

CHAPTER
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Violence on Campus

How Far Will We Go
to Keep Our Schools Safe?

In the wake of the tragic school shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012, some politicians argued that such a time was not the right time to make decisions about gun control. The assumption was that emotions were running too high and that it would be too easy to let what had just happened sway legislators' judgment. The suggestion was that advocates of gun control would be unfairly using emotional appeal to advance their cause. Opponents to this view hold that there is actually no better time to hear proposals for making our schools safer than when we have just seen how vulnerable students in our classrooms can be.

The shootings led to debates not only about gun control legislation but also about other ways to prevent similar disasters from happening in the future. Some people support arming teachers and administrators. Others advocate instituting the use of armed guards. Still others argue that the solution is to recognize those disturbed few who may become shooters before they ever pick up a gun.

Unfortunately, these rare instances of mass murder are not the only times when violence is a problem in our schools. On a daily basis, there are teachers who live in fear of violence from their students and students who live in fear of being bullied by other students.

How far will we go to keep our schools safe? All sides in the controversy agree that every student and every teacher should be safe at school and feel safe at school. The following viewpoints on the subject show just how much disagreement there is about how to achieve that goal.

What Should America Do about Gun Violence?

WAYNE LAPIERRE

LaPierre ■ What Should America Do about Gun Violence?

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Before Reading: What do you know or assume about the National Rifle Association's response to America's school shootings?

It's an honor to be here today on behalf of more than 4.5 million moms and dads and sons and daughters, in every state across our nation, who make up the National Rifle Association of America. Those 4.5 million active members are joined by tens of millions of NRA supporters. And it's on behalf of those millions of decent, hardworking, law-abiding citizens . . . that I'm here to give voice to their concerns . . .

The title of today's hearing is "What should America do about gun violence?"

We believe the answer to that question is to be honest about what works—and what doesn't work.

Teaching safe and responsible gun ownership works—and the NRA has a long and

round history of teaching it.

Our "Eddie Eagle" children's safety program as taught over 25 million young children that "they see a gun, they should do four things: Stop. Don't touch. Leave the area. Tell an

adult." As a result of this and other private sector programs, fatal firearm accidents are at the lowest levels in more than 100 years.¹

The NRA has over 80,000 certified instructors who teach our military personnel, law enforcement officers, and hundreds of thousands

Pre-1981 data from National Safety Council, Accident Facts (annual), 1981 foreword from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at www.cdc.gov/injury/visqars/fatal_injury_reports.html.

of other American men and women how to safely use firearms. We do more—and spend more—than anyone else on teaching safe and responsible gun ownership.

We joined the nation in sorrow over the

tragedy that occurred in Newtown, Connecticut. There is nothing more precious than our children. We have no more sacred duty than to protect our children and keep them safe. That's

why we asked former Congressman and Undersecretary of Homeland Security, Aisa Hutchinson, to bring in every expert available to develop a

model School Shield Program—one that can be individually tailored to make our schools as safe as possible.

It's time to throw an immediate blanket of security around our children. About a third of

our schools have armed security already—because it works.² And that number is growing.

Right now, state officials, local authorities, and school districts in all 50 states are considering their own plans to protect children in their

schools.

In addition, we need to enforce the thousands of gun laws that are currently on the books. Prosecuting criminals who misuse

Wayne LaPierre has served as the Executive Vice President and CEO of the National Rifle Association since 1991. His remarks were made before the Senate Judiciary Committee on January 30, 2013, following the Newtown, Connecticut, school shootings on December 14, 2012.

² Gary Fields et al., "NRA Calls for Arms in School," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 22, 2012, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324461604578193364201364432.html>.

firearms works. Unfortunately, we've seen a dramatic collapse in federal gun prosecutions in recent years. Overall in 2011, federal weapons prosecutions per capita were down 35 percent from their peak in the previous administration.³ That means violent felons, gang members, and the mentally ill who possess firearms are not being prosecuted. And that's unacceptable.

And out of more than 76,000 firearms purchases denied by the federal instant check system, only 62 were referred for prosecution and only 44 were actually prosecuted.⁴ Proposing more gun control laws—while failing to enforce the thousands we already have—is not a serious solution to reducing crime.

I think we can also agree that our mental health system is broken. We need to look at the full range of mental health issues, from early detection and treatment, to civil commitment laws, to privacy laws that needlessly prevent mental health records from being included in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System.

While we're ready to participate in a meaningful effort to solve these pressing problems, we must respectfully—but honestly and firmly—disagree with some members of this committee, many in the media, and all of the gun control groups on what will keep our kids and our streets safe.

Law-abiding gun owners will not accept blame for the acts of violent or deranged crimi-

nals. Nor do we believe the government should dictate what we can lawfully own and use to protect our families.

As I said earlier, we need to be honest about what works and what does not work. Proposals that would only serve to burden the law-abiding have failed in the past and will fail in the future.

Semi-automatic firearms have been around for over 100 years. They are among the most popular guns made for hunting, target shooting, and self-defense. Despite this fact, Congress banned the manufacture and sale of hundreds of semi-automatic firearms and magazines from 1994 to 2004. Independent studies, including a study from the Clinton Justice Department, proved that ban had no impact on lowering crime.⁵

And when it comes to the issue of background checks, let's be honest—background checks will never be “universal”—because criminals will never submit to them.

But there are things that can be done and we ask you to join with us. The NRA is made up of millions of Americans who support what works . . . the immediate protection for all—not just some—of our school children; swift, certain prosecution of criminals with guns; and fixing our broken mental health system.

We love our families and our country. We believe in our freedom. We're the millions of Americans from all walks of life who take responsibility for our own safety and protection as a God-given, fundamental right.

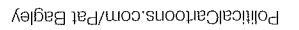
³ Calculated from U.S. Department of Justice data available through Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, <http://tracfed.syr.edu>.

⁴ Ronald J. Frandsen, “Enforcement of the Brady Act, 2010: Federal and State Investigations and Prosecutions of Firearm Applicants Denied by a NICS Check in 2010,” available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/bjs/grants/239272.pdf.

⁵ Jeffrey A. Roth & Christopher S. Koper, “Impact Evaluation of the Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act of 1994,” (1997), available at www.sas.upenn.edu/jerrylee/research/aw_ban.htm.

PAT BAGLEY

the threat of violence against students and faculty?



Pat Bagley is a cartoonist for the *Salt Lake Tribune*. This cartoon appeared on April 4, 2013.

Arming Teachers: A Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Idea

M. D. ANDERSON

Before Reading: Do you believe that arming teachers is the way to protect students from violence? Why, or why not?

The unthinkable tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School left us all horrified with an uneasy feeling of vulnerability. Predictably, as we wrestle with questions about why and how something so gruesome and incomprehensible could happen, some reactions have been strong and swift: more gun control, better access to mental health services. Some have been feeble: curtailing violent movies and video games. And well, some can only be described as downright lunacy.

I readily admit, I hate guns. And the recent happening in Newtown has aggravated my feelings in this area. The tragedy also has me thinking a lot about teachers. Not from an academic point of view, but in the visceral feelings I have for teachers I have loved. There were only a few but they all had the same qualities in common: Patience. Compassion. Understanding. Passion.

Strangely enough, I don't recall any of them having the reflexes of a marksman able to shoot the spots off of a ladybug a mile away. Not exactly the most endearing quality a teacher can possess. But then, I graduated school before crazy became the new normal. Before the gun-rights cabal spied an opportunity to push its pro-gun agenda on schools, and gun manufacturers saw a chance to rake in fear-laden cash.

It kicked off with the benevolent NRA calling to arm teachers and other school officials. Of course, the nation's largest gun lobby is a true friend of public education—that's why it bank-

rolls a conservative group like ALEC aimed at defunding and dismantling public schools.

With the NRA edict, gun zealots were off and running, eager to turn the nation's teachers into gunslingers: launching a test program in tactical firearms training; offering free concealed weapons classes; and providing an "intensive three-day class" where educators can learn tactics "used by first responders." Silly me thinking law enforcement was a trained profession. Little did I know patrolling the playground was preparation for taking down a gun-wielding perp.

But what good is training if pistol-packing teachers are prohibited from bringing guns onto school property. Enter NRA acolytes in Congress, state legislatures, and governors' mansions—a smorgasbord of gun advocates who'd rather arm teachers than whisper a word about common-sense gun control.

Arming teachers is a knee-jerk reaction fueled by the absurd fantasy that armed civilians can stop a mass murderer. They can't. But they very well might get themselves killed or put bystanders in danger. In a classroom, that means someone's child!

With right-wing hysteria in full bloom, it's really easy to lose sight of who isn't crying out to turn schools into the OK Corral: local school districts, PTAs, and teachers themselves. I boldly deduce that the steely resolve to kill another human being may not be programmed

M. D. Anderson writes for borderlessnewsandviews.com, where this article appeared on January 9, 2013.

into someone who has just wiped a first-grader's snotty nose or asked a class of fidgety 8-year-olds to put on their listening ears.

The NRA and gun zealots push guns like a crack dealer, cloaking themselves in drivel about "freedom" in a country where there are more gun dealers than grocery stores. We can't allow their

ridiculous arguments to go unchallenged any longer. They have shown themselves to be rational, tone-deaf, and, ultimately, more interested in gun sales than human lives.

Basically, they want to feel powerful. And that is hardly sufficient justification for putting our kids at risk.

Teachers Packing Heat

BALTIMORE SUN

Before Reading: What does the National Rifle Association propose in response to recent incidents of school violence? Do you agree with their proposals? Why, or why not?

It is easy to dismiss the report released Tuesday by the National Rifle Association—financed by the National Rifle Association—as nothing but an effort to change the topic from the broader issue of gun violence or especially gun control (even the watered-down stuff that's still alive in the U.S. Senate). But that would be a mistake, as it's really much worse than that.

Granted, much of the "National School Shield" report is pretty benign stuff about the need to make security assessments of schools and coordinate with local law enforcement agencies how best to respond to security threats. Most school systems are likely already engaged in such efforts—if they weren't long before the massacre in Newtown—and it's hard to argue with any of it. If the organization wants to help finance further studies of how best to evaluate school safety threats, closed circuit cameras, or "buzz-in entry systems, or assess pre-incident indicators" or judge a student body's mental health "climate," well, more power to them.

This unsigned editorial from baltimoresun.com was posted on April 3, 2013.

But what a good chunk of the report also does is pick up the line of reasoning voiced so outrageously by the NRAs Wayne LaPierre last year in the wake of the Connecticut shooting. What's needed, the report's authors argue, is sufficient training so that teachers and other school staff can carry firearms in school. While that doesn't precisely echo Mr. LaPierre, who envisioned armed volunteers (a so-called "good guy with a gun") recruited off the streets to hang out in school buildings, it does embrace the central premise that the more guns, the better. And while 40-to-60 hours of training won't make the gym teacher a police officer, it should be helpful, the task force concludes.

It's difficult to know where to begin with such an egregious line of thinking. Certainly, it reflects one of the core beliefs of the NRA and its ilk that the problem with America is not too many guns but too few chances to carry them around. But it also implies that the kind of crazed loner who would don body armor and shoot up a school might be deterred by the

potential presence of an armed assistant principal or social studies teacher. How do we know somebody bent on murder and suicide wouldn't, in fact, welcome the chance for a hallway shoot-out?

And that's just for starters. If schools might be made safer by having teachers packing heat, why stop there? What about day care centers? Are 4-year-olds not worthy of similar protection? Why not shopping mall sales clerks, movie theater ushers, or the guy taking orders at the fast-food drive-through? Kids hang out in all those places, too.

Surely, if there's any deterrent value to strapping a sidearm on the school librarian, it's bound to make the alternative venues more vulnerable. The only logical conclusion is to go one step beyond those small towns in Georgia where gun ownership is mandatory and require everyone to carry loaded weapons around wherever they go.

Might this boost accidental shootings and suicides? Might this cause more guns to fall into the hands of criminals, youngsters, or the mentally ill? Almost certainly, but that doesn't seem to enter into the task force's thought process in the slightest—although “thought process” may

be a too-generous description of what's going on here.

What makes the task force report so outrageous is that it totally ignores the school security threat posed by the nation's lax attitude toward guns. What if you could take a gun out of the hands of a potential assailant? Wouldn't that be far better than an armed confrontation on school grounds? How could it not be?

Universal background checks for gun purchases (and improving the database on which such checks for criminal convictions or serious mental health issues are based) would seem like the least that could be offered. Polls still show strong public support for that idea. Yet that common sense measure is under assault in the U.S. Senate—abandoned not just by Republicans but some Democrats, too.

What a charade Washington's post-Newtown public conversation about gun violence is turning out to be. Republicans make hay with pro-gun constituents by resisting everything while Democrats talk big but may not even force a vote. In the end, the NRA wins, and the victims of Sandy Hook—and the tens of thousands of Americans shot to death each year—are gradually forgotten.

Mental Health Services a Defense against School Violence

ROBERT ROSS

Ross ■ Mental Health Services a Defense against School Violence

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Before Reading: Short of arming teachers, what might be done to prevent future school shootings?

These days, it seems like our leaders in Washington have trouble finding common ground. However, the State of the Union address and the Republican response offered a welcome moment of agreement. Both President Obama and Senator Marco Rubio called for urgent action to reduce violence in our schools and communities. It's certainly true that Republicans and Democrats may disagree on the steps we should take, but I was pleased nonetheless that both sides are considering the problem with the seriousness it deserves.

The debate is different this time. December's unspeakable tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School has focused the nation's attention on safety—and rightly so. Every morning, some 60 million American parents check homework, stuff backpacks, zip up jackets, and send their beloved children into the care of our nation's schools. Parents are demanding that our leaders do everything in their power to ensure that those kids return home, every day, safe and healthy.

There is no shortage of ideas on the subject, and the debate has been robust. But I'd argue that our national conversation has been missing one essential element: a physician's focus on prevention. I have served as a practicing pediatrician in Philadelphia and in Camden, New Jersey, but you don't have to be a doctor to know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It's cheaper and more effective to stop violence before it starts.

The key to prevention is understanding the source: who are these disengaged, disconnected, and frequently mentally ill young people who are involved in so much violence in our schools and neighborhoods?

In bucolic communities like Columbine, Aurora, and Newtown, this crisis of disengaged youth may show up as a senseless, massive shooting. In neighborhoods like Compton, Richmond, Chicago, and North Philadelphia, it may be school dropout, gang involvement, and drive-by shootings. Either way, the problem will continue to haunt our civic life until we make prevention a priority.

Early detection and treatment is the key. We need to reach troubled children when problems first emerge, while there's still time to guide them back on the right track. And because young people spend so much time in school, that's where the first inklings of trouble are often detected—and it's why schools are essential places to focus prevention resources. Every school should have the resources it needs to provide comprehensive health services, where nurses, counselors, and other experts can diagnose problems, whether mental or physical, and get kids the help they need. And whether at a school-based clinic or in another setting, every student should get a behavioral health check-up.

Robert K. Ross is the president and CEO of the California Endowment, a health foundation. Earlier he served as director of the Health and Human Services Agency for the County of San Diego and as Commissioner of Public Health for the City of Philadelphia. He is also an expert-appeared clinician and public health administrator. His article appeared on February 20, 2013, on capitolweekly.net.

just like they get a physical check-up before starting the school year.

School counselors are an especially important part of the solution. In California, we have about one counselor per 1,000 students—the worst ratio in the nation and four times the recommended standard of 1 counselor per 250 students. The best counselor in the world can't keep tabs on 1,000 students, and we can't expect them to.

10 The research shows clearly that counseling delivers a wide range of benefits, including improved academic performance, reduced classroom disruptions, and fewer disciplinary problems, all of which lead to calmer school climates, emotionally healthy students, and reduced violence on campus. Access to school nurses is credited with decreasing absenteeism and improving graduation rates. And comprehensive approaches to providing health services that include counselors, nurses, and other experts have proven effective at preventing youth suicide and reducing violence in schools and communities.

Californians are enthusiastic about prevention-oriented approaches to reducing school violence. According to a survey of 1,200 California voters, 72 percent say we should emphasize strategies that focus on prevention generally, compared to just 22 percent who say the right approach is preparing to respond to violence with more metal detectors, fences, and armed security guards. Moreover, 84 percent of survey respondents favored increasing the number of trained counselors in schools (including 55 percent “strongly support”), and when asked whether placing counselors or armed police in schools was the more effective strategy for preventing violence, more than two-thirds

picked counselors over police (67 percent to 26 percent).

If the social science research and public opinion isn't enough to convince you, consider the views of young people themselves—those most affected by the issue of school violence.

These young people gathered in Los Angeles shortly after the Newtown tragedy to deliver a strong message to policymakers: don't let Sandy Hook turn our schools into fortress. Yes, take common-sense steps to ensure that schools are ready to respond to emergencies, but don't sacrifice education in the name of security. A different group of students subsequently released a video sharing their personal experiences with school counselors and urging California to improve our woefully inadequate student-to-counselor ratio.

The youth advocates in these videos wisely caution against a rush to place more armed guards in schools. After all, Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Ft. Hood all had armed guards but they weren't able to prevent tragic acts of violence. In the years following the Columbine massacre, the federal government spent more than \$900 million to pay the salaries of school police and offset other security costs, but all that new spending didn't fix the problem. Instead of continuing down the same path, we should refocus our energies and investments in prevention.

I'm pleased that prevention-oriented approaches to school violence seem to be getting some traction. When I testified before Congress earlier this month, I was pleasantly surprised that members responded enthusiastically to my calls for a focus on mental health services. And more important, President Obama's plan to reduce school violence specifically highlights the role that school counselors can play.

These are positive developments, but it's just a start. To effectively prevent violence in schools, we need a complete approach. We need not only improved emergency response strategies but also better tools and resources to identify kids and adults who need help—so we can get them the care they need or get them off the streets if they pose a serious danger to themselves or others.

These are the strategies the California Endowment will be emphasizing over the coming weeks and months. What would you do to make schools safer? Join in the conversation at www.CalEndow.org.

Overusing the Bully Label

SUSAN EVA PORTER

Before Reading: How do you define bullying?

A Florida mother was arrested this month for allegedly stabbing her two sons' bullies in the back with box cutters. News reports stated that after calming down an altercation between her sons and a group of boys, the mother reignited the situation and attacked the boys, sending two to the hospital.

Last year, a teenage boy posted something nasty and hurtful in response to a teenage girl's Facebook posting. The girl was distraught, contemplated hurting herself and complained to her mother that she had been bullied. This caused the mother to become distraught. A short time later, police say, the mother saw the boy in a mall and took matters into her own hands, literally. She allegedly choked him.

But the reaction among many to the news reports was that the story was about a heroic mother seeking vengeance against a terrible bully on behalf of her victimized daughter, not an adult choking a child.

Although these two examples are extreme reactions to alleged bullying, many of us are overreacting to childhood aggression in less-

extreme, everyday circumstances. It is not uncommon for adults to define even minor difficulties between children, such as being left out of social situations, as bullying. This is fundamentally changing the way we understand childhood.

We hear a lot about bullying—on the playgrounds, in schools, in the media. As a culture, we are infuriated with the bullies and terrified for the victims, and rightly so when it is appropriate. But the idea that childhood today is full of bullies is misleading. We do have a problem, but it's not with our children. It's with us, the adults.

Today we see children as being either dangerous villains or helpless victims, but the truth is kids haven't changed that much in the past generation. I have worked as an educator and a clinician in schools for 25 years, and I can attest that children are not meaner, nastier, or more

Susan Eva Porter is a clinical social worker, school administrator, and author of *Bully Nation: Why America's Approach to Childhood Aggression Is Bad for Everyone* (2013). Her article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on March 15, 2013.

aggressive than they used to be. Nor are they more fragile. Admittedly, digital media amplifies some of their mistakes and pours salt into wounds, but the behavior and reactions aren't new. What's new is our reaction to childhood aggression—and our increasing impatience with children and readiness to label them when they make certain mistakes or experience pain.

What caused this shift? In a word, *Columbine*, but not for the reasons many believe.

Dave Cullen, in his book *Columbine*, wrote that after the 1999 Colorado school massacre, the media crafted the explanation that shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had been bullied. They apparently hadn't been, but the nation—fearing a repeat of the tragedy—adopted a zero-tolerance attitude toward many normal, albeit painful, aspects of childhood behavior and development, and defined them as bullying.

As a result, behaviors such as social exclusion, persistent unfriendliness, and a nasty remark on Facebook have become intolerable acts that cause grave victimization. We now react to the children who commit these acts with a degree of intolerance that we wouldn't consider in other areas of their lives, and we assume that when children feel pain as a result of such mistakes, they will be scarred for life.

10 Can you imagine if we called children stupid when they made mistakes in math? Or if we assumed they'd never recover when they fell off their bikes? This is how we're essentially reacting every time we label children bullies or victims for making typical childhood mistakes or when they feel any hurt in a relationship.

And we're doing this with an unprecedented degree of abandon.

Stanford professor and author Carol Dweck explains that labels create something called a "fixed mind-set," which limits how children learn and perceive themselves, and how we perceive them. Think about it: The mother in the box-cutter case allegedly initiated her assault after the situation had cooled off—fueled, no doubt, by the thought that the boys deserved it because they were bullies. And chances are the mother in the choking incident would have had a hard time justifying her behavior if the boy was someone who had simply made a mistake. But once he was labeled a bully, all bets were off. She and her daughter became victims and were therefore absolved of all responsibility for examining their own behavior.

This is not just a question of semantics. Our penchant for labeling children in situations such as these, and our increasingly fixed mind-set about their behavior, is a real threat to their welfare. As soon as children are labeled bullies, this seems to give us permission to unleash on them a degree of anger and scorn that is frightening. As for the ones we label victims, we keep them identified with their pain and deny them the opportunity to develop true resilience.

We must admit that our approach to childhood aggression is flawed. Our children are not worse than they used to be, nor are they less resilient. But we adults seem to be. Instead of being so quick to label them, we must teach them how to deal with their aggression and pain appropriately and to develop compassion, impulse control, and resilience in their relationships. And we must learn to do the same.

Thinking and Writing about School Violence

1. What appeals does Wayne LaPiere use in his argument? What part of his proposal (if any) do you find reasonable? What (if any) do you find unreasonable?
2. Read "In Gun Control Debate, Logic Goes out the Window" (pp. 11–13), by Richard J. Davis in Chapter 1. How might LaPiere respond to Davis's argument? How might Davis respond to LaPiere?
3. How does Pat Bagley make use of irony in his cartoon about protecting our schoolchildren?
4. What is the allusion in the title of M. D. Anderson's article?
5. What does Anderson believe is the motive of the NRA in wanting to arm teachers? In your opinion, is there justification for arming teachers? Why, or why not?
6. The *Baltimore Sun* editorial responds to a report from the National Rifle Association. What did the report recommend? Why does the writer of the editorial object?
7. Why is the whole conversation about school shootings so heated at times? Why is the issue so controversial? In his essay "Loaded Language Poisons Gun Debate" (pp. 152–56) in Chapter 5, where does Josh Levs claim the problem lies?
8. What claim does Robert Ross make in his essay? Return to Chapter 1 and read Liza Long's essay "I Am Adam Lanza's Mother" (pp. 15–17). How does Long's firsthand account support Ross's argument?
9. Violence at school does not always come from outside. What is bullying? Do you recall bullying being a problem when you were in elementary or secondary school? Explain your response.
10. According to Susan Eva Porter, why are adults guilty of overusing the bully label, and what are the dangers?
11. In her essay "Gun Debate: Where Is the Middle Ground?" (pp. 46–49) in Chapter 2, Mallory Simon searches for similar goals on all sides of the gun control debate. Do the readings in this chapter suggest any movement toward common ground? Explain your response.