



“ARMING TEACHERS” – FALLACIOUS ARGUMENTS AND IRRELEVANT EVIDENCE

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There is a disproportionate buzz about the newly signed Florida legislation that allows its school districts (each at its own discretion) to authorize concealed carry of firearms by teachers in their schools.

Why disproportionate? Because the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, signed into law in March 2018 soon after the Parkland mass shooting, had already established the “Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program” named after the coach who gave his life attempting to shield students with his body during that shooting. That program gave school boards the option of allowing school staff members to carry firearms, excluding most classroom teachers who were not JROTC teachers, or current service members, or current or former law enforcement officers.

Last year’s bill established a tough training standard, and left the decision to local school boards, both very good things. And since school staff who are not classroom teachers often comprise as high as 50% of the total, this approach was rational, if overly cautious, as school boards would still have the authority to approve or disapprove any applicant, without the no-teacher provision imposed by law.

The only change with the new law is that now all classroom teachers are also eligible to volunteer for the Guardian program. Note “eligible” and “volunteer” and you will understand why so much of the near-hysterical opposition to this law is baseless.

Of course, no one is actually “arming” any teachers – there is no arms room where they will line up to be issued weapons before filing into the trenches – much less “all” teachers, which is how the opposition likes to frame its strawman argument. They will arm themselves, if their school board votes to implement the Guardian program, and if they individually volunteer, pass rigorous screening and selection, and complete the legally mandated 132 hours of training. No one is guaranteed approval, and the standards they must meet are high.

The [Miami New Times](#), not known for smart or principled positions on any firearms issue, is one of the media outlets appalled that the legislature and governor, elected by citizens to legislate and govern, have not allowed themselves to be ruled by teachers' unions, high school students, and some school boards and administrators. All those folks display their statist leanings by wanting to impose their own fears of positive protective measures on everyone. Under Florida law, if they (and, pointedly, the voters in their school districts) do not want to implement the Guardian program, they don't have to. They can keep the Gun Free Zone signs over their doors and hope for the best. But that's not enough for them; they think they know better than anyone else what is best for every school district in Florida.

Local control on this issue is a sound and sensible approach, in line with the rule of subsidiarity, the concept that decision-making should occur at the lowest level appropriate to its purpose. Local control is often preferable to decision making by officials far-removed from the affected population, less responsive to their local and regional preferences, and more likely to impose one-size-fits-all solutions. Voters can more easily influence or replace an unresponsive local elected official than his state or federal counterparts. Here it means what Florida and many other states have ruled: let the school districts decide for themselves.

Beyond that repugnant statist attitude, opponents of "arming" school staff try to bolster their argument with unsupportable claims and sloppy 'research' – textbook examples of confirmation bias, the tendency to only consider evidence that supports one's preconceived notions. The Miami New Times cites an [analysis](#) by Gabrielle Giffords' anti-gun organization that purports to show how dangerous introducing "more guns" to schools will be. It is such a sloppy piece of research and reasoning that we cannot let it go unanswered

This long piece cites 67 "incidents of mishandled guns in schools" from all over America, from 2014 to the present, to support their opposition to concealed carry of firearms by school staff who meet the requirements of Florida's Guardian program. But here's the rub: only one of these 67 incidents involved a school staffer carrying a firearm under similar requirements. That one involved a Texas superintendent who left her authorized firearm locked in a district vehicle when she and her staff visited another district where she was not authorized to carry it – and then forgot to recover the weapon and left it in the van overnight, to be found in the morning.

Every other incident on this list actually supports the premises behind Florida's Guardian program, and similar programs in the many other states with similar laws on the books. Not one carefully vetted armed staff member carrying a concealed firearm with knowledge and approval of their school board, in accordance with strict standards, in well over 1,000 schools around the country, was involved in any of the other 66 incidents cited.

Fifteen of the incidents on this list involved subjects who were not staff members at all; some of these were commissioned officers, while others were merely family members

or other visitors carrying firearms on school property in violation of the law. Another incident involved two coaches, but occurred off school property. Desperate to plump up the numbers, are we?

What this list actually does is to demolish the assertion often made by opponents of armed school staff, that guns in school should be left to the “armed professionals.” While the Miami New Times quotes some who seem to believe that armed officers make schools safer, Giffords does not think so, and on this point at least, we can at least understand the sentiment. Fully 27 of the 67 incidents in the Giffords study involve “armed professionals” – commissioned police officers or deputies assigned to a school, officers responding to a call for assistance or visiting for other reasons, or other uniformed security guards or school resource officers employed on site. These “armed professionals” had unintentional discharges (several of which injured themselves or others), left their weapons in restrooms or elsewhere unattended, and in two egregious cases, failed to stop a child from pulling the trigger of their holstered weapon.

So much for ‘armed professionals’ – we who are armed professionals know how little sustained, realistic, demanding training most officers undergo, and how easily complacency creeps in. Uniformed guards – commissioned or not – are not ten feet tall. They are unfortunately sometimes less dedicated and often less proficient than educators who understand their responsibilities “in loco parentis” and undergo rigorous and frequent training required by law and school district policy. Who has not heard educators saying, “we would sacrifice our lives to protect the kids in our care”? Give the tools and the skills to those who are willing, and they can do better than just sacrifice themselves like Coach Feis did at Parkland.

This is not to say that officers are all deficient in their skills and judgment – far from it – or that they cannot train to a high standard; but we who are trainers know without a shadow of a doubt that motivated civilians can do just as well, with the proper training. In the schools as on the streets, they are not volunteering to act as law enforcement officers, which is a very broad skill set indeed, but only to protect innocents against lethal threats – a very narrow skill set that comprises only a small slice of a police officer’s responsibilities.

In fact, what we do know is that responding police – even when do not have unintentional discharges like several in this list – do not protect schools against active shooters, because they almost always arrive too late; and that uniformed officers on site have a very spotty record. The uncertainty in a potential aggressor’s mind that is created by the prospect of an unknown number of trained staff members carrying concealed weapons at various but unpredictable locations throughout a school, appears to be a better deterrent than one uniformed officer, as evidenced by the complete absence of active shooter incidents in such schools. Arguably, if one is swayed by logic, they will prove to be a more effective and flexible defense as well, if that unprecedented day does arrive when a shooting happens in their school.

Again, with the exception of that Texas superintendent, none of these incidents involved an approved, trained, school staff member carrying a concealed weapon. The closest thing to it is the anomalous case of a teacher in Utah in 2014. State law there allows any resident with a concealed carry permit to carry in the schools. There is no requirement to even notify the school board or administration, much less be vetted or approved, or to be trained to any standard beyond the 8 hours of mostly classroom training required for a permit. This teacher dropped her weapon in a toilet stall (before school, with no students in the building); it discharged, shattering the bowl and cutting her calf with a flying shard. That's not a laughing matter, or not only a laughing matter, but should be taken in context. Utah's law has been in place for 20 years, and out of 700,000 citizens with concealed carry permits (14 million person-years?), this is the only reported occasion in which anyone has been injured by a legal concealed carrier's firearm in a Utah school. And she doesn't work there any more. It may also be significant that Utah has had no mass shootings in its schools, but we can only speculate. Pretty safe state, Utah, for all that their statute is far less prescriptive than Florida's or many other states.

Gifford titles its piece "Every Incident of Mishandled Guns in Schools" and assures us that theirs is a "systematic analysis," and that this list of 67 incidents is "comprehensive" for the date range of 2014-2014. But in reality, theirs is a list of those who violate the law and/or handle firearms incompetently - precisely the sort who are unlikely to volunteer in the first place, or to pass a careful vetting and selection process, or a demanding, standards-based training program, as required by statute in Florida and many other states that authorize concealed carry by school staff.

The actions of criminals and incompetents do not form a rational basis for criticizing or opposing these programs, which have been successful everywhere they are in place. Giffords has absolutely failed to make a case against armed school staff members in districts that opt in, under authorizing state law, with well-drafted programs and requirements.

Opponents of protecting our schools and children with armed staff on site will have to do better than this, to make a case worth listening to.

You can find a tabulation of the incidents the Giffords piece cites, upon which these conclusions are based, below.

Tabulation of cases cited in [Every Incident of Mishandled Guns in Schools](#) by Kelly Drane, dated May 1, 2019, published by Giffords

The “Disqualifiers” column notes specific conditions which render the example irrelevant to the argument against armed school staff. “Illegal firearm” indicates that the weapon was on school property in violation of federal and/or state law. The only exceptions to this disqualifier are the 27 cases involving law enforcement officers and paid security guards, and cases of the Texas superintendent (#24) and Utah teacher (#45).

Specifics of each case can be found by following links provided in the Giffords’ article listing.

Ref #	Date	Location	Disqualifiers	Comments
“Guns left accessible to children”				
1	3/28/19	Princeton, WV	Illegal firearm	Substitute teacher had firearm in briefcase
2	2/28/19	Independence, MO	Illegal firearm	Firearm possessed by teacher charged with sexual activity with a student
3	1/19/19	Kingston, MI	Illegal firearm; Not staff	Firearm possessed by family member at athletic event
4	1/17/19	Mustang, OK	Illegal firearm	Firearm found in employee’s unattended bag
5	1/16/19	Port Gibson, MS	Illegal firearm	Firearm found in morning before any staff or students arrived
6	1/8/19	Babylon, NY	Armed ‘professional’	SRO left firearm unattended in school
7	10/24/19	St. Louis, MO	Illegal firearm	Substitute teacher’s firearm stolen by students
8	10/23/18	Largo, FL	Illegal firearm	Substitute teacher’s firearm was seen and reported
9	10/5/18	Bartlett, IL	Illegal firearm; Not staff	Volunteer coach had firearm at school
10	10/5/18	Miami, FL	Armed ‘professional’	School security guard left firearm in bathroom
11	9/18/18	Missoula, MT	Armed ‘professional’	School resource officer left firearm in bathroom
12	8/29/18	San Jose, CA	Illegal firearm	Teacher arrested for crime committed off campus, found in possession of firearm at school
13	5/23/18	Philadelphia, PA	Illegal firearm	Teacher brought firearm to school
14	5/16/18	Buford, GA	Illegal firearm	Substitute teacher had firearm in school
15	3/23/18	Perryville, MO	Illegal firearm	Substitute teacher left firearm in his vehicle

16	3/12/18	Shepherd, MI	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Off-duty police officer left firearm in school
17	2/5/18	Fort Walton Beach, FL	Armed 'professional'	SRO left firearm in restroom
18	2/5/18	Maplewood, MN	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Visiting police officer's firearm was fired in holster by child
19	1/26/18	Hardin, MT	Illegal firearm	Student brought firearm to school, teacher took and hid it
20	1/12/18	Mineral, VA	Illegal firearm	Students found firearm in teacher's car while servicing it for class
21	10/30/17	Glyndon, MD	Illegal firearm	Teacher left firearm in faculty restroom
22	9/29/17	Chandler, AZ	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Off-duty police officer left firearm in bathroom
23	5/3/17	Holly Hill, FL	Illegal firearm Not staff	Volunteer left firearm in bathroom
24	5/1/18	High Island, TX		Superintendent (authorized to carry) left firearm in school vehicle
25	3/30/17	Dallas, GA	Illegal firearm	Intoxicated teacher brought firearm to school in a bag
26	10/13/16	Monongahela, PA	Armed 'professional'	Security guard left firearm in bathroom
27	8/25/16	Chambersburg, PA	Illegal firearm	Teacher left firearm in bathroom
28	5/18/2015	Douglasville, GA	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Sheriff's deputy left .22 caliber handgun loaded with blanks on playground after K-9 demo
29	5/11/15	Anderson, SC	Armed 'professional'	Security guard's firearm pulled from holster by student
30	4/27/15	Hephzibah, GA	Armed 'professional'	SRO's firearm taken from locked car by student
31	12/3/14	Beulaville, NC	Illegal firearm	Teacher's firearm found in bag by student
"Firearms discharged unintentionally" [UD = Unintentional Discharge]				
32	4/30/19	Wesley Chapel, FL	Armed 'professional'	SRO has UD with holstered firearm
33	4/18/19	Mesquite, TX	Armed 'professional'	Police officer assigned to school has UD while inspecting firearm
34	4/5/19	Milwaukee, WI	Illegal firearm	Janitor has UD with firearm; debris injures student
35	3/22/19	Blountsville, AL	Illegal firearm	Substitute teacher has UD in his pocket; fragment injures student
36	2/14/19	Jacksonville, FL	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Police officer investigating threat has UD

37	11/20/18	Portsmouth, VA	Illegal firearm; Not staff	Visiting parent has UD, adult injured by ricochet
38	5/5/18	Fowlerville, MI	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Off-duty officer (not on staff) has UD at athletic event
39	3/13/18	Seaside, CA	Illegal firearm; Armed 'professional'	Teacher (a reserve police officer not authorized to carry) has a UD, fragments wound student
40	2/15/18	Coconut Creek, FL	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Sheriff deputy responding to alarm shoots self in leg
41	2/13/18	Alexandria, VA	Armed 'professional'	SRO UD
42	11/11/16	Auburn, MI	Armed 'professional'	SRO/Sheriff deputy UD in classroom, teacher injured
43	5/6/16	Panama City, FL	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Corrections officer visiting school UD
44	2/18/15	Lake Ariel, PA	Armed 'professional'	School police officer (retired trooper) UD
45	9/11/14	Taylorsville, UT		Teacher's legal firearm UD in bathroom, injuring her
"Firearms mishandled during discipline"				
46	12/20/18	Albuquerque, NM	Illegal firearm	Custodian chased kids suspected of break-in
47	11/28/18	Dolton, IL	Armed 'professional'	Security guard pulled firearm twice on student
48	10/3/17	Oxford, MI	Armed 'professional'	Responding deputy has UD during struggle with student
49	9/15/16	Milwaukee, WI	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Responding officer has UD in holster during struggle with a student, who is grazed
50	11/5/15	Moultrie, GA	Armed 'professional'; Not staff	Student pulls trigger of responding officer's firearm in the holster
"Firearms used in times of personal stress or conflict"				
51	4/3/19	Aurora, CO	Illegal firearm	Private school administrator brought firearm to school, made threats
52	12/5/18	Harrington, DE	Illegal firearm	Coach (also a corrections officer) threatened student
52	11/12/18	Essex, MD	Armed 'professional'	SRO suicide at school with issued weapon
53	9/4/18	Norwalk, CT	Illegal firearm	Cafeteria worker made threat; firearm found in trunk of car
54	2/28/18	Dalton, GA	Illegal firearm	Teacher fired shot while barricaded in empty classroom

55	11/30/17	Bayonne, NJ	'armed professional'; Not on school premises	Hockey coach obtained firearm from assistant coach (a NJ state trooper) and pointed it at others at ice rink
56	8/17/17	Lithia Springs, GA	Illegal firearm	Teacher shot self
57	5/24/17	Kirbyville, TX	Illegal firearm	Principal shot himself, in his truck in school parking lot
58	4/23/17	Orange, CA	Illegal firearm	Coach locked self in empty classroom and threatened suicide
"Other incidents of firearms brought onto campus"				
59	3/27/19	Onley, VA	Illegal firearm	Substitute teacher brought firearm into school
60	3/18/19	Pinetops, NC	Illegal firearm	Custodian had firearm in his car
61	2/14/19	West Columbia, SC	Illegal firearm	Food service contractor brought firearm into school
62	2/7/19	Hot Springs, AZ	Illegal firearm; Not staff	Parent (a convicted felon) wore empty holster in lunchroom; firearm was visible in his car
63	8/15/18	Ft Lauderdale, FL	Illegal firearm	Worker had firearm in his car
64	11/8/17	Lafayette, NY	Illegal firearm	Bus driver observed with concealed handgun
65	10/20/17	Salem, OR	Illegal firearm	Teacher accused of having firearm on campus (outcome unknown)
66	4/4/17	Charles Town, WV	Illegal firearm	Teacher had firearm in his car
67	12/1/16	Jacksonville, FL	Illegal firearm	Coach brought firearm into school

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