



Schools Remain the Safest Places for Kids *For Education Leaders*

Parents watch their loved ones head off to school as the tragedies of the past invade their minds and confidence in the safety of our schools is questioned.

Tragic and irrational events have taken place in our world and most recently in another school. Because these events are played and replayed hundreds of times on the continual news cycle our psyches absorb them as if they have occurred that many times. Our hearts identify with the parents or teachers or children and the pain they endure. This scenario may make us and our children feel more vulnerable than we actually are.

In fact, “America’s public schools are still the safest place for our children. Recent research indicates that nationwide, fewer children suffer serious injuries while at school or while participating in school-related activities than anywhere else in their lives.” (Gateway Polson #23)

When looking at the big picture through an historic lens violence in schools is rare. According to James Alan Fox, Lipman Family Professor of Criminology, Law and Public Policy at Northeastern University, “There is not an epidemic of school shootings.” There have been 16 multiple victim shootings in schools since 1996. Of those eight are considered mass shootings – involving more than four victims, excluding the shooter. Fox and Fridel of Northeastern University synthesized data from USA Today, the FBI, Congressional Research Service, Gun Violence Archive, Stanford University, Mother Jones, Every Town for Gun Safety, and a NYD report on active shooters. Mass shootings are incredibly rare events. Research demonstrates that shooting incidents involving students have declined significantly since the 1990s. Four times the number of children were killed in schools in the early 1990s than today. Still one shooting—one person—tragically and senselessly lost is one too many and we must look at means of prevention.

The authors of The Three Rs of School Shootings: Risk, Readiness, and Response, Fox and Fridel put forth the following as having merit:

- Ban bump stocks
- Raise the age of purchase for assault rifles
- Increase mental health resources for students

Fox and Fridel don’t believe there is a fool-proof method of deterrence against a determined shooter. They find that precautions such as installing metal detectors and requiring ID cards for entry have been proven ineffective in past school shootings. Fox considers arming teachers “absurd” and “over the top” and suggests those strategies may actually be detrimental to the overall well-being of students and perpetuate the unsettling message that they are in danger.

The most recent joint report from the Bureau of Justice and the Department of Education indicates that 99 percent of homicides involving school-aged victims occur somewhere other than schools, underscoring the fact that schools remain one of the safest places for children.

Harvard University Psychology Professor and author Steven Pinker says in a PBS interview about violence that “the long-term historical trend, though there are ups and downs and wiggles and spikes, is absolutely downward. The rate of violent crime in the United States has fallen by more than half in just a decade.” Further he says the rate of homicide in the United States in the last three years is a fraction of what it was in the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s. But he contends that the news coverage formula is driven by discrete events and often ignores long-standing trends.

The task of educational leaders is to fully appreciate the significance of losses that have occurred due to violence, in school or out, but also to build a more balanced narrative that provides reasonable feelings of security to parents, students and staff. At mnasa.org you will find an adaptable copy-ready sheet for your use in your communications with stakeholders.



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