

Is Your School Prepared? - The Definition of Insanity

"If you want the present to be different from the past, study the past."

~Baruch Spinoza, Philosopher, c. 1660

- ✦ 1989 Cleveland Elementary, Stockton, CA: **35**
- ✦ 1999 Columbine High, Littleton, CO: **34**
- ✦ 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary, Newtown, CT: **28**
- ✦ 2018 Stoneman Douglas High, Parkland, FL: **34**
- ✦ 2018 Santa Fe High, Santa Fe, TX: **23**
- ✦ 2022 Robb Elementary, Uvalde, TX: **38**

Same bad plan, same bad result! Schools have been getting it wrong for over 30 years.

Any plan works well on days the killer does not attack; there needs to be a plan for the day the killer does attack. It starts with defining what you want the outcome to look like after the attack is over - specifically, the body count. After defining the desired outcome, a realistic plan can be developed to reach that outcome.

If the focus is on the plan and not the desired outcome, we include things we are comfortable with, things we personally like, things other schools are doing, things we have always done, things that are not controversial, things that require less work, things that are inexpensive. We exclude things we are not comfortable with, things we do not like, things that might be controversial, things that cause more work, things that may cost more.

To be clear, an active shooter attack is Combat and there will be casualties. There needs to be a plan to minimize those casualties which includes treating and evacuating victims. An active shooter attack starts as one-way combat - the shooter's plan. The question is, will it stay one-way combat for 5 to 10 minutes resulting in a high body count or will there be a quick response making it two-way combat, keeping the body count low?

A plan built on emotion, hope or politics is not a plan; a plan built on Math and Time is the only viable plan. Based on previous active shooter attacks, the math shows in the first minute of an attack, expect 8 - 14 victims. After 3 minutes, expect 20 - 26 victims, the body count continues to rise from there. Planning for zero victims is hope, not a plan. An active shooter attack is an ambush - you won't know it is happening until it does, so there will be victims. According to FBI statistics, the average police response time to a 911 call for an active shooter is 3 minutes. That's an average once notification is made.

According to the ALICE Training Institute, the math looks like this:

- ▶ First sign of danger to 911 call: 2-3 minutes
- ▶ Officer response time to scene: 10 minutes
- ▶ Time for Dispatcher to get info from caller: 1-2 minutes
- ▶ Officer in door: 1-2 minutes

The question for planners and policy makers is, *“What is the maximum number of dead and wounded that is acceptable while waiting on a 911 call, police to be dispatched, police arrival, entry and action to stop the killer?”*

At Robb Elementary, 376 law enforcement officers responded to the 911 call of an active shooter, yet it took **more than an hour** before the shooter was stopped. Two teachers were among the dead; two teachers that could have made a difference if realistic plans and policies existed or were executed.

The focus when developing a plan should be to stop the killing within the first 30 seconds. Doing the math shows keeping the body count to single digits means having a plan to stop the threat before the 911 call is even made. In other words, there needs to be an Immediate Responder instead of waiting for a First Responder.

“But we have a School Resource Officer (SRO).” So did Columbine High, Stoneman Douglas High and Robb Elementary listed above. Santa Fe High listed above had two (2) SROs. There are two basic facts regarding SROs: they can't be in two places at the same time and there is no guarantee they will respond effectively or at all as seen in the aforementioned cases. However, in every one of the cases cited above, at least one teacher was a victim, all of them trying to stop the shooter. What if they had been armed and trained? Instead of committing suicide, there is a high probability there would have been a better outcome.

Some additional facts from the above tragedies; the Cleveland Elementary shooting started on the playground and Columbine started in the parking lot as did the Robb Elementary shooting. To reiterate, SROs can't be in two places at the same time or may not respond. At Stoneman Douglas High, the shooter never entered the classroom, all of the students were either shot through the door or in the hallway after the fire alarm went off. A lockdown was not effective. Although the entrance to Sandy Hook Elementary was secure, the attacker shot through the glass and entered the building. There are other cases in addition to those cited above that follow similar scenarios. When will we learn the lessons written in blood?

“On the occasion of every tragedy that befalls you, remember to turn to yourself and inquire what power you have for turning it to use.” ~ Epictetus, The Enchiridion, c. 125

The flying community has learned this lesson, and every aircraft accident is investigated in an effort to learn how to avoid the same tragedy again. It is said, "Flying rules and regulations are written in blood." How many more school shootings will it take to learn this lesson and how much more blood will be needed to write realistic policies and plans to avoid or mitigate future attacks?

In his book, *Why Meadow Died*, Andrew Pollack does the investigation. He identifies the failures in planning, preparing and the human failure to act before, during and after the attack. Meadow shouldn't have died and neither should have anyone else that day. It was the most preventable school shooting ever to occur. *Why Meadow Died* also points out how current school inclusion and discipline policies are hurting, not helping the target community. Those policies are only kicking the can down the road, creating an even bigger problem for schools and cementing future failure for those affected. *Why Meadow Died* should be required reading for anyone involved in education today.

"Violence is rarely the answer, but when it is, it's the only answer."

~Tim Larkin, *When Violence is the Answer*

An active shooter will continue to attack until HE decides to stop. We need to help him make that decision. No one is recommending arming every teacher; only volunteers that have been properly trained. A good person with a gun is the fastest and most effective way to stop an active shooter.

"The art of war is simple enough. Find out where the enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike him as hard as you can..." ~ Ulysses S. Grant

School districts need to have realistic policies and plans. School districts need to provide teachers with training and resources to be active defenders instead of passive victims, whether armed or not. This is not about politics or gun control, this is about leadership and having the courage to act to change the status quo. It's about facing the fact we have as much chance of keeping guns out of the hands of criminals as we have of keeping drugs off the street and out of our schools. It's about acknowledging that if faced with a violent attack a properly trained, armed teacher, present and willing, is the best resource for protecting students and staff. It's about understanding more victims could be saved if basic trauma first aid was immediately available.

Realistic plans and policies need to be grounded in facts and not emotion in order to make the right decisions. Following are facts that get lost in emotion:

- ▶ Schools across the country have successfully trained and armed teachers
- ▶ In Utah, anyone with a Utah Concealed Carry License may carry on school grounds and in school facilities
- ▶ There has never been an Active Shooter at a school with an armed staff
- ▶ Armed citizens have never shot the wrong person when responding to an active shooter
- ▶ It has been proven a person armed with a handgun can stop an active shooter with a long gun
- ▶ It has been proven a person armed with a handgun can stop an active shooter wearing body armor
- ▶ More victims could be saved if the shooter was not allowed time to reshoot victims
- ▶ More victims would survive if immediate stop the bleed first aid action was taken

Building a realistic plan has four (4) parts, **Defining** the threat, **Identifying** the environment, **Determining** needed skills, **Ascertaining** required resources.

In other words, identifying what skills and resources are needed to fight the threat and respond to the aftermath in the identified environment. The plan should be 90% stopping the shooter in the first 30 seconds, 9% treating and evacuating the wounded, 1% everything else.

As this paper is a primer to elicit conversation, the lists on the following page are not all inclusive and a more in-depth discussion is omitted.

Defining the threat:

- ▶ Young male
- ▶ Will plan the attack in a gun free zone
- ▶ Has multiple weapons
- ▶ Has a large amount of ammunition
- ▶ Lasts a relatively short time: 3 to 8 minutes
- ▶ Has no escape: plans on dying, most commit suicide
- ▶ Most will not fight an armed defender
- ▶ Will end when faced with armed resistance
- ▶ Will shoot a victim every 10 seconds, on average

Identifying the environment:

- ▶ Soft Target: why the shooter chose the location
- ▶ Outgunned
- ▶ Playing catch-up: time (tick, tick, bang)
- ▶ Confusion: denial
- ▶ Chaos: panic, dead and injured victims
- ▶ Stress and fear
- ▶ Distance
- ▶ Body armor
- ▶ Fire alarms
- ▶ False reports: additional shooters, location of shooter
- ▶ Consequences of a missed shot: armed response

Determining needed skills:

- ▶ Mindset: planning, preparing, training
- ▶ Recognizing gun shots
- ▶ Recognizing a reload
- ▶ Recognizing a malfunction
- ▶ Having a way to fight back: not everyone needs to fight, but someone needs to fight
- ▶ Identify weapons available and how to use them: firearms are most effective
- ▶ Tactics: hallways are killing funnels, attackers are most vulnerable in doorways, effective use of cover
- ▶ Trauma First Aid: primarily CPR and Stop the Bleed

Ascertaining required resources:

- ▶ Room hardening
- ▶ Staff armed and trained
- ▶ Staff trained in CPR and trauma first aid - Tourniquets and stop the bleed kits
- ▶ Automated External Defibrillators
- ▶ Trauma trained counselors
- ▶ Family reunification locations
- ▶ Internal/External communication capability: school wide public address system; public text messaging system to communicate with parents and others
- ▶ Fire alarms with local administrative control

The answer to one question is a beacon to readiness,

“If you knew you would be in a fight for your life tomorrow, would you change the way you prepare and train today?”

Having a badge is irrelevant; armed, willing and present is what matters. We need to support all of our teachers, especially the ones willing to stand in the gap between an active shooter and the arrival of first responders. We need to provide teachers with the resources and training to be an Immediate Responder, both during and after an active shooter attack. To keep doing the same thing and expect a different outcome is the definition of insanity.