



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SCHOOLS MUST BE SAFE HAVENS

The headlines are once again full of news of another school massacre. We say “never again” after every school shooting. This will be the last one. Then there is another. What do we say this time? We must have the political will and fortitude to address school shootings. Any viable option that can lead to a safer environment in our schools and communities should be on the table.

Isaac Asimov wrote: “Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent.” I agree with Asimov in theory, however, those who conduct violence are cunning and devious, often executing evil with precision. Violence itself has self-perpetuating characteristics and people have grown callous to violence around them. Albert Bandura, one of the most influential psychologists of the twentieth century, put forth [theories](#) on how aggression and violence might be transmitted through observational learning. Bandura believed “our brains are wired to imitate the actions we see around us.”

We know we cannot stop every act of senseless violence in society. But we should still make the effort. Absent a total change in the fabric of society, we will never be able to create a safe and nurturing family environment for every child. We can provide additional mental help and support for individuals and families at risk of violence or violent behavior. Surely we understand that our schools and our places of worship must be a haven from violence.

Unfortunately, as we have seen far too frequently, our schools are easy targets for those who wish to harm others. When premeditated attacks and school shootings occur, they are usually over within minutes. Law enforcement is simply not able to respond quickly enough to violent events such as school shootings, and lives are lost in the process. People who run toward this danger and first responders never receive enough credit.

Schools must be safe havens for students and teachers. School safety policies must be flexible and practical. In the current political environment, every issue is examined with a liberal or conservative lens and the critical issue of mass shootings or viable solutions are never considered. It is time to quit playing political volleyball with this issue. Real lives, those of children and adults, are at stake in our schools.

The first step in school safety is securing the perimeter of a school. It seems like simple logic that we should keep intruders out and make sure the area inside those boundaries is safe for children and adults. Students are our priority, but teachers and staff need protection too. If you see something, say something, and then someone in authority must do something.

SUMMARY

“We say “never again” after every school shooting. This will be the last one. Then there is another. What do we say this time? We must have the political will and fortitude to address school shootings.”

Former Metro Nashville Principal Bill Gemmill, pointed out, “All schools need upgraded security, whether it is as simple and reasonable as inside locks on classroom doors.” Public school safety must be a priority at every level of government. The federal government could absorb the cost by simply eliminating any of the already wasteful programs they are funding.

Intruders who wish to hurt our students and teachers, are usually familiar with the schools’ defense system and create plans around that information. More than likely, the defense strategy is in the student handbook posted online and rarely changes. These people know when to attack, where to go, and often, how to escape. Students and teachers alike, as well as approved visitors, should always have a visible identification badge on them. There need to be secure exterior doors to limit building access points, and each district should develop a uniform policy for entry into a school.

The last line of defense that we can have for our kids is an armed person willing and ready to defend them if the unspeakable should happen. That is why we must support the School Resource Officer (SRO) program. Those who advocate for not having a law enforcement presence at our schools are naïve. The SRO Program serves various purposes during the school year and is invaluable where it exists. A local law-enforcement agency, working in conjunction with the local education agency should direct the program. The school can employ and utilize additional security, but the primary responsibility should always fall to local law enforcement.

We must address the gun issue. We will need to be careful that the policy is reasonable. I strongly support the 2nd Amendment and have a handgun carry permit myself. We must have a commonsense approach to who, when, and where we can carry firearms, without infringing on the rights of law-abiding citizens. We should raise the age for the purchase of certain guns to the age of twenty-one, with an exemption for active-duty military.

We make 16-year-old children pass a driver’s test. We prohibit drinking alcoholic beverages until 21, we should follow suit here as well. Many young people just are not prepared for the responsibility of driving, drinking, or owning a firearm. Some people never will be prepared. We should make stronger background checks, considering factors such as criminal background and mental health. We should more aggressively punish those who commit crimes with guns.

Policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels, must continuously address legislation on school safety. The subject is very emotional, with good arguments coming from either side of the debate. This is why each community must make the decisions. School districts must determine for themselves what direction they want to take on school safety, based on the needs and size of their community.

One side of the argument is that armed teachers who possess the training or a military background would deter intruders. Some schools and districts may want to include qualified, certified, and licensed volunteer school personnel going armed in their building. However, most educators do not want that added responsibility, preferring that trained law enforcement be used as a deterrent.

Mike Conrad, a teacher in Detroit said in an interview, “I think that the moment that you put a gun on the hip of a teacher in a classroom, that we have accepted the norm that school shootings will not stop, that we are now on the front line to defend against them, instead of trying to find a way to stop them.” Conrad’s point

reflects a growing concern of educators who sometimes feel abandoned after the traumatic events have lost media attention.

If a district chooses to permit trained and armed teachers and administrators into the schools, the decision should be discussed with educators and the community. The state should never mandate educators to carry firearms or prohibit them from carrying if permitted by the district.

Martin Luther King Jr reminded us that at “the center of non-violence stands the principle of love.” Our world could use a little more love today. The time for talking is past; it is now time to act.

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JC Bowman is the Executive Director of Professional Educators of Tennessee, a non-partisan teacher association headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the author and the association are properly cited. For more information on this subject or any education issue please contact Professional Educators of Tennessee. To schedule an interview please contact communications@proedtn.org or 1-800-471-4867.