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ARM TEACHERS? THE FACTS ARGUE AGAINST IT

Recent school shootings have prompted renewed debate regarding the idea of arming teachers or other school personnel to fend off attacks by armed intruders or even students. Similar arguments were put forward by the gun lobby following the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

The arguments against arming teachers are multiple. The gun, by definition, would potentially be available to every student, teacher, and school visitor. Moreover, those contemplating armed attacks on schools will know that a gun is available and will act accordingly, and as the Columbine shooting starkly demonstrated, the attackers will have the element of surprise on their side.

Armed guards confronted the Columbine killers, but could not stop them from carrying out their plan to massacre fellow students and then commit suicide. An armed school resource officer engaged Eric Harris in a gun fight, but was unable to stop Harris from entering the school. A county deputy also fired shots at Harris to no avail.

In fact, highly trained police officers, whose *only* job is law enforcement, all too often fail to use firearms successfully:

§ **One study found that 21 percent of officers killed with a handgun were shot with their own service weapon.**

§ **Trained law enforcement officials have only an average 20 percent hit ratio in armed confrontations meaning that only 20 percent of shots fired hit the intended target.**

Experience also teaches that when police officers fire their weapons, they sometimes make grave mistakes in deciding when deadly force is justified. Teachers will not likely perform any better. Moreover, the close quarters of a classroom may make it more difficult, not less, for teachers to effectively use deadly force against an assailant:

§ **From 1990 to 1999, nearly 75 percent of police officers feloniously killed by suspects died within a 10-foot radius of the offender. This area is known as “the killing zone” because of the acute danger it represents to police officers.**

It will also be a huge burden for school districts, individual schools, and teachers to ensure that firearms are not lost or stolen:

§ **300 guns used in the federally administered program to arm commercial airline pilots were lost in one 60-day period in 2004 according to pilot organizations.**

Even federal law enforcement agencies have problems keeping track of firearms:

§ **The Department of Homeland Security reported 289 firearms as lost during fiscal years 2006 through 2008. Most losses occurred because officers did not properly secure firearms.**

Another serious threat is unintentional discharge. Many handguns, including popular models used by police departments, can fire when dropped or bumped. One errant bullet could kill a teacher, student, or other innocent bystander.

The focus should remain on preventing guns from getting into schools, rather than relying on teachers or other education professionals to prevail in a shoot-out.

The Violence Policy Center (VPC) is a national educational organization working to stop gun death and injury in America. For more information, please visit www.vpc.org.