Evidence-Based School Threat Assessment

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Main Points

1. Decisions about school safety must be based on facts, not fear.
2. School violence is a small part of the larger problem of gun violence.
3. We need more emphasis on prevention than security.
4. One prevention strategy is evidence-based school threat assessment, which can identify serious threats and help prevent violence.

Traumatic Effect of School Shootings

School shootings are so traumatic that they convince everyone that we extensive schools are unsafe and require extensive security measures.

We need both recovery from trauma and a factual analysis of the best way to prevent more shootings.
Annual Gun Toll
- 32,000 deaths
- 84,000 injuries
116,000 total

318 Shootings per day

Shooting deaths from National Vital Statistics

5 yrs x 100,000 = 500,000 outside of schools

For every shooting in a school, there are 1,600+ outside of schools

If schools were impregnable, it would only stop .06% of shootings
Less than 1 tenth of 1 percent

The real problem is gun violence, not school violence.
Why the Fear of School Violence Matters

Newtown Rampage Spurs $5 Billion School Security Spending

Extra security in Hillsborough schools would cost $4 million

School security measures could cost millions locally

Additional Florida School Security Could Cost $100 Million

School security wish list would cost Marion County $160M

Armed guards in every Minn. school would cost $138 million

NRA proposal would cost state schools about $138 million.

(DeAngelis, Brent, & Ianni, 2011)

Zero Tolerance Suspensions After the Newtown Shootings

6 year old pointed finger and said "pow!"

http://www.sott.net/article/255552-6-year-old-suspended-for-pretend-gunshot

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School security measures are expensive and deprive schools of resources that could be allocated to preventive measures such as anti-bullying programs and counseling services.

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The Expansion of Zero Tolerance

From No Guns to
- No Toy Guns
- No Nail clippers
- No Plastic utensils
- No Finger-pointing
- No Jokes
- No Drawings
- No Rubber band shooting

No accidental violations

3.3 Million Suspensions Per Year Fuel the School to Prison Pipeline

We should prevent shootings rather than simply prepare for them.

Prevention means “to keep something from happening”

Prevention must start before the gunman is at your door.

The FBI, Secret Service, and Dept of Education recommended a threat assessment approach nearly 20 years ago.
What is Threat Assessment?

Threat assessment is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in some way.

Threat Assessment is a violence prevention strategy.

1. Family members, friends, or others seek help when concerned about someone in distress or who is threatening violence.
2. The threat assessment team evaluates the seriousness of the threat.
3. The team initiates assistance to address the underlying problem, conflict or need. In the most serious cases, protective action is taken.

Threat Assessment

1. Identification of threats made by students.
2. Evaluation of seriousness of threat and danger it poses to others, recognizing that all threats are not the same (e.g., toy guns are not dangerous).
3. Intervention to reduce risk of violence.
4. Follow-up to assess intervention results.

Accurate Threat Assessment Avoids 2 Errors ...

1. Over-reaction
   School Suspends Second Grader for Eating His Pop-Tart Into the Shape of a Gun

2. Under-Reaction

• Threat assessment must be adapted for schools.
• Recognize developmental issues in children, social context of school.
• Goal is not punishment but successful education and healthy development.
In a threat assessment, we try to determine why a student made a threat, and therefore how we can prevent the threat from being carried out.

Research on Threat Assessment


Virginia mandates K-12 threat assessment in 2013

1. 99% of threats not carried out.
2. Only 1% expelled, 1% arrested.
3. Suspension rates decreased.
4. Racial disparities reduced or absent.
5. Counseling used more often.

Key Points about School Threat Assessment

1. Must be adapted for schools.
2. Avoid criminalizing students.
3. Provide help where needed.
4. Need systematic training and research to maintain effectiveness.

Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America

Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence

Endorsed by 240+ organizations and 4,000+ individuals

- American Federation of Teachers
- American Psychological Association
- Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders
- National Educational Association
- National PTA
- National Association of Social Workers

To read and sign
https://curry.virginia.edu/prevent-gun-violence
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Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence
February 20, 2018

School shootings and widespread community gun violence are far greater in the United States than other nations. America cannot be great and realize its promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness if our children are not safe from gun violence.

Although security measures are important, a focus on simply preparing for shootings is insufficient. We need a change in mindset and policy from reaction to prevention. Prevention entails more than security measures and begins long before a gunman comes to school. We need a comprehensive public health approach to gun violence that is informed by scientific evidence and free from partisan politics.

A public health approach to protecting children as well as adults from gun violence involves three levels of prevention: (1) universal approaches promoting safety and well-being for everyone; (2) practices for reducing risk and promoting protective factors for persons experiencing difficulties; and (3) interventions for individuals where violence is present or appears imminent.

Eight-Point Plan to Prevent Gun Violence

1. A national requirement for all schools to assess school climate and maintain physically and emotionally safe conditions and positive school environments that protect all students and adults from bullying, discrimination, harassment, and assault.

2. A ban on assault-style weapons, high-capacity ammunition clips, and products that modify semi-automatic firearms to enable them to function like automatic firearms.

3. Adequate staffing (such as counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers) of coordinated school- and community-based mental health services for individuals with risk factors for violence, recognizing that violence is not intrinsically a product of mental illness.

4. Reform of school discipline to reduce exclusionary practices and foster positive social, behavioral, emotional, and academic success for students.

5. Universal background checks to screen out violent offenders, persons who have been hospitalized for violence towards self or others, and persons on no-fly, terrorist watch lists.

Concluding Points

1. School violence is a small part of a larger problem of gun violence

2. Schools are much safer than the public thinks.

3. Threat assessment can help schools respond to student threats.

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