



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

GUNS AND GUN LAWS

NRA's flawed strategy

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After days of suspense wondering how the NRA would, as promised, contribute to the growing array of recommendations for enhancing school safety, we have its simple solution. Wayne LaPierre, Executive Director of the NRA, has suggested that we equip every school in America -- schools of every size, level, and type -- with an armed guard, someone who would be prepared to ward off any dangerous intruder.

Never mind that most school homicides are perpetrated by insiders, typically disgruntled students not deranged strangers. Never mind that thousands of schools already have sworn police officers on site.

Columbine High School, in fact, had a school resource officer on duty the day in 1999 when two alienated adolescents turned their school into a war zone. Of course, Columbine was a fairly large campus with nearly 2,000 students enrolled, and the cop couldn't be everywhere at once. Should Columbine have employed a small army to patrol the entrances and hallways?

Never mind that there are tens of thousands of schools across America, not to mention restaurants, theaters, malls and other public places populated by children that have been targeted by mass murderers. Apparently, the NRA suggests that a sufficient number of trained volunteers, could fill the bill. But if a New York City police officer managed to injure a number of innocent bystanders during an encounter last August with an armed assailant at the Empire State Building, imagine the potential collateral damage in a school setting with crowds of children milling about the halls.

If using armed guards to protect our schools and school children is the way to go, then what about the playgrounds and playing fields outside the buildings. And what about the fleet of yellow school buses transporting the kids home after school? Are we going to arm the bus drivers as well?

Notwithstanding the cruelty of last week's shooting spree at Sandy Hook and a handful of other deadly incidents involving active shooters, be they angry students seeking payback or deranged adults looking to hurt society in the most profound way, these are exceptionally rare events. Transforming our schools into armed fortresses hardly provides a comfortable and carefree learning environment with its constant reminder that children have targets on their backs.

Whatever we do to fortify schools and shield students from harm should be commensurate with the extremely low likelihood of an active shooter striking any particular school. We need to protect our children's sense of innocence as much as their physical safety.