

# Q&A: Should Your School Staff Members Be Armed?

*It's an age-old debate: How do we ensure the safety of our students?*

By Robert J. Safransky, Ph.D.



**O**n December 14, 2012, Adam Lanza entered Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut and opened fire, killing 20 children and six educators. The incident refueled the decades-old debate about how to ensure our students are safe at school.

Currently about one-third of the states allow faculty to carry loaded weapons on campus if they have permission from the principal or district and meet other requirements that vary from state to state.

Here are some of the questions surrounding the issue of arming educators.

**Q.** Could the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy have been prevented had the principal and faculty members been armed?

**A.** There is no quick and easy answer to that question because the issue is more complex. Would the Sandy Hook Elementary principal have been carrying her firearm as a concealed weapon? Would the armed faculty members or principal have been in the right place at the right time? Would they been able to return fire in a timely manner? No one knows whether arming faculty would have made a difference. What we do know is that they did everything they could to protect their students.

**Q.** What are some of the reasons cited for arming school staff?

**A.** Advocates list a number of reasons to arm school staff. For example, what if the school building was in a rural area and the response time of law enforcement was 30 minutes or more? How familiar are law enforcement

officers with the layout of the school? Would they know where a gunman might hide? Also, simply knowing that faculty may be armed could deter a shooter from entering a school.

**Q. What are some challenges of arming educators?**

**A.** One of the problems with educators carrying concealed weapons is that there are relatively few places to hide the weapon on the body while teaching or performing administrative functions. Also, would teachers end up leaving their weapons at home because the guns were too uncomfortable to be carried concealed every day, thus defeating the purpose?

If the firearm were not carried, but stored in the classroom, how could teachers ensure they are secure at all times?

Would educators be permitted to bring their own firearms to school? If so, what types of personal firearms would be allowed?

What about training? The educators would need to be trained in the use of the firearm.

**Q. The school board decides to provide concealed weapons for faculty and staff. Now what?**

**A.** The Personnel Department would need to do background checks on all personnel by submitting their records to a law enforcement agency to ensure no staff member carrying a concealed weapon has a criminal record. In addition, several questions must be answered before permitting staff to carry their firearms at school:

- Who will provide the weapons training and how extensive will it be? How often will educators be required to refresh their training?
- Will staff be required to reach a certain level of marksmanship before they can have a weapon?
- Will the district buy the concealed carry holsters and pay for the concealed carry permits for the teachers? The costs of providing weapons and training in their use is another budget item, as pistols cost approximately \$450, plus the training time and cost of ammunition.
- Will the faculty be prepared to carry their weapons every day and at all school functions that they attend?
- Will the district consider the use of non-lethal weapons by selected staff members, such as pepper spray and taser guns?

**Q. What are the arguments against arming school faculty?**

## GUNS IN SCHOOLS

These 18 states allow guns in schools with certain restrictions:

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| ■ Alabama       | ■ Montana       |
| ■ California    | ■ New Hampshire |
| ■ Connecticut   | ■ New Jersey    |
| ■ Hawaii        | ■ New York      |
| ■ Idaho         | ■ Oregon        |
| ■ Iowa          | ■ Rhode Island  |
| ■ Kentucky      | ■ Texas         |
| ■ Massachusetts | ■ Utah          |
| ■ Mississippi   | ■ Wyoming       |

Source: [http://investigations.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/01/14/16468754-guns-already-allowed-in-schools-with-little-restriction-in-many-states](http://investigations.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/01/14/16468754-guns-already-allowed-in-schools-with-little-restriction-in-many-states)

**A.** People enter the education profession to help their students grow physically and mentally into well-educated adults; their focus is not law enforcement. Police officers are trained in the use of their weapon and must follow protocol regarding when they may fire their weapons. They are trained specifically to deal with a variety of types of confrontations, including armed persons. Issues of liability and responsibility also come into question.

### The SBO's Role

What is the responsibility of school business officials in creating a safe learning environment for students? School business officials are charged with developing a district budget that will support a safe learning environment. Today that means providing funds for school resource officers, school patrols, armed guards, perimeter fencing, cameras, electronic surveillance equipment, an identification badge system, emergency and crisis management training and mental health support for students and staff.

The physical safety of school facilities has increased in the past 30 years and will continue to increase. However, there is an old Latin saying, *mens sana in corpore sano*: a sound mind in a sound body. Hopefully, we will work to achieve that goal so our schools will be safe learning environments.

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