

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an educator at a small private school in Fairfield County. Our student body is composed of 200 young learners ranging in age from 3 years old to 14 years old. Our school's campus resembles a large colonial house and we eat lunch in a dining room overlooking a beautiful brook. The environment is warm, enriching, and welcoming - not surprisingly, our school's faculty, students, and administration reflect this as well.

Yet although where I report to work is an idyllic educational setting, myself and my fellow educators had our world turned upside down on December 14, 2012. Any teacher in any part of our country was no doubt affected by the events of that day. Shock turned into confusion, which turned into immense grief, which turned into anger, which turned into acceptance, which turned into support. Support for one another, our students, and our community. As teachers, none of us can help but wonder "what would I do?". Lying wide awake in the middle of the night, I would mentally go over what I would do. *Well, I would turn off the lights in my classroom, lock my door, gather the kids into a corner, open a window, start lowering them outside one by one, and take them to the church across the street.* But what if the intruder were right outside my door, banging to get in? *Well, I would tell the kids to quietly play a game in the cubby room while I barricaded the door with all of my might and whatever heavy objects I could find.* And what if the intruder got into my classroom? *Well, I would try to fight him off the best I could and hope for the best.* But what if I had my three-year-olds in the classroom with me and they were scared? *Well, we would sing songs or color or read a book or play with puppets.* And what if I had my eighth graders in the classroom with me and they were equally as scared but didn't want to show it? *Well, we would try to exit out the windows, since those kids are taller and can easily get down to the ground.* Never in my mind, as I lay there terrified, did I ever think I would have to even consider this scenario. And never in my mind did I ever think I would not put the safety of my students above my own safety. No matter the outcome.

Our school administration and faculty attended a mandatory "school safety" seminar shortly after we returned from holiday break. 90 minutes of watching disturbing videos, hearing about self-defense mechanisms, and how to potentially disarm an "active shooter" was scary and overwhelming, but incredibly valuable information. We are taking measures that we never anticipated taking, however, we all feel better prepared should an incident like this ever - god forbid - arise. Moreover, our school's plans for increased security will not affect the school's overall climate and mission. Now I have a clearer idea as to "what would I do?".

In an ideal world, every school should have access to these types of seminars, drills, and information. A prepared school is obviously much safer than an unprepared one. Armed guards and armed principals/teachers/staff are not the answer. Preparedness and information are key. If local, state, and federal budgets would allow for schools to have mandatory ongoing safety training workshops, combined with a security audit of the school's campus and building, it would dramatically increase the chances of a school's ability to handle an emergency situation and hopefully lead to a decline in school shootings altogether. Once a potential shooter is aware that a school building has undergone thorough training and security measures, it could possibly act as a deterrent to that person.

I understand this issue is a sensitive and challenging topic that hits close to home for us all. I thank you for taking the time to read this and I pray for a reality where these types of pleas need not exist anymore.

Sincerely,

A. Cahill