



School Safety and Arming Teachers

Students, faculty and staff deserve to feel safe and free from the threat of gun violence while at school and on campus. However, AFT Pennsylvania strongly opposes arming teachers or other educational personnel, which may create the illusion of making schools safer without actually doing so. AFT Pennsylvania recommends that legislators, educators, parents and administrators work together to use commonsense measures to improve the safety of our students and school personnel.

Schools and campuses should consider implementing research-based, educationally focused strategies and programs to improve student safety:

- Fully staff schools and colleges with qualified nurses, counselors, social workers and psychologists and give teachers and other staff the training and tools to identify and address students' social-emotional, behavioral and mental health issues before they reach a crisis point.
- Implement comprehensive, evidence-based anti-bullying programs at schools.
- Expand access to early childhood programs; after-school and summer programs; and art, music, sports and a full range of extracurricular activities, which encourage development of social skills and allow them to excel outside of the classroom.
- Reduce class sizes, reopen shuttered school libraries and provide tutoring and other programs that address issues faced by children who are struggling academically, socially or behaviorally.
- Provide funding to allow schools to implement [restorative justice programs](#), which shift the focus of discipline from punishment to learning.
- Provide alternative educational settings, staffed with qualified, certified educators and specialists, for students who have behavioral or social-emotional challenges that cannot be addressed in traditional classrooms and schools.
- Create [community schools](#), which create partnerships between neighborhood schools and community resources that integrate academics, health, social services, community development and job resources. By integrating services for children and families, schools become places in which students, community members and families can access vital resources in safe, supportive and stable environments.
- Hire and train paraprofessionals and school-related personnel to supervise and maintain school discipline in areas where teachers may not be present – like playgrounds, school cafeterias and on

school buses – and where students who are prone to violence often exhibit warning signs. Paraprofessionals play a critical role on the educational team and in the lives of students.

- Use security measures appropriately, including trained personnel and technology, to make school buildings more secure. Provide ongoing professional development to help staff members recognize warning signs of potential danger and respond to active threats.
- If necessary, employ trained school resource officers or school police to secure doors, patrol grounds, screen students and visitors and establish emergency protocols to protect students. The Pennsylvania State Police Risk Vulnerability Assessment Team can conduct in-depth reviews of [school](#) and [college](#) campus facilities and recommend measures to enhance security. The [National Association of School Resource Officers](#) also can assist school districts in developing effective school policing programs.

Despite renewed calls and proposed legislation in Pennsylvania to arm teachers, there is no evidence that arming educators improves school safety. At its convention in 2013, AFT Pennsylvania delegates passed a resolution opposing arming teachers, and the American Federation of Teachers updated its resolution on gun violence prevention and school safety in February 2018, following the Parkland, Florida, shooting that left 17 students and school staff dead.

- Research at [Stanford University](#), [Harvard University](#), [University of Chicago](#), and the federal [Bureau of Economic Research](#) show that fewer guns in fewer hands translates into less violent crime and fewer gun deaths.
- There are no documented incidents of licensed civilians stopping an armed shooter. ([Do armed civilians stop mass shooters? Actually, No.](#))
- The [former chairperson](#) of the International Association of Chiefs of Police recommends against arming staff or volunteers to protect schools, calling it a “distraction.” He testified that an enormous amount of training is required to be successful against armed assailants in close quarters. The FBI has enhanced its training of officers to deal with such incidents.
- Shooting under extreme stress reduces accuracy significantly, even among law officers trained to do so. [A study of New York City police](#) showed that police had a “hit” rate of 28.3 percent – hitting their intended target just 103 times after firing 364 bullets. It is folly to think a teacher would be more accurate, and in a hallway filled with students, it is horrifying to think who the other 261 bullets might have hit! At Columbine High School in 1999, a trained police officer stationed at the school actually traded gunfire with Eric Harris, one of the shooters. The officer did not even wound Harris, who ran back into the school to continue his murderous rampage.
- In the event of an active shooter in a school, parents want to know that their children’s teachers will shelter their children from immediate danger and move them to safety quickly. Few parents want a teacher to leave students unattended while the teacher accesses a locked box that holds their weapon and bullets and then dashes into an unsecured hallway, potentially into automatic weapon fire.

- Teachers are more inclined to help children than to snuff out lives. Placing the responsibility of law enforcement officers on the shoulders of American educators, who already do so much more for children than teach reading, science and math, is a tremendous burden that is likely to discourage people from entering the profession and exacerbate the teacher shortage in Pennsylvania.

For nearly a decade, AFT Pennsylvania has supported commonsense anti-gun-violence measures to keep students and all citizens safer from gun violence, including:

- Coordinated criminal and mental health data collection and sharing combined with mandatory, universal background checks to keep weapons out of the hands of anyone who has threatened to harm others or with a history of violence or severe mental health issues.
- Ban or restrict ownership of military-style assault weapons, which were outlawed from 1994-2004 by federal law. The assault rifle ban was upheld by every court asked to review it.
- Restrict sales of high-capacity magazines that fire a large number of rounds without the shooter pausing to reload and bump stocks or other devices that turn guns into automatic firearms.

The vast majority of our members oppose arming teachers. We tell children to listen to their teachers. It's time that legislators and policymakers listened to teachers, too. Teachers want to be armed with resources and programs to help students, not with guns.