

To: Members of the School Safety Subcommittee  
From: Eugene Horrigan  
Subject: School Safety Testimony  
Date: January 25, 2013

I have been a public high school educator for 41 years in 6 schools: social studies teacher, athletic director, assistant principal and principal (for 25 years). Currently I am a Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) executive coach for two urban high school principals.

In designing school safety measures, we have to be ever mindful that most school directed violence is carried out by students who are lonely, isolated and desperate (I refer to the Secret Service studies).

Therefore high school safety programs should include the following elements:

1. Mandated advisor programs so each student has a trusted adult who understands him/her, who has significant daily interaction with the student, and who responds to serious social-emotional problems that the student may be having on a bad day. No student should feel lonely, isolated or desperate.
2. Well-designed and practiced evacuation and lock down programs with frequent lock down practice by the faculty on professional development days while the students are not in school.
3. School entrance procedures which channel all people through one main door which is attended by staff members who have real stature and really know their students.

Well managed schools provide the above safety elements while protecting an atmosphere that is respectful, friendly, welcoming and supportive of each student. Adding gun carrying adults to a school will turn upside down the trusting relationships many teenagers now have with adults. Meanwhile, adults with guns will not eliminate safety problems but will add to them.

As a principal, I was and remain a law and order person, but I am most strenuously opposed to bringing guns into the schools. Consider the following:

Armed guards: In my 21 years of taking seniors on overnight trips, I hired many certified security guards in seven cities for our hotel stays. My teachers and I learned to trust few of them relative to judgment, intelligence, temperament and integrity. Many nights I frequently got up to check on my security guards.

Armed teachers and staff: With each new gun in a school the chances grow that a gun will be unsecured, misplaced, lost, or stolen. The likelihood of poor judgment and tragic decisions by untrained and untested staff or by emotionally troubled, nervous or fearful people will be ever present. Every business, every town and every school employs fragile people.

Armed principals: As a principal, should I have been armed on my way to check out a strange car in the parking lot, a student fight, or an out-of-control student? Absolutely not. I was not trained or experienced or skilled in brandishing a gun.

I meet monthly with retired principals who are executive coaches around the state. Not one believes we should bring guns into schools with the exception of highly trained police officers suited to work with kids. Unfortunately, while there are state and local police officers who are great, there are others who should not be around teenagers.

But discussions of security precautions, often by design, cloud or distract from the fundamental reality.

Security measures will not make any difference if a person is heavily armed with semi-automatic weapons and large clips, and is intent on killing. I hesitate to say this, but school activities are easy targets, e.g. a busload of our sons and daughters on any road, an outdoors sporting event, a packed basketball game or a classroom with windows.

Our real responsibility to our kids is to eliminate the opportunity for a troubled person to easily find and use a weapon and large clips, and to become a demon by hellishly killing many in a matter of seconds. Semi-automatic weapons can empty a 30- bullet clip in five seconds. (See San Jose, California police test.)

Shamefully, today as we sit here, there are thousands of those weapons and clips throughout Connecticut. Our trusted legislators, I pray you have the courage to ban them.

Final Notes – According to the State Police, as of December 7, 2013, there were 8825 assault weapons and 2304 machine guns registered in Connecticut.

Furthermore, since the 1994 ban on new purchases of those guns, gun manufacturers have redesigned them with minor changes to circumvent the law.

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