms are presented to trained teachers or supervisors to protect the school in the event of an active shooter.

Secondly, guns in a school enhance the creation of an automatic anti-safety factor for student children. A clear and present danger will emerge if guns are introduced into the classroom. It does not matter if the weapons are located in various areas of the school under lock and key or even concealed on the person of a teacher or faculty member, they can still be accessed. This adoption of teachers being armed would cause a sense of insecurity on the student's part. According to the American Federation of Teachers President, Randi Weingarten the idea is "irresponsible and dangerous as schools must be safe sanctuaries not armed fortresses" (Barker, 2012, p.4). This is agreeable to a limited point. If the guns are handled appropriately, the

danger completely shifts in the direction of an attacker and that is exactly who the danger should be subjected to. In fact, it is the only reason for adopting this method of security, which is to be used against an attacker. This serves as a deterrent because if an active shooter knows there is a gun in a classroom, they will be far more unlikely to attack a school that they know has elements in place who can fight and shoot back.

Unfortunately, the United States has endured a long history of school violence that involved a firearm. Though some people would say this is new, history reveals otherwise. School shootings have been tracked as far back as 1890 in which a boy killed a classmate in retaliation for bullying. Shootings in schools that result in mass casualties have escalated since the introduction of semi-automatic weapons. This theory behind the increase in mass casualties is because a active shooter does not have to reload as much as a person had to in the early days where only single shot weapons were possessed or aquired. Thereby, the overall counter position to arming teachers almost always leads back to the need for more gun control. As such, "Americans have continually failed to place consistent and substantial limits on firearms and most egregiously on semiautomatic assault weapons" (Schneider, 2013, p.1). If there was more control over America's arsenal of weapons, this would be an absolute factor resulting in fewer active shooter mass casualties. This may be true but not to the degree of satisfaction. A perpetrator committed and set on obtaining a firearm, can do so even by violation of gun restriction laws because of the mass quatity of accessible guns that are located throughtout this country. A firearm can be aquired through just about any method imaginable. No gun control law is going to prevent an active shooter

from carrying out an attack. Only a human element that courageously stands in a active shooters harmful way can stop an attack.

There is another theory that arming teachers is only as effective as the teacher wants to be and depends totally on whether the teacher is willing and capable to shoot an active shooter attacking a school. In an online survey, “10,661 teachers and administrators from all 50 states, nearly three in four educators say they would be unlikely to bring a firearm to school if allowed to do so” (Toppo, 2013, p. 3a). One important factor to consider in retrospect is that this study reveals that one out of four educators would be likely to bring a firearm to school if permitted to do so and that ratio is a good source of protection for a school.

Some indications of public opinion predict that the introduction of guns into the workplace for a teacher could result in their mental breakdown, thereby turning them into the active shooter. Historically this has not occurred. Therefore this is unsubstantiated. With that said, however, according to Jason P. Nance, “Arming teachers and stiffening security measures could intensify the creation of barriers of mistrust between students and educators” (Nance, 2013, p.57). This idea is also expanded to the opinion that if public schools allow teachers to become armed, they will be suddenly faced with untrustworthy and false senses of security that pose threats of the armed teachers turning on students and thereby becoming the terrorist. By introducing guns in public schools and eliminating “gun free zones,” new threats of danger will emerge nationwide. The ultimate goal all along was to stop, prevent, deter or reduce future occurrences of active shooter incidents. However, what is not understood is that laws pertaining to “gun free zones” will not be eliminated but

strengthened by outlining new exceptions for qualified teachers who are selected to protect their schools with firearms.

According to Alabama Senator, Bill Holtzclaw, a conservative Republican and a retired Marine, “We must recognize the difference between a teacher carrying a concealed weapon and the training required to engage an active shooter.” (Person, 2013, p. 9a). In other words, having a gun does not automatically qualify a person to take swift action if met face to face with a combat scenario. Teachers must be trained and have a mindset that they are capable of protecting life and defending themselves or another even if that means taking a human life. Arming schools with police officers is the ultimate answer to combatting the active shooter problem but again in the absence of law enforcement, exceptions must be made. Ultimately, the responsibility thereof falls on law enforcement. According to Chief Gary D. Rudick, “As the nation’s fear of violence in public schools increases, the pressure placed on police agencies to protect the educational environment increases as well” (Rudick, 2011, p. 17). But, as previously stated, this is just not feasible to perform the demands of this magnitude at the volume needed and expedited rate that’s expected. Reality is that arming teachers is not a long term fix but is a temporary one that is immediately feasible.

Lastly, some believe the theory that an active shooter would be deterred if they knew a school was protected with gun toting teachers is not founded. In many cases, the active shooter’s motive for the attack was in reference to emotional retaliation for something and no amount of protection would stop the active shooters attempt to penetrate the protection to get to the target. For instance, the shooter felt belittled by the targets that are identified as students or teachers who are known by name or for the

type of social characterization they are associated with. However, though this is a possibility and has been determined as the motive of some past active shooters, a public school protected by armed individuals ready to do what is necessary to protect will fare far better than the contrary of no one being armed at the time the attack is carried out. Charlton Heston went on record to say, “There are no good guns. There are no bad guns. Any gun in the hands of a bad man is a bad thing. Any gun in the hands of a decent person is no threat to anybody – except bad people” (Heston, n.d.).

RECOMMENDATION

This nation needs more gun control laws to stop, prevent, deter or reduce future occurrences of active shooter incidents. Arming teachers is not the only answer to solving this country’s problem of violence committed against schools. However, more gun control laws supported with mandatory police assignments as school marshals or school resource officers at every school will make more of a positive difference to increasing the safety of students and teachers. School districts must act now in the interim of fulfilling law enforcement assignments in every school.

Regardless of America’s position is on the left or the right, as “liberals point at gun control and violence on television and conservatives blame family breakups and the removal of God from schools” (Domenech, 2013, p. 25), the truth is that times have changed. Bullying in public schools has become a national condition. More and more often, these bullying incidents have escalated to the point of one or more individuals making a decision to take up arms with intent of attacking the very heart of our country’s schools with missions directed at killing student children and faculty staff they feel wronged by. In some other cases, it just boils down to a mentally ill subject or a totally

sane person filled with hate that decides to strike a random public school for no apparent motive or reason other than to commit mass murder.

One common rule is that a person should not bring a knife to a gunfight, and they certainly should not show up unprepared to do battle. An unprotected school is no better off than a church, movie theater, restaurant, or a crowded shopping mall that has no security to fight back and combat an attacker. Each has its own uniqueness and identity but each has the same vulnerability if left unprotected.

According to Ripley & Fellow, "Odds are that students killed at school are about 1 in 3 million. That's lower than the odds of being struck by lightning" (Ripley & Fellow, 2013, p.33). Sometime sooner or later, some student somewhere will become that one in three million and an unknown number of victims will fall at the hands of an active shooter. Once again, this country will be struck by tragedy. It is inevitable. The event will be broadcasted throughout the country by numerous media outlets and the nation will once again mourn the loss of innocent victims because little or nothing was done to protect and engage the crazed killer(s). This nation and its public schools cannot afford to wait until it happens again. Public schools must act now and without delay to train and arm teachers.

Public schools need to ensure that protective measures to combat this style of attacks are in place. Cost factors should not be an issue as the life of any child is priceless. Training and arming teachers will cost less in the interim than to have a school marshal or school resource police officer in place. However, the ultimate goal of a school district should be to eventually have law enforcement present in every public school. Arming teachers is only a temporary solution until a school district could absorb

the costs associated with hiring police officers to assume the role of public school protectors. But it is a necessary solution to enhance safety.

A compromise to arm teachers will most likely be based on each individual community's needs and wants dependent totally upon the community's decisiveness with how it chooses to protect its kids and teachers. The fact is that, "kids become victims of gun violence far too often but almost always outside of school, gun free zones and pistol toting teachers" (Ripley & Fellow, 2013, p.33). However, arming teachers in public schools is essential and necessary to answer the immediate solution of combating the ongoing threat of active shooter(s). It is unfortunate, but attacks against this country's children and teachers will continue. It is not if, but when.

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