

2019

Education Connection: School Safety: The Industry Shootings Has Created and What We Can Do to Protect Our Children

Hannah Batsche

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lawcommons.luc.edu/clrj>



Part of the [Family Law Commons](#), and the [Juvenile Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hannah Batsche, *Education Connection: School Safety: The Industry Shootings Has Created and What We Can Do to Protect Our Children*, 39 CHILD. LEGAL RTS. J. 208 (2020).

Available at: <https://lawcommons.luc.edu/clrj/vol39/iss2/13>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by LAW eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Children's Legal Rights Journal by an authorized editor of LAW eCommons. For more information, please contact law-library@luc.edu.

Education Connection:
**School Safety: The Industry Shootings Has Created and What We Can
Do to Protect Our Children**

By: Hannah Batsche

CURRENT CLIMATE

Students have one prevalent issue on their minds now, more than ever in history: the possibility of a school shooting. Not only do they frequently see it in the news, but in their day-to-day lives it is almost inescapable as well. Some have to participate in mock-shooting drills and go through metal detectors every day before they enter school. Others have bulletproofed backpacks, and tornado shelters that double as a place to hide should a shooter come into their classroom. Essentially, living with this possibility has become “normal.” While there are clearly security measures that are being taken, what more can we do to keep the children of America safe from harm?

According to a study, school shootings are affecting the enrollment, performance, and mental health of today’s children and teens. Mass shootings can also trigger post-traumatic stress disorder, which can lead to a constant feeling of anxiety and lack of a sense of security. Other outcomes from school shootings can be hyper-vigilance, grief, loss, guilt, changes in eating habits, inability to trust, resistance to school, uneasiness, decline in academic performance, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, inability to express thoughts and feelings, and increased anger, depression, and fear, among others.

I. WHAT IS BEING DONE AND WHO IS BENEFITTING

Some schools have implemented a “threat assessment team,” a group of mental health, law enforcement and educational professionals who identify and support troubled youths based on academic and social media-related observations to hopefully prevent an at-risk student from becoming a threat. A recent federal report encouraged schools to have an online tip form, a hotline, or an app, where people can voice their concerns. Then, parents can be notified, and the student can be set up with academic tutoring, life skills classes, and therapy. Although it can be hard to identify those who are struggling, letting a student know they have a support system can make all the difference and can influence their choices greatly.

A. The Industry

Unfortunately, the security industry has benefitted from this horrifying reality. In 2017, sales of security services and equipment to the education sector reached \$2.7 billion. The School Safety Advocacy Council, which holds a conference and expo about school safety, also saw a spike in registration: up about 40 companies and 300 more guests than usual. One school in Colorado spent \$600,000 fitting every window with bulletproof film,

only to then realize this would prevent students from breaking the window and escaping should the need arise.

New potential technology for schools nationwide include motion, sound, heat, and metal detectors; body cameras; GPS tracking; remote-controlled door locks and pepper-spray systems; palm scanners; scans of social media content for signs of threats; anonymous tip lines; walkie-talkies; panic buttons; scream alarms; automatic text alerts; and of course, bullet-proof shelters, windows, backpacks, and even clipboards.

Experts say the civilian armor market is expected to double by 2024, and new companies are forming regularly to capitalize on the problem surrounding schools. Businesses that previously offered visitor management services and gunshot recognition software to hospitals and stadiums are now pivoting to schools. Along with hiring new teachers and general staff each year, schools are now looking into hiring military and law enforcement consultants as well.

More importantly, if these companies are benefitting, who is paying? Most of the time, the advocacy groups focused on school safety are funded by neighborhood businesses, families, gifts from the state, or, in one school's case, money raised via the superintendent running a marathon to earn sponsorships from businesses. However, there is state legislation being passed to help allocate more government money to this issue, such as the Safe to Learn Act of 2018 in Maryland or the 2018-19 expansion budget in North Carolina. Specifically, the latter piece of legislation creates a School Safety Grant Program that the Superintendent of Public Instruction will oversee. The program includes \$12 million for School Resource Officer Grants, \$2 million for students in crisis, \$3 million for training to increase safety, \$3 million for purchasing equipment, \$10 million for mental health support personnel, and another \$5 million allocated to the Department of Public Instruction to expand the anonymous tip line.

B. The "Gun Debate"

Some believe that arming teachers is the best way to protect children because they will be in close proximity to the shooter and can take him out before the shooter hurts anyone. After the shooting in Parkland, Florida in February 2018 that killed seventeen people, President Trump stated that teachers with training and experience who "love their students" could be more effective than an armed police officer. Unsurprisingly, gun-rights advocates also agree with this stance. This has influenced some teachers in Texas, Utah, Wyoming, and South Dakota to implement the idea.

There are, however, key questions that still need to be answered: where do teachers store their guns? Will armed teachers get some sort of bonus? What credentials are needed? Who is liable should something go wrong? Who is footing the bill? These questions give rise to scenarios gone wrong; for example, if a student steals a teacher's gun, if the gun accidentally discharges, or if the teacher hurts an innocent bystander when trying to protect

the students. As far as costs go, a high quality semi-automatic pistol can run anywhere from \$500 to \$1,200. This is problematic because teachers are already in desperate need for funding for supplies, such as books and paper. Furthermore, it seems the majority of teachers are not in agreement with the idea. The National Education Association polled 1,000 of its members, finding that 82 percent of respondents would not carry a gun in school, even if it was allowed and they were trained.

Another important factor to note in this debate is racial bias. While school shootings happen in every part of the country and to every socioeconomic demographic and age group, race brings up two very important issues: arming teachers of black students who have a racial bias and arming black teachers themselves who could face extreme risks for carrying a weapon. This is not to say every teacher, or even the majority of teachers, have a racial bias. However, implicit bias can emerge in a moment of panic, and the results, although maybe not explicitly intended, could be deadly in disproportionate outcomes for black students.

II. POSSIBLE SECURITY SOLUTIONS

Due to the amount of emerging technology and strategy available, what is the best solution for schools? Michael Panish, a door, lock, and security equipment expert witness and consultant, says that, “[a]lthough nobody wants to feel caged or enclosed, it is a good idea to incorporate the many tiers of isolation elements that are common to a jail, only in a reverse application.” This includes having multiple “chamber” areas of the school, with access needed to enter said chamber, and, then again, to gain access to the next room. He also admits that, “[u]nfortunately, security and safety of our students will mean limiting some overall personal freedoms,” and finding an acceptable level of security is no easy task. As far as costs go, he urged schools to be smart: a card-reader system may seem effective but is really no more of a deterrent than a normal metal key lock. Furthermore, spending money a school received from the government usually comes with governmental burdens, and a large portion of the money will be spent on requirements to administer the projects. This is why it is important to do research instead of installing the first proposed system, which, although it may quell some regional fears, may not be the most effective use of funds.

Possibly the most promising technology, which is being tested out by 18 schools currently, is “Campus Shield.” This system collects massive amounts of data from attendance records, social media, citizen tips, nearby crimes, and school incident reports. Next, the system funnels all this information into one system to highlight patterns or signs of trouble. This information links to school surveillance cameras, a visitor system, a gunshot-detection system, and a team of mental health specialists. Coined the “Cadillac” of school security plans, this system will hopefully be adopted nationwide in the near future, should it prove to be effective and given that the schools that want to implement it can afford to do so.

Other experts argue that schools need to take an inside approach and address student mental health. This is based on the belief that a filling school with extreme security measures will send the signal that it is a place of violence, and has the potential to change how teachers, students, and the administration view one another. Additionally, one must acknowledge the natural social competition schools foster with some being considered “popular” and some “not.” This pronounced social hierarchy can lead to bullying. Oftentimes, the shooter is described as an “outcast” or “loner.” Therefore, making schools a more inclusive atmosphere would be beneficial, as well.

To further cultivate the importance of mental health, experts urge teachers and families to talk openly and honestly with children after shootings or shooting safety drills about their fears and feelings. The more positive a campus climate, the more students can share their own thoughts, as well as concerns about their classmates who have exhibited troubling behavior, without being labeled a “snitch.”

As far as costs go for future security, in 2018 Congress passed an appropriations bill setting aside \$100 million a year in grants for programs dedicated to stopping school violence, to be used from the 2019 fiscal year through 2028. Another proposition of help would be if insurance companies reward schools that do safety assessments with a reduced premium as an incentive to save money while working toward safety, instead of losing money trying to fix the problem.

III. CONCLUSION

Although these events are frequent and awful, there is a lot of research, time, and effort being dedicated in preventing harm to our nation’s youth. With the proper funding, research, and technology, the goal is to find a way to make school a safe haven for children again. There are different theories about how to reach that goal, but despite different beliefs on how to achieve that, everyone has the same aspiration and will do anything we can to make it a reality.

SOURCES

Appropriations Act of 2018, S.B. 99 (Feb. 16, 2017), https://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2017/Budget/2018/S99-CCSMMxr-2_v2.pdf.

Carolyn Fagan, *The Impact of Mass School Shootings on the Mental Health of Survivors: What Parents Need to Know*, PSYCOM (Apr. 24, 2018), <https://www.psycom.net/mental-health-wellbeing/school-shooting-survivor-mental-health/>.

Education Week Staff, *Should Teachers Carry Guns? The Debate, Explained*, EDUC. WEEK (Aug. 24, 2018), <https://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/arming-teachers.html>.

Erin Dooley, *Armed security officers in schools increasing: Report*, ABC NEWS (Mar. 29, 2018), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/armed-security-officers-schools-increasing-report/story?id=54095112>.

Eugene Scott, *A big question in the debate about arming teachers: What about racial bias?*, THE WASH. POST (Feb. 23, 2018), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/02/23/a-big-question-in-the-debate-about-arming-teachers-what-about-racial-bias/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.095847252cb5.

John Schuppe, *Schools are spending billions on high-tech security. But are students any safer?*, NBC NEWS (May 20, 2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/schools-are-spending-billions-high-tech-security-are-students-any-n875611>.

Louis-Philippe Beland & Dongwoo Kim, *The Effect of High School Shootings on Schools and Student Performance*, 38 EDUC. EVALUATION & POL'Y ANALYSIS, 113–126 (2016), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0162373715590683>.

Michael Panish, *Increasing School Security Concepts to Keep Our Students Safe*, CONSTRUCTION WITNESS, <https://www.experts.com/Articles/Increasing-School-Security-Students-Safe-By-Michael-Panish> (last visited Oct. 12, 2018).

School Safety-Our Goal: A Safe Learning Environment For Every Student, SECURITY INDUSTRY ASS'N, <https://www.securityindustry.org/advocacy/policy-priorities/school-safety/> (last visited Oct. 9, 2018).

The Safe to Learn Act of 2018, MD. ASS'N OF BOARDS OF EDUC., <https://www.mabe.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018-Safe-to-Learn-Act-Summary-5.30.18-1.pdf>

Tiffany Hsu, *Threat of Shootings Turn School Security Into a Growth Industry*, THE N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 4, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/04/business/school-security-industry-surges-after-shootings.html>.

Why security measures won't stop school shootings, THE CONVERSATION (Feb. 14, 2018), <http://theconversation.com/why-security-measures-wont-stop-school-shootings-90738>.