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Opposing Viewpoints: Preparing Students, Teachers, and the Community for School Shootings: Saving Lives with Active Shooter Simulations

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By Michael Gubiotti

One can never be too prepared for a disastrous event such as an earthquake, tornado, fire, or any other type of natural disaster that our K-12 schools prepare for on a regular basis. So why not prepare for an event that is so unnatural as to cause nationwide concern? The type of event in question is a school shooting. Over the last couple of decades, and particularly in the years following the school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado, there have been legislative efforts by many states towards participation in school shooting simulations. In Illinois, an elementary school superintendent was quoted saying, "I'd much rather [. . .] children be a little bit scared and alive, than not knowing what to do and end up being hurt." By preparing students, teachers, and the communities for school shootings in a realistic scenario, everyone involved will be better prepared for an actual school shooting and lives will be saved.

Law enforcement and other members of the community, such as church members and parents, may be involved in an active shooter simulation. Some of these simulations have involved the discharge of guns; however, the guns are merely loaded with blanks in order to create as realistic a scenario as possible. These simulations have sparked concerns that these types of drills are going too far and have the potential of traumatizing students. Despite these concerns, there is a need to educate students, teachers, and the communities on how to react if a shooting were to occur due to the increased occurrences of school shootings throughout the United States.

Although it may seem like a big step to discharge a gun, even if they are only blanks, realistic demonstrations and simulations have been occurring for years. The activist group Mother's Against Drunk Driving ("MADD") has been putting on demonstrations at schools for many years now. In some of these cases MADD will have student and teacher volunteers put on very realistic demonstrations of car wrecks, which include real cars, fire engines, and ambulances. In these scenarios the students watch as "victims" are pulled from cars, covered in fake blood and wounds, and are taken away in ambulances. In comparison, realistic school shooting simulations are not so farfetched as to be considered an inappropriate means of educating students, teachers, and members of the community about the reality of school shooting occurrences.

Another critique of these active shooter simulations is that it creates distrust when students are not forewarned that a simulation is going to be conducted on a particular day. The response, however, is that by not informing the students, they will be better prepared for an actual attack. If a real shooter were on a school campus, there could be little to no warning. Therefore, the more realistic a scenario, the more the teachers and law enforcement will be able to get a better gage as to how students would react and educate them appropriately to help them react better in the future.

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There are risks involved when students are not informed of these drills. For instance, if a student were to react badly and attempt to fight back there could be an unintended consequence, and a student may be harmed or traumatized. On the flip side, when students are subjected to active shooter simulations, they could think an actual school-shooting event is just a drill. However, through the use of these simulations and education about school shootings in general, students will be better prepared if an actual shooting event were to occur on their school campus.

Active shooter simulations are becoming increasingly more common in many states, and it appears this trend will continue as long as school shootings continue to occur. These types of simulations, however, are still new and it will take time and practice to help educate and prepare students for school shootings. When combined with educational tools, open discussions, and active shooter simulations the youth of the United State will hopefully become more aware of the danger and reality of school shootings. There is still a learning curve, but as the legislation evolves and these active shooter simulations become more common, there is hope that one day lives will be saved and school shootings will be prevented.

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