

# Stop 'bad guys with guns' by implementing good policies

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Tragedies involving children, such as the one at Sandy Hook Elementary School, fuel massive outrage and calls for immediate action to prevent similar atrocities. The National Rifle Association (NRA) has put forward a National Shield School Proposal which supports the placement of armed security in all schools. A new review by Gordon and Angela Crews from Marshall University in West Virginia and Catherine Burton from The Citadel in South Carolina attempts to find a balanced and unbiased view of the facts within this heated and emotional debate. Their paper, which appears in the *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, published by Springer, sets out what these proposals would mean to schools and offers some alternative suggestions.

Though the National Rifle Association presents a convincing argument, the authors have found that some of the evidence which they use to back their proposals is erroneous. The NRA contends that schools are not safe places for children, when they are indeed the safest places. They have stated that school violence is the "leading cause of death" of children when statistics clearly show that unintentional injury is the primary cause of death among 5-24 year olds.

Crews and his colleagues then point out that it is still not proven that [security guards](#) actually prevent school violence. Both Columbine and Virginia Tech, where two of the most deadly school shootings occurred, already employed armed security guards. There are also the financial implications of such a scheme. These are enormous, both in terms of implementation and civil and/or criminal liability. Suggestions that

volunteers carry out armed policing of schools, though cheap, only adds another layer of potential problems.

There are numerous other concerns. There is the increased chance of injury and death. Questions have already been raised about the potential [conflict of interest](#) for security firms involved. There is a raft of problems already documented relating to security guards in schools ranging from criminal activity to increased student detention rates. There is the not inconsequential potential for arms kept at schools to fall into the wrong hands. When there are such serious doubts about the efficacy of a proposal and the costs are so high, alternative solutions must be sought.

Two questions, which the National Rifle Association repeatedly fails to address when looking at school shootings, are whose hands the weapons were in and the ease with which they got there. Crews and his colleagues note that in the past there has been a reluctance to profile school shooters. However, there is evidence to show that in the majority of cases the assailant suffered from some type of mental health issue, dysfunctional family, problems at school, social isolation and in some instances, bullying. They suggest that it is these issues that are the root cause of these tragedies and that in order to prevent school violence, society must address troubled youth, along with their ease of access to weapons.

The authors conclude: "Preventing school violence does not have to be expensive. All it takes is preventing the development of young men and women into perpetrators of school violence, and putting armed guards at fortified schools will not do this...It just requires someone to pay attention, to listen and to care, which really cost nothing." Their assertion is given backing by teachers in California, sixty-seven percent of who believe that hiring a counselor would be more effective at preventing [school violence](#) than hiring a police officer.

**More information:** Crews GA, Crews AD and Burton CE (2013). The only thing that stops a guy with a bad policy is a guy with a good policy: an examination of the NRA's "National School Shield" Proposal.

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