

The Need for a Permanent Police Presence Schools

Is There a Need for a Permanent Police Presence in Schools?

There are a number of reasons which make me believe there is an absolute need for a law enforcement presence in public schools. When speaking of a police presence, I do not mean school security and monitors. While they have a purpose in schools as well, they can not and should not be used in lieu of a professional police officer. My experience in the past with school security has not been very positive. While schools opt for this route because they are far less expensive to employ, they are not trained as well or in the proper physical condition necessary to perform the job that police are required to do.

Today's schools seem to have an increasing number of disrespectful and violent children. The cost of removing these children to another setting is probably the single biggest reason for leaving them where they are. These children have no respect for authority and no fear of consequences. Additionally, these children know from experience that the school has limited power. Whatever consequences the school can meter out is meaningless to this group. Since the school and society is not prepared to make sure these young people get the necessary counseling and help, these children are an accident waiting to happen. They become involved in a variety of criminal behaviors including but not limited to making threats to other students, bullying behavior and extortion, bringing weapons to school, substance abuse, vandalism and gang activity. School personnel for the most part have lost control of these students. These children often don't listen

The Need for a Permanent Police Presence Schools

to teachers or administrators and surely don't listen to aides. The only person that might even have a chance of verbally controlling them is a police officer. And if that fails, the police are the only ones prepared for some type of physical intervention should it be needed.

Feeling unsafe is the number 1 reason given by students for bringing a weapon to school and almost encourages students to bring weapons to school. According to the statistics of the justice department and the Centers for Disease Control, 100,000 guns are brought to school each day. Since guns are not the weapon of choice, how many knives and box cutters are brought to school? I am sure 1 million is not an unreasonable number. Who in the school has any training to take a knife or gun away from a student, certainly not the teachers or administrators? Having a School Safety Officer on the premises will make removing weapons from students possible and within a reasonable period of time.

Imagine having to perform a dangerous job, on an almost daily basis, where you can be seriously and permanently injured. Add to that, you were never told what to do or trained how to perform that job by your supervisors. In addition, if you made a mistake, you would be held responsible. Sound unbelievable? Yet this is exactly what happens in most U.S. schools on a daily basis. Teachers are expected to protect students, ensure their safety and stop fights without any training or directions. Over the past 25 years, I have been teaching school violence prevention programs to teachers and other school personnel. In an unofficial survey involving

The Need for a Permanent Police Presence Schools

hundreds of educators, over 98% of those surveyed said they were never given any training in fight intervention in their college courses, by their school districts or their teacher's union. To make the job that much more impossible, when dealing with violent students, teachers are frequently told they are not supposed to touch anyone. During a presentation I was giving to a group of school administrators several years ago, I asked them who in your school breaks up the fights. The answer given was "whoever is there." "Would they be teachers?" I asked. "If they are there," was the response. "Were they trained?" I asked. The answer to that was an emphatic "No." So how can we expect teachers to perform this dangerous job without training? This is another reason why the presence of a professional police officer is essential in a school. For too long, fights were stopped by "whoever was there," by whatever means needed and no training provided. This approach to stopping fights is a prescription for disaster and a major safety hazard that exists in most public schools. A fight occurred recently in Lafayette High School in Brooklyn. A dean attempted to physically control one or more of the combatants. As they fell back and hit a defective elevator door, it opened and the three of them fell into an elevator shaft. Fortunately, they were on the first floor. While breaking up a fight is dangerous for anyone, police are in a far better position to accomplish the job.

Why Are Fights So Risky and Dangerous to Stop? First, fights create tremendous emotional stress on the both the fighters and the teachers coming to intervene. Under stress, performance changes dramatically. Thinking and logic often cease to exist and our decisions

The Need for a Permanent Police Presence Schools

become more emotional and unconscious. The fighters, due to tunnelvision, often can't tell the difference between their opponent and an innocent teacher intervening to protect them. The strength of fighters, even little ones, increases dramatically. Even relatively small children have tremendous uncontrolled power. Throw in the possibility of weapons or controlled substances and the situation becomes that much more dangerous. Under stress, the maternal, paternal or caring adult mindset might take over and often influences educators to physically intervene at the wrong time. The second stage of most fights is the most dangerous time to intervene but because of the brutality of it, teachers often get drawn in to protect one of the combatants. Aside from not being properly trained to intervene, often the teacher is not physically fit or might even have health issues i.e. high blood pressure, heart condition etc. that could result in other serious injuries. Fights are governed by only one law, "Murphy's Law." Therefore, even individuals properly trained run some risk of injury. Fight intervention should be a team effort and therefore team training is required. This training might be provided by the school resource officer to the security staff so that they can work as a team. At the very least, two trained individuals are required to work as a team to safely intervene in a fight with two combatants. Finally, since physical skills are perishable, frequent review and training is needed to maintain these skills.

Keep in mind we haven't even added variables such as the presence of drugs and alcohol, weapons, gangs, and fights becoming riots. Long Island newspapers recently ran stories of fights in two school districts which

The Need for a Permanent Police Presence Schools

turned into riots. In my travels, I became aware of another 4-5 districts that had riots within the past year. If teachers are not really trained to deal with a fight, a riot is surely beyond their expertise. Educators must wake up to the possibility that they have potentially violent students and volatile situations can arise anytime and any place. The vast majority of educators are not trained to handle these dangerous situations and they should not second guess the professionals who do. Having a professional police officer on campus is definitely the way to go and I believe the trend to stationing School Resource Officers in the public schools will spread. Stay Safe!

This appeared in the Defensive Tactics Newsletter about a year ago.

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