



School Violence: It is Not Just a “Fact of Life”

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School violence in the form of firearm violence has been a major hot topic on constitutional rights and safety. Since then, policymakers and advocates have had different views on addressing firearm violence. While some people argue that school violence will never disappear, it is crucial to understand that there are countermeasures to prevent lost lives. With schools being a key point in students' lives, community leaders have taken steps towards preventing school violence. However, school violence still occurs every four weeks (Sullivan 1). This brief will cover the overview, solutions, and history in a place where students should not be afraid for their safety.

II. OVERVIEW

School violence is determined when violence occurs in a school setting, which can include violence in schools or on school grounds. Additionally, school violence can occur at school-related events. School violence takes place when a weapon is used to cause deaths at colleges, high schools, and elementary schools (CDC). In 2022, 43,000 students experienced gun violence at school (“17 Facts About Gun Violence”). School violence has a long-lasting effect on students, such as a decline in students' mental health, which will hinder their performance in school.

A. Relevance

School violence affects more than just students. It also affects educators, principals, superintendents, parents, and guardians. How? People rely on relationships and care about the well-being of their friends and family. For example, if a student is suffering from mental health issues as a result of school violence, the student's friends and family are likely to help them out and try to solve the problem. Another example is when a student feels ambitious, many of their peers are more likely to set goals for themselves. School violence works in a similar way. While many students may not be the direct target of violence, their peers are still affected because of the domino effect. As a result, many students will have decreased performance in school, such as a lack of motivation in clubs and slipping grades (“Violent Threats and Incidents in Schools”). This then leads to a decreased preparation for their future careers. Schools should be a place where learning and curiosity are explored. Parents should feel safe when they send their children off to school.

III. HISTORY

A. Current Stances

With the political division in the United States, many government officials and community officials have established different “solutions” and policy proposals to further prevent school violence in schools. Without a doubt, each state

depends on its beliefs in protecting students in education, training, security measures, and community engagement.

With students being the center of education, schools have incorporated education training on school violence prevention in their curricula. For example, state boards of education have passed policies on incorporating warning signs of school violence in their classrooms, such as in their advisory periods or their required health classes. In Illinois high schools, health class is required in their schools, with many classes covering a required topic of mental health. However, some schools have taken security measures in their districts.

An elementary school in Niles, Illinois, has incorporated security measures to prevent attackers from entering the building, alongside detecting them before entrance into the school. The new technologies include a panic button in every classroom and a face ID scanner where visitors are scanned for criminal background checks (Rossen 1). These measures have prevented school violence while keeping the Second Amendment rights.

Community engagement has been a solution to school violence. For example, peer support can enhance a positive school environment, which is crucial to preventing school violence. A better environment means people are more likely to speak up when they see warning signs. For example, community engagement can mean mentorship programs, where psychologists are trained to empower students on school violence.

I. POLICY PROBLEM

A. Stakeholders

Of course, students are affected by school violence, but the entire country is affected as well. For example, when a school shooting happens, community members—parents, business owners, and neighbors—call on their local policymakers and leaders to prevent further school violence.

As a society, connections are intertwined. Whenever a student is affected by school violence, the community will unite to further prevent it. For example, an educator may choose to address the mental health needs of students by providing them with stress-relieving activities. School administrators and parents will collaborate to provide services to both prevent and recover from school violence, such as therapy dogs, mental health days, and psychotherapy.

B. Risks of Indifference

The risk of indifference to gun violence will result in fear, division, and lives lost. Not only is gun violence the leading cause of death in premature children, but it also has a devastating toll on families' economic situations. A recent study from NICHM shows that gun violence cost the United States \$557 billion in 2023 (Helmke and Song). To explain, an injured person's hospital bill costs thousands of dollars, with the average American not having the proper expenses to pay for it. Even with insurance, they have the risk of their claim being declined. Also, most victims have pivotal roles in their family lives, such as caretaking and translating. Hospitals are affected by the spending of gun violence, "increasing hospitalizations and spending by

1,449% and 1,713% respectively.” This is crucial to current politics. One of the GOP’s key policies when running is reducing the United States’ national debt. With gun violence, this will hinder their goal of decreasing the debt. Each time a patient is treated, the hospital can use the federal government funds. While the hospital does not necessarily contribute to the national debt, the government’s assistance programs do. For example, Medicaid and Medicare are both government assistance programs.

If the United States continues to ignore the gun violence crisis in schools, students’ growth—mental and academic—will dramatically decline. With PTSD, many students will turn to substance abuse to cope with gun violence. As a result, students will develop harmful habits that can disrupt their education and community. For example, drug usage and alcohol abuse will rise in the United States, which will cause more problems to erupt in schools.

Firearm violence further divides division in the United States. The two-party division disagrees on how gun violence should be prevented:

- Liberal: Progressive officials have advocated for stricter gun control laws, including background checks, bans on certain firearms. Liberals are more likely to support stricter gun laws.
- Conservative: Right-leaning officials, in the past, have advocated that guns are crucial to self-defense. Also, they argue that firearms are supported by the Second Amendment.

As stated above, liberals and conservatives have highly polarizing views on firearm violence. The polar division in both parties results in a deadlock, and laws are extremely difficult to pass. With the division in both parties, laws to prevent firearm violence are unlikely to be in law.

C. Nonpartisan Reasoning

When firearm violence in schools occurs, it affects not just the students but also the entire communities, and, oftentimes, people across the globe are affected by the gun violence. On television and social media, strangers come together in times of crisis. Addressing gun violence :

- 1) Economic growth: The occurrence of firearm violence costs districts over \$115,000 in wages (“The Cost of School Shootings: Institute for Policy Research – Northwestern University”). Teachers will have a higher turnover rate due to the fear of violence. The threats will cause them to pursue a safer job. As a result, the cost of hiring and training new teachers will be higher. The costs of hospital bills, as discussed in the previous points, can cause many individuals to fall into debt if they are unable to pay the loans.
- 2) Justice and Equity: Addressing the gun violence issue is not just about saving lives, but also promoting equity across multiple backgrounds. Students in low-income communities lack access to mental health support and education to prevent school violence. For example, a student in a rural and low-income community cannot

discuss with a therapist, and many small towns lack adequate emotional centers. Some people may argue that rural students can access help remotely. However, remote services have their drawbacks. Most students do not have reliable internet access, which makes their meetings and sessions difficult. Additionally, remote sessions can feel disconnected from face-to-face interactions. The conversations are not as genuine as an in-person session, which hinders the students' growth.

- 3) **Mental Health:** Students who experienced school violence will likely experience mental health issues, such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and fear. With mental health struggles, academic progress will decline alongside teacher stratification rates. Students will be less prepared for their future careers. Additionally, the school environment will decline, and students will have an increased rate of dropout. Without a doubt, school violence lingers for months, even years.
- 4) **Supporting Teachers and Staff:** Preventing School Violence means teachers report a higher rating of school environment. Common sense has it—teachers are more likely to keep their jobs because they feel safe. With decreased teacher retention, the teaching quality will be better, leading to better student outcomes. Without a doubt, school violence is a complex issue.

II. TRIED POLICY

Armed Teachers

Tennessee has recently passed a bill that allows educators to carry firearms in school to defend themselves and their students, which is called HB 1202. The bill passed in the 113th general assembly and goes into effect on July 1, 2025. Authorized teachers will need to pass permits and training to carry handguns, alongside background checks. Also, the educators will need to sign a written agreement with their superintendent and principal. Supporters of the bill have argued that the firearm is essential for self-defense. However, it depends on the context of the event. According to multiple sources, the firearms that the teachers carry in school are not as “advanced” as the ones intruders typically use, such as shotguns in the Columbine High School massacre.

Identifying Mental Health

States have required mental health training and education in schools. During these mental health classes, educators are required to teach students about identifying mental health signs before they blossom into threats. For example, in Illinois schools, health is a required class to graduate. Students will learn how to identify the warning signs in their classmates. However, it is important to note that the vast majority of people with mental illnesses are not violent. People struggling with mental illnesses are more likely to be victims of school violence. Therefore, policymakers and community leaders need to break the cycle of violence.

Security Measures

Schools across the country have used technology to prevent school violence in their schools. For example, two-thirds of schools in the Aiken County Public School district have vestibules installed in their schools (Palmer 1). The vestibules are meant to filter out unwelcome visitors from entering the building. Paired with a camera doorbell, a school staff member will let the visitor in from the vestibules after verification is secured. However, vestibules have drawbacks. While the vestibules address intruders during school hours, they do not address the internal threats.

III. POLICY OPTIONS

Anonymous Tipline

Anonymous tip lines allow students, and even parents, to report suspicious activities in school. These tiplines have made it comfortable for students to not face the stigma by reporting behavior they deem as threats, thus detecting school violence in its early stages.

The tip lines are typically accessible on the district's website and app. Most districts have a section on their website that allows individuals to report suspicious behavior. Next, the school administration will review the reports and take proper action using the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG), which consists of determining if the threat is serious. Next, they will take a transient or substantive route. The threats, whether serious or not, will be monitored, and people's actions will be taken to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

The funding and cost requirements of a tipline are low-impact costs. Of course, it will cost

funding to implement the cost into websites. Especially with underfunded and rural districts, most districts do not have access to reliable internet. In some cases, limited-income students do not have access to the internet outside of school. Alongside internet inequalities, understaffed schools do not have the required staff to run the tipline.

Tiplines also provide evidence to public safety departments, such as police departments. Without a tipline, police will need to rely on a second-hand witness for confessions. As a result, the information is at risk of exaggeration, or some information will be missed.

Additionally, false reports can be reported in the tipline. A few students may falsely use the tipline to report a threat that never happened. However, school administrators and educators can make it clear that the tipline is a tool that saves lives and to be taken seriously.

Enhanced Required Lessons in Health Class

While forty-six states have required health class as a graduation requirement, lessons in social media are not yet required. Social media has been proven by research to cause mental health conditions, especially in adolescent girls.

A required module on social media's impact on mental health will help students be aware of the issues surrounding social media. An example of a required social media lesson would include that student learn about why social media is engineered to be addictive, including the dopamine and psychology behind social media. Then, students will learn about certain tools to prevent addiction, such as time management platforms and app blockers.

Educators shall implement a comfortable setting where students can discuss how social media makes them feel through journals and discussions.

Students shall learn that excessive use is linked to poor sleep, eye strain, lack of real-life social interaction.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

With an ever-changing society, school threats continue to exist. In school, students should focus on their education, not whether their lives are at risk. School violence is a hot topic because of its ties to the Second Amendment. Alongside a diverse society, a clash of ideas has prevented many policies from being passed.

School violence is more than just the lives lost. Strangers across the country grieve and come together during times of crisis. If schools continue to ignore school violence, the drawbacks from the costs and mental health issues will result in a domino effect.

Each district has different policies to address school violence, such as a panic button and metal detectors. However, each solution comes with cons. Anonymous tip lines have created a welcoming school violence where students are shown that it is safe to report school violence.

School violence is an issue caused by multiple factors, with mental health being one of the key factors. Not only does school violence affect a community, but growth in education and personal development are also hindered.

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