How Do You Stop and Prevent Gun Violence in Schools?

Special Report: March, 2019

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Gun violence in our schools is a problem...and it’s time to do something about it.

Too often we turn on the television, check the news, hop on twitter or get an alert that there has been another shooting inside of a school. This is not just a problem; it’s an epidemic. School, formerly perceived to be a safe space dedicated to learning and growing our children, has moved to the forefront of the gun safety conversation.

What can we do about it?

That is the question we will begin to tackle in this special report.

Everyone recalls the schools that have been burned into our memories:

- Columbine (1999)
- Virginia Tech (2007)
- Sandy Hook (2012)
- Marjory Stoneman Douglas (2018)
These are just four of the school shootings that received extensive media coverage but by no means does this offer a comprehensive list of the number of horrible events perpetrated in schools in our country. To list each and every act of instance of gun violence in our schools would require a different medium.

Each of these events will forever impact the victims and survivors who must now carry an unjust burden for the remainder of their lives. Such events also perpetuate fear and panic in students and parents across the country as they hope to restore confidence in an institution aiming to provide the foundation to springboard bright futures.

This issue is not limited to the violence or the violent acts; it’s also about restoring the feeling of security and safety that students should have in their schools. Our schools need to be able to potentiate learning. This goal is only possible if we can create a safe and secure environment for our young people to thrive and learn.

**Gun Violence in Schools is Real**

There were a record number of school shooting incidents in 2018.

According to the Center for Homeland Defense and Security [1], 2018 had more gun violence incidents in schools than any year since 1970.

Additionally, over 1300 school shootings have occurred since 1970, with almost half of the incidents occurring inside of school buildings.
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Center for Homeland Defense and Security, Naval Postgraduate School, K-12 School Shooting Database [1]

With an increase in the number of gun events in schools, it is hard to deny this is a real issue resulting in real consequences for our youth. It’s even more disturbing when you examine the number of students who have been exposed to gun violence.

A study by the Washington Post [2] identified that over 221,000 children have been exposed to gun violence since Columbine. This number represents only the children in school, during school hours in primary or secondary school when an event occurred. Factoring in before and after hours incidents and incidents at colleges and universities, this number increases.
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When you factor in the connected nature of our children and their families today with the rapid velocity of communication between our youth across social networks, the actual number of individuals who have directly (survivor) or indirectly (know a survivor) experienced a school shooting is likely significantly greater.

Compound this with the average family size [3] of 3.9 family members for families with children, and nearly 860,000 family members have directly experienced gun violence through their children.

In fact, an ABCNEWS/Good Morning America poll of 500 high school students released in March found that one in eight kids say they personally know a student who has brought a gun to school and a third of high schoolers think their schools still are not doing enough to protect them. [4]
It’s a problem of both reality and perception

Beyond the sheer number of individuals involved or affected by shootings, there are greater societal issues at play here as well. Perception around school safety has reached a national conversation.

In Chicago, for example, Governor Pritzker recently included commentary about addressing school safety as one of the key tenets of his plan for Illinois, including a focus to ensure that schools are equipped to meet the needs of students who have experienced trauma or have other mental health needs.
In his transition report, it’s acknowledged that insufficient recognition, acknowledgement and support for students who have experienced trauma or other mental health needs affects the climate and culture of a school. The new administration should support efforts to expand training on trauma-informed practices for all school personnel.

2018 was also the year of the #NeverAgain movement [5][6], a student lead initiative focused on making schools safer for all students and inspiring legislatures to take action to prevent events like Parkland from ever happening again. This movement has inspired and led to rallies, walkouts, marches, and endorsements from major political and social American figures including former President Barack Obama and Actor George Clooney.
There is a real cost of school shootings, and it’s more than you think

School shootings impact victims, survivors, and our communities. They also have far reaching economic impacts to our economy. A recent study from the prestigious John Hopkins University Surgery Center shows the extent of the problem.

The study of more than 75,000 teenagers that suffered a firearm-related injury between 2006 and 2014 found that the annual cost of medical expenses alone for gunshot wounds to teenagers is $270 million per year.\[7\] It is important to note that this accounts only for the medical expenses (emergency room and inpatient charges) related to the actual gunshot wounds. We will explore the long term and additional costs of shootings later.

“Gunshot wounds in children account for $270 million in medical charges annually”

The emotional pain of shootings is real. The cost of shootings is real, too. Helping to quantify just how much school shootings costs, can help us understand that this problem is worth the investment to fix it both morally and financially.

There are long term implications as well to our students involved in these incidents as they work to cope with the stress and trauma they encountered in their formative years throughout their lives.

Another study released from the Journal of the American Medical Association found that youths who experienced childhood trauma were 1.3 times more likely to develop
psychiatric disorders than those who did not experience trauma, and 1.2 times more likely to develop depression or substance abuse disorder.

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Youth with a history of trauma are also more likely to experience health problems, participate in risky behavior, struggle financially, and have violent relationships or problems making friends. And the study found the more childhood trauma a person experienced, the more likely they were to have those problems resurface in adulthood. [8]

**Finding the right solution**

Recognizing the problem is just the first step toward finding the right solution. Significant debate has taken place around the appropriate way to guarantee safety in our schools.
In fact, a multi-billion dollar school safety market has emerged in recent years. Trade shows and speakers have made their ways to help try to separate fact from the fiction and allow school officials, parents, and teachers to make informed decisions around the best ways to keep our kids safe.

Not all potential solutions are created equal.

Proposed solutions to the Gun Violence debate have included[9][10]:

- Providing students with hockey pucks
- Leaving stones in classrooms for s
- Arming teachers with weapons
- Smarter evacuation plans
- Embedding ex-military trained personnel as teachers
- Bulletproof backpacks
- Bulletproof classroom doors

But, even well intentioned, many of these solutions miss the mark. Some even propose unrealistic solutions to real problems, or completely cost ineffective solutions that are unsustainable in today’s financial environment, especially in schools.

A Comprehensive Solution Total Coverage

No single solution can solve this problem in its entirety. However, a comprehensive approach can begin to tackle major components of the underlying issue.
A solution that provides complete coverage would include preventative measures, equipment and personnel, and a detailed plan.

1. Preventative measures.

Designed to flag and screen individuals who have behavioral or psychological issues before those lead to action. This would include information from and utilization of psychiatrists and psychologists within our student populations.
2. **Equipment and personnel.**

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Utilizing security and screening equipment and security personnel to prevent weapons from entering schools, as well as to serve as a deterrent.

3. **Planning and Preparing.**

Instilling and practicing “Active Shooter” drills to ensure in the event of an incident that a measured and practiced plan can be successfully executed.

4. **Architecture Adjustments.**

Changing the architecture of schools to allow for better and more controlled ingress and egress.

Each of these items contributes to the complete approach for addressing this complex and layered problem.
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Where to start

Only one of these items is immediately actionable as a deterrent to prevent weapons from entering our schools: the installation of equipment and personnel to keep our schools safe.

The combination of metal detectors and security guards in our schools has been proven to create a measurable and immediate impact in the overall safety of our schools and prevent weapons from entering a given site.

The Facts About Metal Detectors Impacts in Schools

A 2000 study found that in Chicago, metal detectors prevented 294 weapons, 15 of which were guns, from entering schools. A 1993 sample of New York City schools with metal detectors showed a deterrent effect because some students said they were less likely to bring guns to school.[11]

New York City police data shows that metal detectors in city schools have already helped to make kids safer. One study showed that metal detectors stopped 37 box-cutters, 36 knives, and eight guns from getting into school buildings, according to NYPD data.[12]

According to a report in June by Houston TV station KHOU, Aldine Independent School District in the Houston area completed installation of more than 200 metal detectors district-wide around the 2009-2010 school year. Before then, the district averaged nearly 12 weapons incident reports every year. Afterwards, an average of just 2.3 illegal weapon incidents were recorded each year. [13]
Spring Independent School District near Houston took the same approach after the 2013 fatal stabbing of a Spring High School student. All the district’s high schools are now equipped with metal detectors. Before metal detectors were installed, the district averaged nearly 20 weapon incidents per year. 12 months after installation the average dropped to 3.5 per year, over an 80% reduction.[13]

Many of the school shootings recently have occurred in rural or suburban schools, and not in urban environments where metal detectors and wanding is more prevalent. [14].

Weapon Incidents at Aldine ISD

Aldine ISD installed more than 200 metal detectors district wide around the 2009-2011 school year, dropping the number of weapon incidents per year by nearly 10.

KHOU [13]
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In each of the cases above, the number of weapons making their ways inside of our schools dropped. Students were less likely to bring weapons to school, a greater number of weapons were confiscated, and most importantly the number of incidents in these schools decreased and did so drastically.

As evidenced above, the added benefit of metal detectors is that they do not just prevent guns from entering our schools, they prevent weapons from entering our schools, too.

Zooming out to look at all violent events involving weapons in schools, the number of incidents per year begins to skyrocket. In 2015, about 6 percent of students in grades 9–12 reported that they had been threatened or injured with a weapon, which amounts to nearly 1 million high school students per year [15].
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Understanding the impact of metal detectors in schools to prevent gun violence and prevent weapons from entering our schools is impressive. Our ability to keep our students safe stems from our ability to prevent guns, weapons and violence from entering our schools.

Metal detectors help with all three.

**Screening Works - Case Study: TSA**

We would find incredible results if we looked at TSA and airports as the poster child and case study for the impact of screenings and their effectiveness. [16].

Even in the face of a record number of travelers passing through the TSA infrastructure, increased screenings have produced record results in 2018:

- Almost 82 firearms confiscated per week
- An average of 12 firearms found per day
- 3,700 loaded firearms confiscated
- A record 32 guns confiscated in one month at one airport (Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport)
We expect TSA to keep us safe and we submit to screenings at airports every time we fly or travel. Why would we want anything less for our children and our schools?

Cost (Including Insurance) and Benefits of Metal Detectors in Schools

Understanding the true cost and benefit of every mitigation and prevention technique is critical in understanding how to best optimize for our children’s safety. In a world of unlimited resources, our children could walk around in bullet proof bubbles with anti-weapon screening happening in real-time across every inch of our schools. Unfortunately, that isn’t our reality.

In the real world, we need to understand how much investment our schools need to make to protect our children.

Portal metal detectors vary widely in price. Portals on the market range from as little as $1,000 up to as much as $30,000. The moderately-priced models around $3,000 to $4,000 offer the features and reliabilities required for a school metal detection program.

If the average metal detector costs $3,000 with a useful lifetime value of 10 years, and the average school district requires 6 detectors, the actual yearly cost of installing metal detectors in schools is only $1,800/year (an $18,000 investment spread over 10 years).

That’s the equivalent of adding 30 basketballs per year to the gym, or stocking 45 days worth of toilet paper (depending on the size of the school).
When we reframe like this, it starts to put the cost of metal detectors into a rational and realistic perspective.

**Understanding the true costs of a shooting and active shooter insurance**

With the unfortunate increase in the frequency of shootings, there is now a better and more meaningful data set around the actual hard costs for schools, victims, and communities when a shooting occurs.

Not surprisingly, these costs can overwhelm schools and governments when they occur, as evidenced below [17]:

In addition to the devastating impacts to communities from shootings, here are some of the financial impacts of recent events:

1. San Bernardino had already filed for bankruptcy when it had to pay $4 million for the response to the terrorist attack at the Inland Regional Center.

2. Connecticut gave the city of Newtown $50 million just for the costs of rebuilding Sandy Hook Elementary School.

3. The total costs from the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School also came to roughly $50 million.

4. In Parkland, the Florida Attorney General’s Office paid for funeral costs, and the school district plans to tear down and rebuild the part of the school where the shootings occurred. A bill to replace the building where the shooting occurred in Parkland includes $25.3m allocated for this purpose [18].
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With the realization of the true costs of these incidents coming into light, it’s understandable why a market for “active shooter insurance” has emerged.

These insurances can help offset costs in the event of violence in schools but the cost of these insurances is increasing. One of the biggest drivers of costs in these instances is getting enough insurance to cover the true costs in the event of an incident.

Historically, $1m insurance coverage may have been sufficient. Realizing that the true cost of these events can extend into the $10m+ means coverages now must include higher and higher limits [18].

The coverages can include costs like the years of lawsuits and legal fees from victims, repair to buildings, expenses for counseling, medical treatments, media consultants and accountants, and reconstruction fees.

Current estimates suggest that premiums can range from $1,400 per year for $1 million in coverage for a small private school to $50,000-$100,000 for a $5 million to $10 million policy for a large public school district [18]. Looking at expenses from some of the recent shootings may suggest that these limits are not high enough.

Additionally, the current general liability policies that schools have in place may not cover the shooting events and may not have limits that reach nearly high enough in the event an incident occurs.
Not all solutions are created equal, especially in the eyes of risk consultants and insurance carriers.

Some solutions decrease risk and liability for school districts while others may actually increase risk. Some insurance carriers may raise rates or deny coverage for schools that arm teachers, recognizing that it’s dangerous to try to instruct teachers how to use firearms. EMC insurance recently indicated they will not provide insurance to school districts who allow employees to carry concealed weapons on schools, exacerbating the potential cost of this solution [18].

Still, other security experts suggest approaches including buckets of rocks or baseball bats in classrooms provide another avenue for a different kind of exposure in schools. One security expert suggested that incorporating bats into schools may simply allow “one kid who loses his temper to create a different $4m lawsuit for the school district” [17].

But there is good news as it relates to insurance premium control for school districts who are smart about their investments. Other industries, including personal homeowners/renters insurance and auto insurance have created financial incentives for safe and good behavior.

The Progressive Safe Driver discount and companies like MetroMile reward drivers who utilize driver tracking GPS plugins in their vehicles. When they exhibit good behavior to the insurance carriers, the carrier rewards them with reduced personal auto insurance premiums. Homeowner companies like State Farm provide an incentives program or reduction in premiums for the installation of a home security system [19].
In the same way, the installation of metal detectors in schools should begin to provide relief for insurance market rates, as schools that implement preventative measures will ultimately be safer, smarter, and less costly to insurance carriers than those who leave safety to chance.

**Debunking the Myths on Metal Detectors**

But what about our kids? Parents, teachers, and officials do not want their kids to feel like going to school is like going to prison. They fear the negative reaction their children will have to the placement of metal detectors in schools is not worth any potential benefit.

Most adults in non-school environments pass through metal detectors and wanding multiple times a week, especially in major cities. Airports with TSA screening, office and government building entry, concert venues and nightlife venues are now all places where seeing a metal detector is not uncommon.

Any child who has traveled with their parents through an airport has already experienced metal detectors in a positive, normal environment. Our fears around metal detectors being the cause of our children’s anxiety is misplaced.

“Even the children focused production of Sesame Street Live now requires bag searches, wanding and walk through metal detectors for entrance to their shows [20].”
Dr. James MacKenzie, Chicago child and adolescent psychiatrist and former president of the Illinois Psychiatric Society, “By having metal detectors and security equipment in schools, we are actually protecting our children, college students and all young people in public places,” MacKenzie said. “Many – if not most – of my patients are worried about violence at schools. This ...will make our kids feel safer, making it easier for them to learn.”
The overlooked problem here isn’t about the feelings that metal detectors inspire, it is that our kids do not feel safe in schools and it’s making it harder for them to learn and harder for them to thrive.

The speed at which our children exchange information is unprecedented compared to previous generations. They are all aware of what is happening and has happened in all places at all times. They do not need any help to start thinking about safety at school, they need reasons to start feeling safer at school. Metal detectors not only provide tangible results in their ability to remove guns and weapons from the school environment, but also have an added effect as a deterrent.

As humans, it is always our initial emotion to reject the inevitable norm. When the NSA put a camera in the Lincoln Tunnel, the country was outraged. That same outraged person is today posting their longitude and latitude coordinates in Facebook and telling people where they are every minute of the day across numerous social mediums.

When TSA introduced the body scanners travelers were outraged. Now most travelers don’t look twice, more concerned about the status of their flight instead of the machine they must walk through to get there.

Even our data on the internet requires incredibly strict security regulations, including those on technology products and the companies who store privation information about us. Strangely, we don’t put the same sets of regulations and guidelines around humans or our children’s safety in public places.
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Metal Detectors Are A Core Part of A Comprehensive Strategy To Stop and Prevent Gun Violence In Schools

The issue of gun violence in schools is real.

There is a problem today and it is affecting our children’s ability to feel protected in their learning environment. As part of a comprehensive approach, metal detectors can remove guns and other weapons from the school system, and do so immediately. The combination of their ability to act as a deterrent, and reduce the rates of violence in schools, provides rationale for incorporating Metal Detectors into the safety and security strategy of any educational institution. Combine this with their cost effectiveness and potential to impact insurance rates in an escalating cost environment and it’s easy to understand just how metal detectors help to ensure safety in schools.

William D. Yates, MD, FACS security expert and former trauma surgeon, shares thoughtful insight on the complex challenge of addressing gun violence,

As we are all aware, the solution to the equation involves many unstable variables. A problem as devastating as this deserves and demands immediate action to lessen its impact.

In my opinion the most efficient and rapid way to deter and prevent gun violence/carnage is to immediately employ metal detectors, hand-held wands, x-ray equipment; no different than the proven TSA model. This method of surveillance must be applied unbiased and systematically to everyone who enters the school property.
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With this added layer of comfort, the other variables of this complex equation can be studied and resolved to eliminate the recurrence of such violence. As in any disease process, the most life-threatening symptoms must be extinguished with haste. My thoughts are the same for violence in that there are many variables that need to be addressed and solved but the bleeding should be stopped first; weapons should be kept off of school campuses.

Being a scientist, all of the data I have reviewed suggests that the pre-emptive strategy of metal detectors does save lives.

Putting it in its simplest form, I find it a much more prudent strategy to prevent the wolf from ever getting into the henhouse as opposed to confronting the wolf in the henhouse and dealing with its devastation once it is there.”

William D. Yates, MD, FACS
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Sources

[16] https://www.tsa.gov/blog/2019/02/07/tsa-year-review-record-setting-2018
Dr. William Yates, MD is the founder and owner of Yates Enterprises. He grew up on the south side of Chicago. He obtained his Medical Degree from Northwestern University’s prestigious Medical Degree Honors Program. Dr. Yates then practiced as a renowned Trauma Surgeon for many years where he witnessed first-hand the devastating results of gun violence. He is now passionate about providing effective security solutions to schools and other venues to prevent the increasing incidences of tragedy in our nation.

Robin McIntyre, RN has been a registered nurse for 25 years. She practiced in emergency departments, trauma centers, ICUs, surgery, and in other medical specialties. She too has been touched by the devastation of violence as a caregiver and mother. As a result, Robin was instrumental in forming Yates Enterprises, where she works closely with Dr. Yates to develop effective solutions to help keep our schools and public spaces safer.

Gun violence in our schools is a complex problem affecting our students and our communities. This guide outlines a comprehensive approach that tackles both immediate and long term challenges for our students and our schools.