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WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTERS?

PART THREE: WHAT SHOULD CHANGE?

IN THE LAST TWO ISSUES, I began this three-part series on what we've learned about school shooters—in Part One, I addressed the issue of “magazine capacity” head-on to determine whether a reduction in magazine capacity would have affected the outcome at any school or other mass shooting (the answer is no). I also looked at whether Gun-Free Zones figure into the planning of these mass murders (the answer is yes). In Part Two, I looked at whether victim response made a difference in any mass shooting; in other words, does it make a difference when potential victims fight back? The answer is a resounding yes, which reflects the Department of Homeland Security's new program on “Surviving an Active Shooter.” The program teaches potential victims of a mass shooting to “Hide, Flee, Fight.” (Yes, believe it or not, the U.S. Government is telling you that you don't need to be an easy victim.) In this article, I'll summarize this series with a four-point plan designed to eliminate the scourge of school shooters once and for all.

A FOUR-POINT PLAN

So we've learned a lot from school and other mass shootings, but that begs the question, what should change? Well, a lot should change.

Point #1: Harden School and Classroom Doors. Let's face it: the security at most of our nation's schools is not just poor...it's abysmal. Two years after Sandy Hook and seven years after Virginia Tech, if you were to ask your local school administrators the types of questions on my school security checklist (P. 117), you'd most likely receive an answer of “no” for every question, or a look of embarrassment. While we don't necessarily have the money to institute airport-level security at school entrances, we do have the money to plug these major gaps in security. If you are a parent or a teacher, take a copy of this checklist to your school and ask your school administrators to answer these questions. Unless every answer is a resounding “yes,” you'll need to make the argument that these items can no longer be delayed or ignored. Lives literally depend on it.



Although all of the items on the checklist are important, simply hardening up the main entrances of schools will have an effect—FEMA reported that 74 percent of mass shooters enter their target zone through the front door, as was done at the four school shootings I profiled in my first article. Although Sandy Hook Elementary did have a “security door” blocking entry from the lobby to the interior of the school, that security door was made of glass. While it was good for appearances, it had no effect on actually stopping shooter Adam Lanza as he shot his way through it. Other good intentions that

ultimately failed at Sandy Hook included the fact that a lock-down was never called from the front office, predominantly due to the fact that the shooting began just outside the office doors. That indicates that schools must have multiple methods of ordering a lock-down, which might include launching a prerecorded message initiated by pressing a necklace fob worn by multiple staff throughout the school.

The final failure at Sandy Hook was the most devastating. Although all of the classrooms did have lockable doors, the locks required that a key be used, even

when locking the door from the inside. In the aftermath, it was discovered that all of the classroom doors were locked, except for classrooms eight and ten, the two classrooms where Lanza murdered the majority of his victims, and that keys were found on the floor next to one of the murdered teachers. Any delay in locking the classroom doors may be fatal, and looking for a key creates just such a delay. Lock-down drills must not only be procedurally correct, they must also be fast. How fast? A good test for every teacher in every school would be to see how quickly a healthy runner could sprint from the closest school entrance to your classroom. If that can be done in five seconds, then you have four seconds to get your students into the classroom and secure the door.

While the defensive measures listed in the checklist might sound ineffective (a determined attacker should be able to eventually breach a locked door, right?), remember from my first article in this series that school shooters know that they’ll have just five to nine minutes to complete their attack before the police will make entry. Delaying a shooter for even one to two minutes is enough to either force the shooter to move on to try a different target or to end their life. The students in classroom 205 at Virginia Tech didn’t need to delay shooter Seung-Hui Cho for hours or even minutes. When Cho was unable to breach the door that students had barricaded with tables, he gave up in seconds and moved back to the classrooms where no such barricades had been erected. If Virginia Tech had installed deadbolts and back-up locks on their classroom doors, it’s very likely that every student in classrooms 204, 207, and 211 would have survived, and—if the school had instituted Point #2—it’s very likely that many of the students in classroom 206 (the first room attacked) would have survived as well.

Point #2: Teach Students to Fight Back. During lock-down drills, students must be taught to do more than simply huddle on one side of the classroom. Instead, they must be taught to fight back, and fight back aggressively, if a shooter enters their classroom. During lock-down drills, schools must implement (or teachers can improvise) counter-attack plans by instructing students to spread out,

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pick up any object, and hold it back in a “thrower’s stance” in preparation for an attacker making entry. For younger kids, the object might be a book, a stapler, their shoes, or a glue stick. Older students should be taught to pick up chairs or other heavier objects. Any object thrown at an attacker will break his momentum, which may cause him to back out of the classroom. Schools should go as far as acting through simulated counter-attacks by providing students with soft rubber objects that can be thrown at mock attackers making entry through the door. Not only would that exercise make lockdown drills less frightening, it would also begin to build the proper neural pathways that not only is fighting back okay, it is necessary and expected. For junior high through college kids, students should be taught to defend and attack as a team, by immediately locking the door and barricading it with the designated cabinet or bookshelf, and striking the shooter with hardened objects to the head and torso if he makes entry. If you’re a teacher, you’ll also need to include a baseball bat or other incapacitating tool in your classroom. If a shooter enters your classroom, you not only have the legal right, you have the moral obligation to use deadly force to stop him. Huddling with your kids on one side of the classroom whispering “everything is going to be okay” is not living up to that obligation.

Point #3: Arming Educators. If we really want to stop school shooters in their tracks, we must institute an “Armed Educator” program, similar to the “Armed Pilot” program. Allowing school staff to carry concealed firearms as official security is a sensitive topic, so I’m ready to propose a number of compromises on the issue, including:

- Requiring weapons retention and advanced handgun training in addition to state-mandated concealed carry training for participants in the program. This could be modeled after the Armed Pilot program, but should not require more than two weeks of training.
- Passing a physical agility test to enter the program.
- Securing firearms in Level III holsters to minimize the fear that unruly students might attempt to grab the firearms.
- In addition to including traditional

firearms and ammunition in the program, I’d propose that Simunition firearms and ammunition be included as well. This option would certainly attract more educators into the program, and mass shooters are unlikely to know the difference between the sound of or pain inflicted by Simunition rounds versus live rounds. (If you’ve ever been hit by a Simunition round, you know what I mean.) We need to keep in mind what the end game of these shooters is: the moment they believe a counter-attack is occurring, they’ll end their own life.

Interestingly, there may be another significant benefit of allowing educators to choose Simunition firearms over traditional firearms: knowing that they will only inflict pain rather than death (on the shooter or innocent bystanders), they may be much more likely to immediately commit to a response rather than hesitating as they might with a traditional firearm and ammunition. Picture what might have changed at Sandy Hook if Principal Dawn Hochsprung and School Psychologist Mary Sherlach had closed in on Lanza, firing Simunition rounds at his head and torso as fast as their fingers could

pull the triggers instead of simply shouting “Stay put!” as Principal Hochsprung was reported to have done. Lanza would either have ended his life immediately, or he would have collapsed into the fetal position as his body was wracked with impact after painful impact. Even if Lanza had recovered his senses long enough to continue his attack, the disruption of his momentum would certainly have bought the teachers in classrooms 8 and 10 enough time to lock their doors, and it could have bought the police the few minutes they needed to make entry.

So why haven’t we implemented a program like this already? It’s because the anti-gun crowd and liberal politicians (is there a difference?) want you to believe that a physically fit teacher wearing a level III holster who’s been trained in weapons retention and use of force is more dangerous to your children than a school shooter who walks through the front door loaded down with multiple firearms and hundreds of rounds of ammunition. We need to politely disagree.

Point #4: End Gun-Free Zone Policies at schools. Finally, we need to reverse public policies and public statements of



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schools as “gun-free zones” once and for all. While the “Armed Educator” program takes a massive step in this direction, our ultimate goal (which, admittedly, will require more time) needs to be the elimination of schools from the “banned location” lists on state concealed carry laws and the repeal of the “Gun-Free School Zones Act” of 1990. The “No Guns Allowed” sign is what drew Aurora theater shooter James Holmes to that particular theater, when other theaters were closer to his home, and our nation’s schools all carry that same virtual blinking neon light stating, “No one in here will stop you.” Which sign do you think would cause these mass shooters to reconsider their plans: a “No Guns Allowed” sign taped to a glass door, or a sign declaring “Multiple armed personnel on the property will use deadly force to protect our children and our staff” taped to a reinforced steel door?

Now the reality check. Nothing will convince school boards to institute any of my four points, so here is my plan to stack the argument in our favor. I’d like

to challenge every concealed carry instructor in the country to do three things: first, offer a free class at least once per year to any teacher, school administrator, school staff member, or school board member who is willing to learn. Second, if you have school-aged children, let it be known that you’re a concealed carry instructor and provide an open invitation for any parent at your children’s school to take a class from you for free. You might give up a few dollars, but you’ll be doing your school an incredible service. Third, include the data points from this series in every class you teach. I’ve captured everything in this series in a PowerPoint presentation—email me at michael@uscca.com and it’s yours. I’m a huge believer that education is key to winning this argument, and if we educate from within, the blanket statements of “guns in schools are bad” or “we need to balance security with access” are going to begin sounding more and more ridiculous. The more teachers and parents who are educated with these facts, the more likely it is that one or more of them will stand up

and hit the B.S. buzzer the next time they hear, “It’s the magazines” at their next PTA or teacher development workshop.

At those types of meetings, the typical argument from school administrators against securing schools and allowing armed personnel on the premises is two-fold: 1). Schools need to balance security versus access, and 2). Armed personnel will scare children. Those arguments are bunk. No one makes the “access versus security” argument about airplane cockpits, or the secure area of airports. Children also know the difference between a gun in the hands of a bad guy and a gun in the hands of a good guy (and teachers are included in kids’ version of a “good guy” list). A gun in the hands of a bad guy equals danger, while a gun in the hands of a good guy equals safety. Similarly, children aren’t afraid of lockable doors or other active security measures. Those things say, “This place is secure. You’ll be safe here.” A trip through security and the sight of armed police at the airport doesn’t frighten children; if anything, it brings on a sense of comfort, especially if your chil-

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SCHOOL SECURITY CHECKLIST

FRONT DOORS:

- Is there a secured door that visitors must be cleared through before entering the school? Can the door withstand gunshots? Can the door be bypassed or are all visitors funneled through this entrance?

LOCK-DOWN PROCEDURES:

- Who can initiate a lock-down? Can it only be initiated from the front office, or are multiple methods of initiating a lock-down available? Can teachers initiate their own lock-down if they hear what they believe is gunfire or if they see an intruder?

CLASSROOM DOORS:

- Do the doors have a deadbolt that can be secured quickly, with no key?
- Do the doors have a back-up lock such as a hotel-style throw over lock, a Door Jammer, or a similar security doorstop?
- Are the classroom's windows security windows with embedded laminate?
- Can the windows be quickly and completely blocked with a shade or curtain?

BARRICADES:

- Do classrooms have barricades, such as movable cabinets or bookcases, which can be quickly pushed or dropped in front of the door?

aware of 9/11. How secure would your children (or you) feel if the extent of airport security was a "No Guns Allowed" sign posted at each entrance and a glass cockpit door?

Finally, think about how this argument would change if it were Al-Qaeda committing these crimes instead of unbalanced domestic terrorists. The argument of magazine capacity would dry up overnight, and any politician voting against an "Armed Educator" program wouldn't have to wait until the next election to be booted from office—they'd be thrown from office in mass recall elections supported by both Republicans and Democrats.

If we implemented my four-point plan across the nation, we'd very likely find that mass shootings at schools would simply end, and here's why: school shooters want to commit their horrible crimes and then end their lives painlessly by their own hands. That's not just a theory of mine; the FBI agrees. 42 percent of all mass shooters and 90 percent of school shooters commit suicide on-site. Their planning goes something like

this: A) Record and upload a vile video to YouTube or write a rambling manifesto, explaining why they hate the world. B) Enter a gun-free zone and shoot as many innocent children as they can in five to nine minutes. Continue shooting until they hear sirens. C) Die painlessly by their own hands. Implementing these four points will either get these shooters to give up their plan entirely, or just skip part "B" and go directly to part "C." I don't care which route they take, I just want them to skip part "B."

When these potential murderers understand that they have no hope of breaking through secured school or classroom doors, know that their mission will end in utter failure, and realize that their death will be agonizing as they're shot by multiple armed school personnel, then—and only then—will this national nightmare end.



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