

SCHOOL SAFETY



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Did We Forget About School Safety?

Before COVID the public outcry for school safety developed closer working relationships with law enforcement agencies. Among those responses was expanding police presence in schools to act as a deterrent, first response, and behavioral intervention to reduce the occurrences of school violence.

Now headlines continue to report the canceling of school resource officers since the in-custody death of George Floyd in 2020. Minneapolis schools, in a move consistent with many missteps of that city after the Floyd incident, moved to remove police in schools. While Minnesota law requires schools to run students and staff through five lockdown drills a year, school board member Kimberly Caprini. “I firmly believe that it is completely unnatural to have police in schools.” There have always been debates about the appropriateness and efficacy of police in schools, but “completely unnatural” is not part of a rational discussion. Typical of the police reform proposals, the decision was not based on data but ideology. Many school district patrons decried the lack of collaboration and information in making such a dramatic decision.

Their solution in replacing police in schools is a new safety team – made up of more than half of the specialists with experience in security, corrections, or law enforcement. The original job posting for these positions listed law enforcement as a desirable background, although that was removed after criticism.

In other words, the skills and knowledge are apparently still valued, just not the badge.

In Portland, Oregon, the epicenter of how not to handle public safety, the superintendent of Portland Public Schools said he was “discontinuing” the presence of school resource officers (SROs) and would increase spending on counselors and social workers. That can certainly work for resolving internal conflicts, not so much for armed attackers from outside the school.

Schools in Los Angeles have cut the number of SROs by a third, diverting money to social workers and mental health professionals. Joining the trend of removing less than lethal tools from officers to control violent behavior, the Los Angeles Unified School District also voted to ban the use of pepper spray on students.

The claims for firing SROs are the usual diatribes against police violence (based on erroneous assumptions and contrary to data), systemic racism, and students of color feeling “uncomfortable”, and described as a “traumatic presence”. The anti-police headlines have overtaken headlines and studies showing that schools consistently fail to offer students of color equal opportunity to succeed academically. In comparison to isolated reports of actual police misconduct while on SRO assignment, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing received 5,895 misconduct cases in 2019 – the highest number of instances of misconduct reported since at least 2007. The hypocrisy seems to go unnoticed.

Teachers are divided on the issue of police officers in schools, but sentiments against police in schools are not

a clear majority. Some voice concerns that in situations where police need to be called in, responding officers may lack the knowledge of the school or experience in dealing with student populations.

Student safety that may be impacted by inviting access to biological males to female bathrooms, showers, and locker rooms seems to be less important than an ideological imposition of artificial equality with zero scientific basis or justification. Protecting young minds from the apparently hurtful cartoon drawings in Dr. Seuss books, and removing the offensive title of “Mr.” from your favorite plastic potato toy, all seem to be more important than having a trained armed sentinel guarding our most vulnerable.

Students, teachers, staff, and citizens deserve fact-based decisions regarding the value of police officers in schools. The mission and expectations of SROs should be clearly defined between school and police leaders. Will they teach courses? Intervene in the enforcement of school rules and discipline? Guidelines and training recommendations from the National Association of School Resource can be helpful in those situations. There is no substitute for close collaboration between schools and local law enforcement in preventing and responding to violence. Whether that involves police officers remaining on-site or not is open for discussion. Summarily cutting those ties based on pre-conceived notions rather than data is not a strategy for safety, but merely a political statement.

Real Common Sense Planning for School Violence

Despite the statistical rarity of mass shootings at schools, events are so bone-chilling that that prevention and response has become a priority in every community. As a former Chief of Police on a university campus, a graduate of the Emergency Management Academy and a host of FEMA courses, I have written a number of well researched articles on school safety and active shooter response in addition to conducting full scale exercises and first responder training. I do not minimize the seriousness of the threat, nor the need for preparation. We've had enough experience since Columbine to have learned a few things and ignored a lot of other things. Here are some fact-based observations:

1) The number of well-armed attacks on mass numbers of students is much rarer than reported. In counts of "school shootings", those violent crimes that are actually interpersonal, domestic, or gang related, or completely unrelated to the fact they occurred on school property also get counted. Certainly potentially deadly, these cases are not what we have in mind when we imagine the horrific random attacks designed to kill as many people as possible, and not the kind of crimes for which much of our preparation attempts to address. These crimes target individuals who happen to be on a campus when contacted by the assailant.

2) We probably need to stop doing active shooter drills in our schools. There are several reasons for this.

a. One is that the drills can traumatize students and teachers, normalizing an expectation of imminent violence.

b. Secondly, since most attackers are students or former students, drills train the shooters as well responders.

c. Thirdly, there is no template for the way attacks play out. In other words, we are likely drilling a practice that would be irrelevant in an actual attack.

d. Fourthly, first responder participants in a drill likely will not be the ones responding to an actual event. When the call goes out, every law enforcement agency with a radio will be responding, from the local agency that you'd expect to the game warden. Seldom are all of those agencies represented in full blown exercises which are, by the way, a hugely expensive endeavor.

e. Fifthly, most active shooter events are over by the time law enforcement arrives, which limits the value of full-scale deployment practices

f. Sixth, not every police leader has actual expertise in this type of response and, therefore, may not be aware of best practices or be willing to coordinate with the vast number of agencies and personnel to coordinate a response.

3) Complex systems of response don't fit with human nature. There are many well intended systems of signs, placards, codes, etc that are part of some emergency plans.

a. The human brain is less effective when there are too many things to remember. In police training we know this as Hick's Law, a principle in psychology that says the more choices you have, the slower the decision-making process becomes. Having a seldom used system that

requires a lot of decision making increases the likelihood of that system failing.

b. The frequency of employing the knowledge of these emergency procedures will result not only in their lack of use in a crisis, but also in their lack of awareness by new staff, first responders, substitutes, and visitors.

c. Coded public address announcements, and even sophisticated alert systems via cell phone, are likely to be heard and received by the attacker or given too late for effective response.

d. A failure to adhere to the system with 100% accuracy can result in unnecessary panic and are not a reliable indicator of a situation inside a classroom. Does that OK placard in the window really mean the room is safe? If the teacher forgets or chooses not to risk moving toward the door to put up the right placard, will the SWAT team be tossing in a stun grenade?

4) The attraction of evacuation must be resisted.

a. There have been zero – yes, zero – k-12 students killed who were behind a locked door secured as soon as an intruder or threat appeared. The classroom with a locked door is unquestionably the safest place for anyone to be in a school shooting. Any protocol that moves students from that safe “protect in place” location increases exposure to attack.

b. Marching students from inside the school to another location with their hands over their heads makes reunification, accountability, and protection less effective. Allowing students to stay in their classrooms with a safe adult allows the situation to be controlled better than any other strategy. Students can be counted, identified, and released to parents directly

from classrooms more efficiently than after a mass exodus past potentially hazardous locations.

c. This includes bomb threats. The preferred protocol is to have students remain in place while the threat is assessed, or the premises are searched. Bombs are much more likely to be anti-personnel or of limited power than to be of such magnitude that structural damage is likely. That means that movement outside the classroom more likely exposes students to an explosive device than protects them from one. Classroom walls are the students' best protection while first responders arrive.

5) Prevention and intervention are possible. Schools are often afraid of privacy concerns like juvenile laws, FERPA, HIPPA, and protecting victims and therefore do not share information about the behavior of students. This is exactly why the Virginia Tech killer wasn't stopped before he murdered 33 people. On the university campus where I most recently served, our CASH (CAmpus Safety and Health) team reviewed reports of concern from law enforcement, students, faculty, and staff to "connect the dots" on concerning behavior and develop intervention strategies for potential threats from on or off campus. Other behavioral intervention team strategies are available to copy that can be effective and pass legal review.

I am not addressing security hardware or security personnel in this commentary, but I'm convinced that it is time to simplify our preparation and response to the threat of a mass killer.

What We Know About School Shootings

The blood was still on the ground at Virginia Tech in 2007 when I traveled to interview as a campus police chief in Colorado. My time in charge of public safety was punctuated by the threat of campus violence. It was the same year that my daughter married a young man who just eight years earlier had been sitting in the cafeteria at Columbine High School, not knowing that he was eating and chatting with friends next to a home-made propane bomb placed there by two classmates who, moments later terrorized the school murdering 12 students and one teacher.

Violent attacks in places that are sacred and safe inflict a national anxiety on us like no other crime. We need to go to our churches, schools, stores, concerts, and movie theaters without feeling like a random target just waiting for the impact of flying lead. With every headline starting out: “yet another...”, the violence seems so frequent and pervasive. It is hard to evaluate these events without viewing them through the lens of hopelessness and panic.

Most of us, when the weather threatens, do take steps to avoid being struck by lightning even though we know that death from lightning strikes is so rare that it is the measure of small likelihoods. The probability of a student being killed in a school shooting is less than being struck by lightning. That may be of little comfort, but the reality is that school shootings are an anomaly. Schools remain the statistically safest place for a child.

The most dangerous places are in the home and in automobiles.

Even more interesting is that no student who was behind a locked door with an attacker on the outside of that door has ever been killed in a school shooting. Some parents and officials advocate running or evacuating during a violent attack. Staying in the classroom behind a locked door provides the best chance of survival.

The frequency of school shootings is overstated in statistics as well. Many acts of violence occur on school grounds that are personal acts of violence directed at specific persons from gang violence or domestic violence. A victim and their perpetrator may have no affiliation with the school or a student but the crime ends up happening on school property. These are still scary, but not the random, mass violence that we assume when a “school shooting” is reported.

There are some standard active shooter protocols in use around the country, but there is no one response that is appropriate for every kind of attack (the phrase “active harmer” is often used to include non-firearm weapons). Methods of attack have included stealth entrances, distraction by explosives, false alarms to get students out in the open, team attacks, and hostage-taking to name a few. Simulation drills in school have been criticized, including by this writer, for invoking unnecessary fear and trauma in students. Since many shooters are former or current students, they know what to expect from participating in the drills themselves. Many protocols are too complicated to execute while under attack.

There is no profile of a potential active shooter. The U.S. Secret Service and the FBI have studied the subject thoroughly and have stated at the end of their research reports that there is no profile. Although some shooters have a history of violence, many do not. Some shooters were taking prescribed psychotropic medications but shooters aren't always diagnosed with a mental illness. Some shooters played violent video games, but most young people play video games and don't become killers. Police agencies are often criticized when the public hears that some report had come to their attention about a person involved in school violence, but sorting through all reports of people acting strange is a bigger task than one would imagine.

There is evidence that a significant number of shooters had given some subtle or overt signal of their intentions. Training teachers and law enforcement officers to recognize those outcries has had some good results, but the challenge is that gathering bits of information from friends, counselors, and family members (many of whom want to keep confidentiality) to create the constellation of evidence that might predict a violent outburst is burdensome. Hindsight is of little consolation and "we should have known" doesn't mean we would have.

The political response to these anomalous attacks usually centers around new firearms restrictions and legislation or more funding for mental health programs. There is no consensus that new laws would have made a significant impact on the ability of attackers to obtain weapons, but when bad things happen, politicians are quick to claim answers are in pages of new laws.

Two responses seem to make a lot of sense. One is threat assessment teams made up of a variety of persons who may have information on persons of concern. This would include school personnel, law enforcement, and mental health professionals who might be able to “connect the dots” on clusters of concerning behaviors with the goal of intervention. The other is to make sure that getting students secured behind a locked door is the first response of choice when alerted to a possible threat. Ridding schools of a law enforcement presence including School Resource Officers, despite the claims of the National Education Association teacher’s union, is a step in a decidedly wrong direction.

Knowing facts about school shootings can help relieve some tension about the probabilities of it happening to our kids. We can take some comfort in knowing that schools are very safe places to be. The only thing worse would be to believe it will never happen to your school.

I Hate To Say I Told You So, But...

It didn't take a prophet to predict the collapse of law and order when the anti-police movement virus spread from criminals and academic philosophers to politicians and government leaders. It also took no supernatural skill to predict that regret, backpedaling, and restoration would inevitably follow.

A prime example is the presence of police officers in schools. Mythology promoted by anti-police voices in general, with a big push by the National Education Association, encouraged the de-policing of schools. The NEA devotes a web page to the promotion of the Black Lives Matter agenda, the "school to prison pipeline" caused by school disciplinary measures, and their "Creating Safe Schools" position that states "When police and immigration authorities aggressively pursue enforcement activities on or around school property, they interfere with all students' ability to learn."

Perhaps one has to be of a certain age to remember the panic caused by school shootings in the Columbine age that continues today. A flurry of laws were passed about school safety that lowered the age to be tried as an adult for violent crimes and mandated that schools report criminal behavior to law enforcement. For college campuses, the 1990 Clery Act required detailed reporting and disclosure of criminal and delinquent behavior on campus to keep colleges from hiding dangers encountered by students. For better or worse, the public became keenly aware that, while schools are still the statistically safest place for children to be they

are not insulated from dangerous behavior from students and outsiders.

Many school districts increased law enforcement presence on their campuses beyond the popular DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) programs. Some schools developed their own specialty police agencies to serve their schools.

Now we have forgotten those realities. A prime example of the knee-jerk decision to keep cops away from schools was Alexandria, Virginia. In May of this year, the city council decided to pull their school resource officers because of accusations that uniforms intimidated minority students. Just five months later the council voted to reallocate those officers back into the middle schools and high schools. A spate of videos showing violent attacks in and near the school grounds reached the public with shocking effect. Superintendent of Schools Gregory C. Hutchings Jr. came to the city council saying "I'm pleading with the City Council this evening that we reinstate our school resource officers immediately."

Meanwhile, in Louden County, Virginia, a parent whose daughter was raped in the girl's restroom by a boy wearing a skirt, was arrested when he tried to passionately plead for the school to stop covering up the crime.

In Covington, Louisiana an 18-year-old student knocked a 64-year-old disabled teacher out of her wheelchair in what is believed to be in response to a TikTok "slap a teacher" challenge. The video of student

Larrianna Jackson knocking the teacher over and punching her was posted on social media.

In San Francisco, a suspected gang member was arrested after a number of guns were found hidden in the Kezar Stadium bathroom during a high school football game.

In Arlington, Texas, a Timberview High School student allegedly had been repeatedly assaulted and bullied then brought a gun to school. A fight broke out on October 6th at 9:15 that escalated into gunfire that left four persons injured, two by gunfire. A .45 caliber handgun was eventually recovered in the investigation.

In Seattle at Ingraham High School where SROs had been banned by Seattle Public Schools, a dispute near campus spilled into the school's parking lot where teens were threatened by a man in a vehicle pointing an AR-15 rifle at them.

All of these events occurred within the first two weeks of October 2021. Are our schools safe? The general answer is yes, but the exceptions are terrifying enough to cause intelligent citizens to regret the absence of law enforcement.

Campus Cops – An Important Part of Any College Town

As a former university police chief, I have encountered a lot of misconceptions about campus policing. There are plenty of reasons for the notion that college law enforcement isn't "real police work". Foremost is the average person's template for what policing looks like is the city or county law enforcement officer. Although there are plenty of entities with their own police force such as railroads, museums, hospitals, parks, and state capitol buildings, anything other than the city or county police car causes a double take.

Campus policing is thought to have its origins with Yale University's 1894 decision to hire two officers for patrolling the campus at night to establish a campus security function. Until the 1960s and 70s, the growth of campus security remained a watchman-type function. With the prevalence of campus unrest during the turbulent years of civil rights and anti-Vietnam war protests, campus leaders came to believe that relying on outside agencies to deal with campus disturbances was inadequate from a political and operational standpoint.

The transition to full-fledged armed and commissioned police officers on campuses came about from legislation authorizing colleges to have their own police departments. Another factor affecting public confusion about campus law enforcement is the variety of approaches that colleges take. The watchman model of security personnel limited to physical security and

limited intervention in crimes in progress is the choice of one-third of campuses of over 2500 students. In over 40% of campuses use a combination of non-commissioned (no or limited arrest powers) and commissioned officers, while over two-thirds use sworn officers, with a third of those officers carrying weapons. Some campuses use a contract model with local law enforcement agencies or private security companies to provide specific services to the campus population.

Another complicating factor is the variance from state to state authorizing what police powers campus officers may have. Private colleges may not be allowed to commission their own officers in some states. These may have to operate under private security or special officer regulations. Other states allow only limited commissions that do not grant general police powers away from campus or off-duty. Others may grant state commissions similar to any state law enforcement organization with powers on and off campus, and on and off duty.

For campuses with a full complement of sworn officers, the duties include anything a municipal agency would do. In addition to patrolling and responding to calls for service, there may be specialty units such as detectives and tactical teams. Community policing concepts are especially important in campus policing due to the unique demographics of a college campus. Young people deserve extra guidance from campus officials including campus law enforcement. Education about relationship violence, stalking, sexual assault, and drug abuse is especially important for this population.

The legitimacy of the campus police officer is often questioned by students as well as the community. “Can you arrest me?” is not an uncommon question facing a campus officer. The answer is “yes”, as evidenced by arrests for sexual assault, drug transactions, theft, and even murder. There are people in prison who were arrested by campus police officers. Another question from the public and campus community is whether campus police should be armed, and further should have access to rifles, armored vehicles, and visible body armor. Campus law enforcement leaders must be able and willing to justify the need for such equipment based on the threats on or near campus.

Campus housing in dorms as well as married housing presents special challenges for young people learning to live together in a diverse community. The typical population group of college students is ages 18-25. This is not only statistically the most frequently represented age group of perpetrators, but also the most frequent crime victim group. This concentrated group of potential offenders and target-rich victims is a strong argument for campus policing.

Campus law enforcement is required by law to report criminal activity and disruptions on and near campus. This federal legislation, commonly called The Clery Act, is unique to colleges. This requires transparency for campuses and is a disincentive for college administrators to hide or downplay safety issues on their campuses.

Campus police are an integral part of a community’s public safety infrastructure. They deserve appreciation

and respect along with their better-known public safety partners.

Confusion in the Chaos of School Emergencies

After the apparent lack of swift response to the school shooter in Uvalde, Texas, parents can panic over what might seem to be inaction on the part of the law enforcement response to emergencies in their own neighborhoods.

There are two things the public, and law enforcement leaders, must recognize about school attacks. One is that response strategies are still evolving, and the other is that the chaos of these tragic events is never the same as the last one or the next one. For all the planning and threat assessment that can be done, the uniqueness of each attack and each attacker.

One common misconception is the benefit of evacuation. Some have advocated pulling the fire alarm in cases of school attacks or bomb threats. This would be a mistaken tactic that can put students at higher risk. Statistics from decades of studies on school shootings show that the safest place for students is behind a locked classroom door. As of the date of this writing, there have been no fatalities of a K-12 student with a locked classroom door between them and the attacker. Putting students in hallways or streaming outside of the school building exposes them to unpredictable hazards.

Many think that evacuation should be the first option in cases of bomb threats as well. The best practice advises otherwise. Generally, protecting in place is the safest

option. This is not because most bomb threats are false although allowing the disruption can feed into the caller's motive. Just like safety from attack is found in the walls of a classroom, so too can safety from explosives be found behind those same walls.

When the image of an explosion comes to mind, it is likely that something like the collapse of the Murrah building in the Oklahoma City bombing. The kind of explosive device that might be used around a school is more likely to be a relatively small one, and more likely to be designed to maim than to destroy a building. These anti-personnel devices can be seeded with objects that create shrapnel rather than the power to take out walls. Such a device would likely be outside the classroom, either in a hallway or someplace commonly accessible, or outside near where persons might be exposed to a detonation. Best practice is to assess the credibility of a threat and conduct a search of areas by persons who know what would look "normal" or out of place.

Imagine if the Oklahoma City bomber had called in a bomb threat and the building had been evacuated into the parking lot where the truck full of explosive material ignited! Evacuation can result in a more dangerous exposure than the relative safety of the classroom.

With attacks on schools often completed within just a few minutes and usually essentially over by the time law enforcement arrives, the most current philosophy is that the first officers on the scene make an immediate entry to stop the attacker. Parents and observers, who may arrive sooner than law enforcement or soon after the police have deployed, can wonder why there are

police still outside the building. In some instances, parents have rushed past the police to get into the building. The terrible memory of hundreds of officers in Uvalde, Texas waiting to enter the kill zone, as well as the apparent hesitancy of the school resource officer at the 2018 Parkland, Florida massacre has eroded trust in law enforcement response.

A first arriving officer might know that other officers are arriving soon and wait in order to create an effective ad hoc entry team, as happened with great effect in the Covenant School shooting in Nashville. Taking time to coordinate information and communication with the variety of agencies that will respond to this type of call is an important investment in a good outcome. Having many individual officers making uncoordinated plans and decisions can create confusion that may hamper an effective rescue and response. Officers may be setting up appropriate perimeters and observation points while observers wonder why they aren't inside the school hunting for suspects.

Asking terrified parents for patience as they wait for word on their children is a big request, but in most cases letting the police do their job first is the safest for all.

Active Shooters: Myths and Realities

The October mass shooting in Maine happened in a state with one of the lowest violent crime rates in the nation and a state with permitless carry. Everytown for Gun Safety cites Maine as “a permitless carry state, though it continues to have low gun violence relative to its weaker firearm laws.” The site further states that 89% of gun deaths in the state are from suicides, meaning that overall, violent crime related to firearms is significantly rare in the state.

That won't stop those who believe more restrictions on firearms ownership will reduce mass shootings of strangers. The debate over such efforts is not the focus of this article, but decisions in the discussions should be informed by facts and not fear. It should also be noted that nothing in this article minimizes the tragedy and loss of violent crime, nor lessens the need for awareness and preparation.

A news report cited over 500 mass shootings in the U.S. in 2023 as of the date of their coverage of the Lewiston, Maine shooting. They may have erroneously referred to the USA Today scorecard that counts 569 events since 2006. The Associated Press cites 37 mass shootings (using the FBI criteria of four or more persons dying within 24 hours) as of this writing. The Gun Violence Archive website cites 567 mass shootings (presumably including non-lethal events) in 2023 and 32 mass murders. Wikipedia claims 487 shootings while Axios states 501 at the end of September.

No wonder the tendency is toward panic. The major concern is random violence as we go about our business. Is it safe to go to Walmart? A USAToday article published in April of this year notes that in a 10-month period, there were 363 gun incidents. Even assuming each of those events happened at a different store, there are over 4,700 Walmart locations in the U.S., meaning that 4,337 stores had no gun incidents. That means there is a 0.0002% chance of being in a Walmart on a day with a gun incident.

School shootings in 2023 number at least 58 according to CNN, 39 of which were on k-12 school grounds and 19 on a college campus. According to weareteachers.com, there are 115, 576 K-12 schools, and USNews and World Report there are about 4,000 college campuses in the U.S. The chance of being on a k-12 or college campus on a day with a shooting event is 0.000003%. Check my math, but the CDC estimates that the odds of being killed in a school shooting any given year is 1 in 2.5 million, much less the risk on any given day of a 180-day school year.

Compare these rates to the risk of being struck by lightning in any given year is 1/1,222,000 according to weather.gov, 90% of which are non-fatal. Dying in a car crash is 1 in 101 in any given year according to the National Safety Council. Being killed by a shark is 1 in 3.7 million

As a school safety expert, I do not take this risk lightly. But even among reported school shootings, many happen on school property from crimes that are unrelated to the school population, and many are not

aimed at random members of the school community but are targets of personal disputes or domestic violence.

A Rand Corporation study on state and local gun regulations concluded that “none of the policies we examined would dramatically increase or decrease the stock of guns—estimated by the Small Arms Survey to be more than 393 million firearms in 2017—or gun ownership rates—with about one-third of households estimated to own firearms in 2016—in ways that may produce more readily detectable effects on public safety, health, and industry outcomes.” The study found few regulations that could be tied to a reduction in firearms-related deaths but did note that even a small reduction in such fatalities and injuries could be a significant number over time.

The fear-to-fact ratio appears to be tilted far in favor of fear, which is never a solid foundation for new laws, particularly those that impinge on basic freedoms. Facts matter, but who can we trust to produce and interpret them?

Avoiding the “School to Prison Pipeline” Yields Tragic Results

In the rush to label policing as a racist enterprise, dozens of school districts dropped school resource officers from their buildings. To the surprise of no intelligent human, their absence has been felt during attacks on schools. A recent shooting of two school employees in Denver occurred when a student with a history of disciplinary issues shot the two administrators while they were doing a regular pat-down search of the student.

There are too many issues involved in this case and so many like it that one article simply can't address them all. It seems like the only response is a call for more gun control measures that have zero evidence of making a molecule of difference in reducing school violence.

The Denver shooter, identified as 17-year-old Austin Lyle, was later found dead in an adjoining county in a remote mountain area. The unusual release of the juvenile's identification was because he remained at large and a published alert with name, description, and suspect vehicle information was necessary for public safety.

In case the reader is wondering why administrators were searching Lyle for weapons, it was part of a “safety plan” put into place due to repeated disciplinary issues. In fact, the student was a transfer from another school district from which he was removed due to his behavior.

Much of what happens with students is protected privacy by federal law, so whether or not the public will ever know this student's history, his continued presence in school is not unusual.

Legislators and rule makers and the distributors of federal funds with federal strings attached have universally lost touch with the reality of life in schools, just as they have lost touch with the realities of law enforcement. School officials are so afraid of lawsuits and being labeled as intolerant that the best way to keep a low profile is to be a punching bag for delinquents. There are schools that, by policy, prohibit teachers from defending themselves or restraining students in any way.

One of the most effective and highly recommended methods for preventing school violence is a school-based threat assessment team. Critics of the idea of holding anyone accountable for their behavior say that these teams are also discriminatory against minority students. They are also adamant that no law enforcement should be a member of such a team. Such is the position of the nation's largest teacher's union whose platform is for more Black Lives Matter education and no police officers on campus.

There are some statistics that can be manipulated to indicate that minority students are disproportionately affected in disciplinary proceedings, but those studies lack the context for accurate interpretation. Neither officers in schools nor threat assessment teams have the primary purpose of disciplining or punishing students. Their purpose is prevention, early detection of

risk factors, and getting students the support they need. Keeping law enforcement out of the loop on threat assessment leaves a dangerous information gap needed by schools to detect and prevent problem behavior.

Of course, Denver schools are scrambling to get police back on campus, despite the school board's previous ejection from campus. The same thing is happening across the country as politicians are spraining their ankles to back peddle on their anti-police stance now that the public is recognizing that as a pro-crime stance.

There is obvious consensus that combating inequity and racism is an important social goal. It is naïve and unproductive to say that all inequity begins and ends with law enforcement or even rule enforcement. Students who engage in dangerous behavior must forfeit their rights to education in the public classroom. There are alternatives, and frisking them every day is not the solution.

Teachers and Professors Need Education on Policing

My wife is a music teacher and belongs to a Facebook group for elementary music teachers. A member of the group posted a question about ukuleles but instead got angry lectures because his FB profile photo was a blue line flag. “If you are a music teacher and have a Blue Lives Matter flag, you probably aren’t going to gain much respect.” “Blue Lives Matter is a harmful movement that actively seeks to silence Black people.” When other teachers rebutted these kinds of comments, another commenter said “Calling out racist behavior is not being unkind.”

Other angry posters cited the often-heard claim that “thousands” of black people are killed by police. If this is the thought process of a significant number of teachers in this subject, what is going on in the classrooms teaching history, social science, and civics?

A racist rant by a Black motorist lawfully stopped by a Latino Los Angeles County deputy recently was captured on camera. “You’re a murderer, OK?” says the female driver who identified herself as a teacher. In another widely reported incident, an adjunct professor for Cypress College in California was captured on a Zoom classroom session antagonizing a student who called police officers heroes. The instructor stated that “A lot of police officers have committed atrocious crimes and have gotten away with it, and have never been convicted of any of it” and “I don’t trust them. My

life's in more danger in their presence." When asked by the student who she would call if faced with an armed attacker, the teacher responded "I wouldn't call anybody." She also stated that policing in America started with slave hunters.

If teachers are communicating their anti-police position to students from elementary to college, the least we could ask for is that it be presented with facts, and with respect for dissenting discussion. Saying that American policing began with slave hunters, or that "thousands" of Black people are killed by police is no better than teaching that the earth is flat or that gravity is just a theory. The sharing of ignorance, bias, and unsubstantiated opinion from a position of power is the antithesis of education.

The National Education Association, the most powerful teacher's professional association, and the largest union in the country supports the Black Lives Matter movement, including the idea that schools with disciplinary measures are pipelines to prison. Under their topic about safe schools, the leading statement on their website is "When police and immigration authorities aggressively pursue enforcement activities on or around school property, they interfere with all students' ability to learn" advocating for police-free schools, claiming widespread police brutality inside schools.

There are many correlations between teachers and police officers. Both get blamed for things out of their control. Both deal with increasing disrespect and resistance. Both are frequently evaluated, and both are

subject to investigation of their ability and character before hiring. Both are recruited from the human race with all of its potential for error and misbehavior. In fact, a quick internet search on teacher misconduct will indicate the extent of the problem of teacher misconduct including sexual exploitation of students, as well as concerns about a uniform platform for reporting, and serious questions about unreported misconduct.

Police agencies have been supporting schools and teachers for decades. Key components of many community policing outreach efforts have been focused on cooperation with schools. Most schools have very productive and mutually beneficial partnerships with their local public safety professionals. Teachers and police have no reason to be adversaries, other than the unsubstantiated narrative of wholesale racism and incompetence in law enforcement that has taken root like the worst kind of predatory weed.

Law enforcement leaders, school administrators, and parents are all concerned about school safety and good citizenship. Those relationships that remain must be reinforced and celebrated. Where those relationships have been damaged by the ill-advised removal of school resource officers, intentional efforts to repair those relationships must happen. Some school districts are forbidding the inclusion of police in responding to criminal behavior. The involvement of law enforcement with crimes on school property is something worthy of discussion, but teachers and well-behaved students can suffer real harm if violent behavior is not handled appropriately.

Teachers and law enforcement are on the same side. It will take the efforts of administrators, school boards, parents, and police leaders to keep those positive connections.

Less Juvenile Crime?

With murder rates spiking and fear of crime growing across the country, there is some good news and bad news about the role of teenage offenders. According to a Department of Justice report recently released, violent crime among youth has declined from previous levels. Juvenile arrests for violence peaked in recent years around 1996, then declines with a slight bump in about 2006 and declining thereafter.

Important caveats are stated in the body of the report for those making a close analysis of the information: “The number of arrests is not the same as the number of people arrested because an unknown number of individuals are arrested more than once during the year. Similarly, arrest statistics do not represent the number of crimes that arrested individuals commit because a series of crimes that one person commits may result in a single arrest, and a single crime may result in the arrest of more than one person. One should not use arrest statistics to indicate the relative proportions of crime that youth and adults commit. The FBI requires law enforcement agencies to report the most serious offense charged in an arrest. The arrest of a youth charged with robbery and aggravated assault would be reported to the FBI as an arrest for robbery.”

Keeping in mind that crime rates are influenced by the proactivity of law enforcement, the willingness of the public to report a crime, and the accuracy of statistics provided to the Department of Justice by local law enforcement, the trends appear to be in the right

direction. Not part of the calculus of this particular data is the percentage of persons aged 0-17 in the population relative to the percentage of persons 18 and older. The increase in the adult population due to immigration and the decrease in birth rates in recent decades would be necessary to calculate the true impact of juvenile crime, but fewer kids relative to the population could be a factor in the decline. We also note that these figures are from the year of the height of isolation from the pandemic. Nevertheless, raw numbers show a decline.

According to the report, of the 424, 300 arrests involving persons under 18 in 2020. Eight percent of those arrests were for a violent crime, representing 5% for aggravated assault, 3% for robbery, and 1% for murder. It may be no surprise that 80% of juvenile arrests are of males. For the most violent of offenses, males make up 92% of juvenile murder arrestees and 88% of juvenile arrests for robbery. Those somber figures are the bad news, even though those numbers are in decline.

Relative to all arrests for violent crime, suspects under 18 years old accounted for 7% of all arrests. This percentage is half of that reported in 2010. The rate of decline for juvenile involvement in violent crime is much higher than any decline reported in the adult category.

The age group of 18–24 represents a much higher threat to public safety than those under 18. This older group of young people represents 19% of all arrests and 21% of arrests for violent crimes. They are responsible for four times the number of murders than their younger cohorts.

In more bad news, young people are also crime victims. Serious crime victimization of juveniles showed a spike in 2019, a dramatic decrease in 2020, with the exception of murder. Youth homicide claimed the lives of 1,780 children and teens in 2020, a rise of 30% over 2019. Over half of these victims were aged 15-17. Over a fourth were children under age six. Two-thirds of the victims were killed by gunfire. Males were not only more frequently the perpetrators of murder, but also 74% of victims. Black victims represent 55% of homicide victims.

There isn't much good news about the crime rate in recent months, and even these statistics give a limited prospect of optimism. We can only hope that families, law enforcement, schools, and positive organizations for young people can unite to keep young people from becoming offenders and victims.

About The Author



This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#) Joel is a retired police chief. He is an award-winning writer, college professor, trainer, and first responder chaplain.