2019 Legislative Session Issue Brief

School safety

We all want safe, secure and welcoming schools so our students can focus on learning and educators can focus on teaching. This is important every single school day – not just if there’s an armed attack.

Violent incidents that injure students or educators are much more common and usually related to unresolved traumas many students are carrying. Students frequently experience untreated mental or physical health issues that interfere with learning.

It’s time to invest in people

Minnesota needs to invest in people before building security. This will take time and money, but that is no reason to delay. State lawmakers should do the following to help educators connect with students and intervene earlier to ultimately make our schools safer:

• Hire a counselor, social worker, psychologist or similar support staff at a ratio of one per every 250 students. Minnesota’s current ratio of counselors-to-students is 1:723—the fifth worst in the nation.
• Create a system of concrete, enforceable caps on class sizes for every grade. Educators get to know their students better in smaller classes.
• Every school that requests a trained and certified school resource officer should get one.
• Create systems to teach every Minnesota educator about restorative disciplinary practices.
• Provide sufficient funding for every school district that wants a full-service community school to hire a coordinator. Provide one-time grants for setup costs.

Arming school staff isn’t the answer

We can’t calculate all the dangers of arming teachers or other school staff, trained or untrained, but there are few clear risks.

One of those risks is accidental discharges caused by curious little fingers. It happened in February 2018 at a Maplewood, Minnesota, school when a third-grader pulled the trigger of a police officer’s holstered weapon. An armed teacher could be mistaken for a suspect in an attack and be shot. Or a student could steal or take a firearm from a teacher.

Minnesota educators are not interested in carrying a gun. About 86 percent of educators say they wouldn’t carry a firearm, according to a survey completed by more than 1,200 members of Education Minnesota. Seventy-one percent said schools would be less safe if more educators were allowed to carry firearms in school.

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The Legislature should increase school safety grants to improve building security across Minnesota. Last year, only $25 million was available for improvements at 120 schools. More than 1,000 schools didn’t get funding for $230 million in requested projects.

**It’s time to listen to educators**

Educators overwhelmingly agreed that more counselors and supports in our schools is the most effective way to make sure our schools are safe and welcoming. About 90 percent said better mental health supports is the most important thing that could be done to prevent gun violence in our schools.

Minnesota is in a moment where we can and should invest in the mental health and other support services that will benefit our kids every day and reduce the chances of another tragic school shooting.