

Student Safety

A Case for Arming District Personnel

The conversation about potentially arming teachers and staff in schools has been fueled predominantly by emotions not logic. Loud voices from across the country have been shutting down the conversation due to their unjustified fear of firearms, as well as their lack of patience to work out a better solution. Most heated debates become so because there is a general lack of facts and clear understanding. Logic-based conversations alone are those that can potentially solve this issue plaguing school districts.

It is undeniable that school shootings are an incredibly tragic problem facing the country today. While there are multiple potential solutions to the problem, it is likely that the best solution depends on the district or state. However, the idea of arming district personnel does not have to be a one-size-fits-all approach. One of the most common arguments (and unfortunately one that is drenched with emotional language) against arming faculty and staff is that “they have enough to deal with already” and that arming and training them is an “unfair burden”. Indeed, many teachers and administrators are not equipped to handle the responsibility of owning and storing a firearm, whether that is due to their hectic schedules or their aversion to firearms. This reasoning is exactly why the argument in favor of arming faculty has *never* mandated that each employee be unwillingly forced to own a firearm. No one on either side of the debate would want to place what is in fact a burden onto every adult in the district. Rather, support for those that volunteer to take on the responsibility so that they could have this opportunity.

The Clarksville School District in Arkansas displays an example of this situation. The district claims that they wanted to hire a school resource officer (SRO) to better guard the building. The argument for adding school resource officers is another conversation, but there is no conclusive evidence on their effectiveness, and there was an SRO at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, but this presence did not stop the tragedy there from occurring. The cost of hiring one, according to Clarksville Schools, would have been about \$50,000 per year. Instead, the district decided to spend \$68,000 to train and arm 13 staff members that volunteered to participate in the program. There are signs posted outside the building warning possible intruders about this defense system (Chavez, 2018). These signs alone are likely a huge deterrent to would-be shooters. Neither side of this argument has much evidence other than a few case studies to substantiate their claims or ideas for solutions. Thus, case studies must be the standard for proposing solutions. Admittedly, every district is different, which is again why no one is suggesting a one-size-fits-all solution.

Another argument in opposition to arming faculty (this one more logical) is that 73 percent of teachers oppose guns in schools, according to a Gallup poll (Nova, 2018). It is certainly unfortunate that some faculty members would ever have to feel uncomfortable with the knowledge that their peers were carrying inside the school. The reason this figure is not substantial enough to deter those in favor of arming faculty is that at some point, keeping the

students safe is more important than these concerns from district personnel. Personnel with concerns about how to protect students would not have to be the ones carrying firearms. Firearms are a common method of protection; celebrities are protected with armed guards, large concerts and sporting events are kept in check by armed guards, and over 30 percent of Americans own firearms themselves (Nova, 2018). If it means the best form of deterring shooters, faculty and staff perhaps must be made uncomfortable with having a few trained and armed people in their districts.

One more argument against arming faculty and staff is that there is potential for students to find the firearm, hurt themselves or others with it, or for the faculty member to lose it. This argument lacks credibility or understanding- obviously, faculty would not be storing the firearms loosely in desk drawers, or leaving them in lounges. Firearms would have to be stored in locked, secure areas, with faculty members being held to strict accountability. Undoubtedly, this is another burden for faculty or staff members, but as long as they are volunteering to be armed in the first place, they will have understood what the responsibility entails. A counterargument, supposedly, could be that no faculty or staff member would ever take on such a burden. Well, there already have been plenty who have, and their reasoning is sound.

Why choose to cower in a corner of a room only protected by a locked door, when a tool of empowerment is available? If a person has been trained to use it safely and effectively, and feels confident in doing so, how can anyone inhibit them from potentially saving lives? The added responsibility is nothing in comparison to protecting students and other personnel in a situation where lives are at stake. This logic is that which has already put firearms into the hands of some faculty and staff in America. In districts that approve of such measures, and in the hands of faculty and staff who knowingly take the responsibility, is there really so much harm in protecting the next generation?

References:

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Nova, Annie. "73 percent of teachers oppose guns in schools, Gallup finds". 16 March 2018. CNBC. Retrieved from: <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/16/73-percent-of-teachers-oppose-guns-in-schools-gallup-finds.html>