



Written by [Staff](#) on March 1, 2013

Targeting Schools

John Weldon is a teacher in the Centinela Valley Union High School District in California.

The scene must have been horrific. Blood from bullet holes staining the shirt of young Luis Nevarez, a 13-year-old student at Edison Middle School, as he lay dying on the streets of South Los Angeles in June 2007. Friends ran away in terror from the criminals who had just murdered him, and this writer, his World History teacher, had to stand before his classmates the next day and tell them he was dead. Later it was learned Luis was shot by gang members who were looking for future rivals to kill. They asked Luis and his friends where they were from, and knowing that that question spelled trouble for kids from the wrong neighborhood, his friends fled. Luis didn't understand, answered the question, and was shot on the spot, leaving grieving parents, students, and an entire school behind.



The Problem

The loss of students, or even youths in general, owing to gun violence can be very traumatic and calls out for an answer, and Americans do need to provide an answer. But what is being proposed in the national media and by politicians won't work — can't work — and will probably make the problem worse.

The media and many politicians want to continue with so-called gun-free school zones (which apparently draw those seeking infamy through bloodbaths) and limit the types of guns that can be sold, as well as the number of rounds that a gun's magazine is capable of holding — limit how many bullets it can shoot before reloading. However, none is a workable solution.

Gun-free school zones only stop law-abiding citizens from bringing guns to school. Any kid or adult could fill a backpack or coat with large pockets full of guns and ammo, and no one would be the wiser until he started shooting. Even when schools have metal detectors at the door, they are very often not used on a daily basis because using them is time consuming and the detectors are typically set up only by one set of doors, and armed thugs can typically get in other doors with little problem.

As to eliminating guns, there are an estimated 300 million guns in the United States, and even if strict gun control laws are passed, they won't limit access to weapons available to criminals. The result would merely be that more guns would be owned illegally.

The news website examiner.com reported in a December 2008 article entitled "Those peaceful



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Europeans own more guns than you think” that the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey showed that European countries with strict gun laws often have far more unregistered firearms than registered ones. The 2003 Small Arms Survey showed that France had a minimum of 2.8 million registered firearms, and between 15 and 17 million unregistered ones. And the number of unregistered guns doesn’t appear to dwindle away over time. In Greece, the number of unregistered guns in the 2003 survey was 350,000. By 2005, the Greek government estimated unregistered guns at 1.5 million. Even strict Germany had an estimated 17 to 20 million unregistered weapons. Making gun control worse, the evidence shows that when criminals buy guns from the black market, instead of legal establishments, they tend to buy as much firepower as they can get for their money. They sought submachine guns and even machine guns.

It would be impossible to use gun control to de-fang dangerous people and effectively reduce the risk to people at schools or at other “gun-free” locations without putting literally everyone in a police state-monitored fishbowl.

Moreover, guns become more accessible every day, not less. Guns have proliferated the world over for hundreds of years, made mainly with rudimentary tools, and now the advent of 3D printing, in which a machine can lay down layers of materials — including plastic and stainless steel — that are fused to create objects, means that guns will soon likely be able to be produced by anyone with the willingness and a few thousand dollars to spend on a printer. Early models of 3D-printer guns have already been created and test-fired.

To ban guns would only mean that law-abiding citizens would be disarmed while criminals get the guns. In spite of this, the anti-gun lobby would have us believe that if only police and the military had guns, massacres like the one in Newtown wouldn’t have happened. But again, this is demonstrably untrue. The 2005 Red Lake Senior High massacre in Minnesota answers that. There, the assailant, 16-year-old Jeffrey Weise, shot his grandfather, a police officer, while he was sleeping in bed, just as Adam Lanza reportedly did to his mother in Newtown. He then took his grandfather’s police-issued guns to school in a squad car and killed seven more people.

Well, what about at least stopping people with mental health issues from buying guns by mandating mental health tests before allowing anyone to buy a gun? Again, that would only affect someone’s ability to buy registered guns, not black market ones. Also, the people who get to choose the definition of mentally unstable get to choose who gets guns. With the Department of Homeland Security already in 2009 indicating in a report entitled “Right-wing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment” that those Americans who are against abortion, illegal immigration, and more federal gun control laws are potential terrorists, how long would it be before most Americans were stripped of legal arms. (Similar accusations of dangers presented by right-wing Americans through DHS have been made since 2009.)

Other gun laws seem futile, as well. Some members at [firearmsdiscussion.com](#) tried to come up with a comprehensive list of the laws Adam Lanza broke before he began murdering students and teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The list is as follows:

- Since he was only 20 years old, it was illegal for him to possess a gun because the possession age is 21 in Connecticut. (He used a .22-caliber rifle to kill his mother.)
- He murdered his mother in her bed — first-degree murder.
- He stole at least three of his mother’s guns: a Bushmaster .223, a 10mm Glock handgun, and a 9mm



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Sig Sauer handgun — theft.

- Using a reportedly stolen vehicle, he transported a loaded pistol, unlawfully carrying an unlicensed pistol.
- He entered a gun-free school zone while possessing weapons.
- Using one of his illegal guns, he apparently shot out a school window to open a door and enter the school — forced entry (and likely, shooting a gun in a residential area).

Then he committed mass murder.

And Wikipedia reported the following about the Virginia Tech shooter, Seung-Hui Cho:

The sale of firearms by licensed dealers in Virginia is restricted to residents who successfully pass a background check. Virginia law also limits purchases of handguns to one every 30 days. Federal law requires a criminal background check for handgun purchases from licensed firearms dealers, and Virginia checks other databases in addition to the federally mandated [National Instant Check System]. A 1968 federal law passed in response to the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. also prohibits those “adjudicated as a mental defective” from buying guns. This exclusion applied to Cho after a Virginia court declared him to be a danger to himself in late 2005 and sent him for psychiatric treatment. Because of gaps between federal and Virginia state laws, the state did not report Cho’s legal status to the NICS.

Clearly, those intent on committing massacres at schools care little for the laws they break.

Even if it were possible to eliminate all guns, this would not secure schools from further attacks. Other weapons even more dangerous can be used. People have forgotten that at Columbine the main weapons intended for use were not guns at all, but propane bombs placed in the cafeteria, which failed to ignite. Had they exploded, they might have killed hundreds. Recently a white supremacist named Derek Shrout was charged in Alabama with attempted assault after authorities said he planned to use homemade explosives to attack fellow students at Russell County High School. And the worst school attack in U.S. history — the attack on Bath Consolidated in Bath Township, Michigan — was done with dynamite and the incendiary pyrotol.

In that attack, on May 18, 1927, Andrew Kehoe, the 55-year-old school board treasurer in Bath, nearly destroyed the school in murderous revenge over losing an election for township clerk. The attack killed 38 elementary-school children and six adults, and injured at least 58 others. Dynamite was laid throughout the building, but only some exploded.

The only use of a gun by Kehoe was to ignite explosives in his shrapnel-laden truck in a final act of murder-suicide.

Other attackers have used flamethrowing devices. One such incident occurred in Cologne, Germany, in 1964 at a Catholic elementary school, killing eight students and two teachers. Another took place at a school in Northern Ireland in 1994, where six students were burned.

In China there have been multiple attacks with knives, including one on the day of the Newtown shootings that left 22 injured. Previous attacks in China have resulted in multiple deaths. In a similar vein, in 2005, doctors in the U.K. pushed to ban long pointed kitchen knives because they are used so often in that country in violent crimes.

Too, a reduction in magazine capacity from 30 to 10 rounds would only have a symbolic effect,



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preventing no shootings and not reducing deaths that occur. A century ago in the city of Bremen, Germany, 29-year-old unemployed teacher Heinz Schmidt shot and killed five girls and wounded 20 others at a Catholic elementary school. He had on him 1,000 rounds of ammunition and, according to the *New York Times*, 100 clips, 10-round clips — just like the limit advocated by Obama and others today. Of the Virginia Tech shooter's two pistols, one, a Walther P-22, held only a 10-round magazine.

How Schools Respond

If not gun control, then what would work to reduce violence in our nation's schools? To answer this question, we need to first look at what has become the standard response of any school to a reported gunman: the lockdown. The prevailing theory is that if children are sequestered in closed classrooms, they will have an increased chance of survival while police rush to the scene to confront the perpetrator. In reality, this is often nonsense. Neither the doors nor the walls are bulletproof or likely to repel a committed assailant from entering. As well, even if we beef up school doors, many classrooms have large windows facing the outside that a shooter could shoot through or use to enter classrooms. Even if we could equip all classrooms with bulletproof doors and windows — a cost-prohibitive endeavor — will we also make them bombproof? This past November a student brought a homemade bomb to Rivermont School in Lynchburg, Virginia, and in February 2012, two teens had a pipe bomb in a Pickens, Georgia, school. In Pickens, officials didn't find out about the bomb until the students had already brought it home. Also, it is unlikely that school doors would remain shut and locked all day, every day; so shooters could still wipe out a class or two before all the doors could be shuttered. (For safety's sake, that would also mean the practical elimination of all outside gym classes and stadium sports that are difficult to secure.)

Since gun-free school zones and the bunker mentality of the lockdown are inevitably fatal, something else must be done to protect students.

That brings us to the first suggested action: reevaluate the response that schools take to school shooters. Having been through a school lockdown over a gun threat, in which a police helicopter flew overhead and officers searched the hallways, I can confidently say that my students likely would have felt greater protection in getting out to safety as quickly as possible. Our classroom was on the second story, faced the front, and was next to a flight of stairs that led immediately to an outside door. Depending on the shooter's location, exiting by the stairs or by being lowered from the window would have been far safer than cowering under desks and waiting for a hail of bullets to end our lives.

Mobility, rather than staying locked in a room, is cited by experts as being key to survival. Retired police officer and weapons and defensive tactics expert Greg Ellifritz, writing in *A Parent's Guide to School Shootings*, stated that escape is almost always the best option. He writes:

In the Virginia Tech shooting, the students who did not get shot were those who jumped out of a window or ran to another part of the building. Most of the students who attempted to lock down the room, hide, or play dead were shot. There are many other examples of fleeing students surviving while their counterparts who locked down in a room were shot.

Ellifritz recommends fleeing the school if shots are being fired some distance away. Exit the school at the side opposite the gunfire.

There are plenty of scenarios where at least partial evacuations are far safer than imprisoning students.

For example, Leuzinger High School in Lawndale, California, has two classes of a community-based program for the developmentally disabled, totaling over 20 students. The program is in a separate



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building at a far end of the campus and is largely autonomous, with its own parking lot, entrance, and exit. It cannot even be seen from most of the campus. If a shooting occurs at the main campus, even the kids in a school such as this could flee. The students, many of whom have Down syndrome and other conditions, learn life skills by working in and visiting businesses, meaning they are well trained in leaving the campus in an orderly fashion. Nearby classrooms run by the Los Angeles Office of Education for other, more severely disabled, students would take a little longer, but all students and staff would be gone long before any assailant could target them. Yet the school's preparedness level is so low that no such coordination has ever been planned, and teachers are prohibited from evacuating students on their own, leaving the students in the rooms as sitting ducks for a killer.

A similar situation exists at Lawndale High. The school recently took over multiple classrooms from nearby Loyde Continuation High, making for an incredibly long stretch between the main buildings and these rooms. They are also not very visible from the main campus area, and could safely be evacuated should the need arise.

An Armed Defense

To reduce the casualty rates in any future attacks — and attacks will eventually happen, as they still do in strictly controlled populaces of Europe — the only realistic option is to allow school staff to fight back. Fortunately, some teachers are now taking training courses in both guns and martial arts. Roughly one out of every three states allows teachers to carry guns on campus as long as they have the principal's permission. Even here in California, a teacher may carry with superintendent approval. The legacy of Newtown may not just be more gun control. More positively, it has moved the idea of arming school personnel closer to the mainstream.

For schools like Loyde, this may be the only option. Continuation schools, created for students with behavior problems, are by their nature very small, and Loyde is not suited for either evacuation or lockdown. Security staff are not armed; all classrooms lead to a single small courtyard outside; and any exit would put students in the immediate line of fire. Yet a lockdown would have a similar catastrophic result, with a shooter being able to target every room through their large windows (which are barred and so prevent escape) in just a few minutes. Worse, recently the school held a lockdown drill in which some teachers were actually told that students had to be in the middle of the room, in the direct line of fire, rather than behind objects such as filing cabinets, computers, or bookshelves that might provide a modicum of protection. Since the sheriff's station is several minutes away, without an armed response, the results could be devastating.

Officials at Loyde might take heed of the experience of those in the Grossmont Union High School District, where staff took to heart the lessons of a nearby school shooting and obtained armed school officers.

In 2001, at Santana High School in Santee, California, 15-year-old Charles Williams, armed with a revolver, killed two students and injured several others before being subdued by police. The incident shocked the community and persuaded the Grossmont district to take quick action in posting an armed officer at every school. Time would quickly reveal that officers were provided none too soon. A mere three weeks later, another shooting occurred at nearby Granite Hills High, but this time the shooter, senior Jason Hoffman, faced an armed security response from school resource officer Rich Agundez, who quickly dispatched the assailant by wounding him and disabling his shotgun with his own weapon. No one was killed.



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Examining the Causes

Another main problem with the politically popular solution of gun control is that it deals with the “how” of the attack, not the “why.” And while the “how” may be relevant to limiting casualties in future similar attacks, only by answering the “why” and dealing with it can we possibly reduce future occurrences.

Contrary to popular belief, attacks in schools have been a regular occurrence for many years, but mass killings were infrequent until recently.

The first school massacre in America, ironically done without guns, was on July 26, 1764, when a group of Lenape warriors, during the rebellion of Chief Pontiac, killed a teacher and 10 students in Antrim Township, Pennsylvania, in what became known as the Enoch Brown School Massacre. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, many shootings occurred, often for such reasons as a spurned or jealous suitor attacking a teacher, or a student retaliating against a teacher for harsh punishment.

The anti-gun lobby would have us believe that mass shootings are the result of the availability of high-powered, semi-automatic weapons. But even when fully automatic weapons were available to the general public prior to the 1930s, whole-scale school massacres weren’t committed with them. And semi-automatic handguns and rifles have been commercially available since they were invented in the late 19th century. Presumably we should have had mass killings in all the decades since. Why, then, has there been a rise in mass shootings only in recent years? The answer has to be cultural and societal.

We cannot legislate our way to a pious, peaceful state of affairs. We must change our culture, hence our behavior as individuals, if we wish to see tragedies such as Newtown stop happening. Children are losing their lives to violence that cannot be answered by the siren call of gun control — children who may, in fact, be saved by caring people with guns. Like the children of Sandy Hook, had someone been around to protect Luis Nevarez with a gun, he might be alive today. He deserved better. The children of Sandy Hook deserved better. All the children of America deserve better.

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