

To Whom it May Concern

After the tragic event in Newtown many responded with concern and anger about the lack of security in our schools. I have, respectfully, to disagree with them. The problem is NOT lack of security in our schools. The young man who committed the murders used his weapon to smash his way through the doors of the school, and proceeded immediately to begin to kill. No amount of metal detectors or locked doors would have stopped him from what he did. Nor will such 'security' measures serve to prevent other tragedies of this kind.

I understand the gut response to make our schools safer by beefing up security. As the tragedy unfolded in Newton my own six-year old son was sitting in his first grade classroom barely 25 miles away. Part of me wants simply to protect him, to build ever higher and stronger walls around his precious little body to keep it from harm.

I am convinced however, that not only are efforts to make schools more secure in this way futile, they are also counter-productive. They are like a band-aid for a wound that stems the flow of blood, but allows and even encourages the infection to fester beneath. Metal detectors and higher and stronger walls will not only distract us from the real problem at hand, but will, by creating an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, perpetuate and exacerbate the conditions that foster this type of murderous behavior, the multiple factors that coalesce and culminate in such tragedies. As we focus on protecting ourselves, we lose sight of the root causes of our insecurity.

Those root causes are multiple and complex, but not so complex that we can't identify them and address them. They include easy access to easy-to-kill-with guns/ammunition, a national norm that measures strength in terms of numbers and sophistication of weaponry, an underfunded mental health care system that cannot cope with the scale of those who suffer mental illness, a culture that promotes individual success over community well-being, and that measures success in terms of power and fame, rather than positive impact on wider society.

Focusing on building higher walls or tighter security systems around our schools and homes encourages us to seek strength in weapons, to distance ourselves from those whose suffering we need to understand and address before it bursts out in a fury borne of isolation and paranoia, to turn inwards to our 'own people,' fearing those who seem different ... and so the cycle continues.

Now is the time to pull together our resources to solve these problems, to begin to take steps towards real change. If we want our schools to be more secure, talk of metal detectors and tighter security risks distracting us from the real task at hand.

Thank you

Annie Harper

Project Manager, Yale Community Carbon Fund

Consultant, Financial Health, Connecticut Mental Health Centre