

Inquiring Minds topic – 19 April 2019

Riv Swartz, Moderator

Violence in Our Schools

Since the Sandy Hook Elementary School mass killings on December 14, 2012, there have been 239 shootings and 138 children and adults murdered in our schools. Beyond the loss of life and limb, the psychological impact reeks carnage on those individuals who walk away without physical scars. The scars involving emotional trauma associated with PTSD are not as visible as gunshot wounds, but can be just as deadly. Case in point, two students who survived the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School massacre committed suicide on the first anniversary of that deadly day. It appears that our thoughts and prayers have not been working. What else can parents, educators, and governmental entities tangibly provide in order to foster security and safety for our children within a school setting?

Questions to Consider:

- **If you could select one main source that contributes to school violence, what would it be?**
- **How would you address that issue in order to eliminate its impact on school safety? (Please be specific.)**
- **What other issues impact safety in our schools? How would you address those concerns? (Please be specific.)**
- **Is it possible to have safe schools in our country, and if so, why haven't we attained this important goal?**
- **As a grandparent, how do you feel about your grandchildren entering a school building in light of potential violence?**

Below is a Resolution provided by the American Federation of Teachers (FTA) where they analyze causes and cures for violence in our schools.

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND SCHOOL SAFETY

WHEREAS, all students deserve safe, welcoming, supportive school environments where they can learn and thrive without fear; and

WHEREAS, no parent should send his or her child to school and fear that the child may never come home; and

WHEREAS, no academic faculty, professional faculty, staff or student in an institution of higher education should fear for their lives or be victimized by gun violence while attending class or living the life of the academy; and

WHEREAS, principals, administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and other school staff have shown over and over again their instinct to shield and protect students in these tragic situations, and their acts of heroism should be lifted up while at the same time doubling down on the work needed to ensure safe working environments free from gun violence; and

WHEREAS, in the wake of the mass murder at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., we said, “never again,” yet there have been 239 school shootings since Newtown, with 438 people shot and 138 murdered—most recently the 17 students, teachers and staff at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla.; and

WHEREAS, the mass murder of students, teachers and staff at Stoneman Douglas High School was committed using a legally purchased AR-15—the same weapon used in mass murders in Newtown, Conn.; Aurora, Colo.; Orlando, Fla.; San Bernardino, Calif.; Sutherland Springs, Texas; Las Vegas, Nev.; and more; and

WHEREAS, since the shootings at Columbine High School in Columbine, Colo., first shocked our nation, students, parents and educators have fought tirelessly to put an end to gun violence in our schools and communities and

are now at the forefront of organizing efforts in the wake of the mass murder in Parkland; and

WHEREAS, the National Rifle Association has stood in our way, using money and threats and influence to fight every commonsense reform of gun laws as an assault on the Second Amendment rather than a means to ensure the safety of Americans, while also shielding gun manufacturers from all legal liability related to the sale or use of their products; and

WHEREAS, President Trump and Republicans have ignored this crisis, offering, at best, rhetorical gestures and, at worst, blatant hypocrisy—from singularly focusing on mental health interventions (and ignoring gun restrictions) while simultaneously slashing funding for and access to mental health care for everyone from school-age children to adults, to Betsy DeVos' and others' misguided suggestions that we arm teachers and staff and militarize our schools; and

WHEREAS, America's students—led by the courageous young people of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School—are now leading the charge to prevent further tragedy:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers will recommit ourselves to commonsense measures to stop gun violence in schools and institutions of higher education, including further school safety efforts, reforms such as bans on both assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines, background checks and other vetting processes, revoking the federal Dickey Amendment (which has prohibited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from conducting research on gun-related deaths), and rescinding the gun industry's immunity, while also opposing wrong-headed and counterproductive ideas like arming faculty and staff; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to fight for expansion of mental health

care for all, including: defending and fully funding the Affordable Care Act in all 50 states, expanding access to public mental health facilities and services for all Americans, and fully staffing every school in America with qualified mental health counseling to identify and intervene before students reach a crisis point; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will be a conduit for listening to members and students, and for amplifying their voices and experience in the public sphere to more effectively fight this scourge, including convening an activist committee within the next month to recommend ways that national, state and local affiliates can seize this moment to end gun violence collectively in schools and institutions of higher education, including through lawful strikes, other concerted actions and disruption of business as usual to compel the nation to take action; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will work to find ways to combat the stranglehold the NRA and gun manufacturers have on policy in this arena, including exploring further divestment of pension funds and others from the gun industry; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will work to support the courageous efforts of the survivors of gun violence at Stoneman Douglas, Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech and too many other schools and institutions of higher education, and of all those who have fought for schools that are free from gun violence, by ensuring that April 20—the anniversary of the Columbine massacre—becomes a day of action across the country to end gun violence in schools, and by supporting the student-led marches on March 14 and March 24; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will support the students' and survivors' movements in other ways as well, including through voter registration, engagement and mobilization efforts.

- <https://www.aft.org/resolution/gun-violence-prevention-and-school-safety>