



Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Five Years Later: School Shootings Continue to Rise

By Patrick V Fiel Sr.

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Five years ago today, February 14, 2018, an expelled student entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida and fatally shot 14 students, 3 staff members, and injured 17. It became the deadliest high school shooting in United States history.

At Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas on May 24, 2022, a former student at the school fatally shot 19 students, 2 teachers, and injured 17. It is the third deadliest school shooting in the United States, following the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007 and the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012.

There were 51 school shootings in 2022 that resulted in 40 deaths and 100 injured, the most in a single year by the data gathered by Education Week.

What is the answer? Do we have a problem with gun control? Do we have a problem with mental illness? The answer to both questions is yes. Nonetheless, the debate should not solely revolve around the Second Amendment or mental health. Anything emerging from those debates represents long-term fixes. What we need is a serious discussion about the proven solutions that will work today.

It is critical that school board members and their school superintendent take immediate action and implement a closed-campus policy and review their emergency/crisis plans and lockdown procedures. Schools need to hold safety/security drills with emergency responders, and practice responses to different emergency situations, e.g., active shooter.

It is impossible to predict where the next active school shooting will occur, yet all schools must be prepared to take preventative measures to mitigate damages from an active shooter.

Schools are soft targets; they are unique and have their own individual challenges (i.e., size, age, location, design/type of construction, etc.)

Through careful planning, it is possible for schools to develop a quality emergency crisis plan that meets their needs. As security experts, we work with schools, their staff, and local emergency responders to complete a thorough risk assessment, including an all-hazards approach of all their schools and properties.

A risk assessment pinpoints critical areas of vulnerability and will identify the security strengths, as well as any security weaknesses. The whole process is designed to reduce incidents and try to anticipate any emergencies that might occur at their school or campus. The results of these assessments serve as the initial phase to develop a course of action, a strategic plan.

One key component to the plan are teachers. Although, the fear among teachers who feel unsafe in their schools, is increasing. Teachers and staff members are afraid to speak out because of retribution from their administration. There is an anonymous security survey for staff and employees on their perspective of their overall school security/climate available.

Another element to consider are students. They need to be able to voice their opinion and recommendations about an active shooter.

School districts should have threat assessment teams ready to identify, evaluate, and address threats, potential threats, or alarming behavior to their schools.

All schools need to have a permanent School Resource Officer (SRO) assigned and additional SROs as needed.

Any plan will undoubtedly include security technology, but no single security implementation will protect a school; true protection comes from many layers of security protocols and processes. Access control is a critical component to stop an unwanted visitor before something happens.

Security screening systems can help spot guns, knives, and other weapons at the entry points or other areas. The exterior school grounds need to be searched daily to locate prohibited items. Cameras in and around your campus have proven to be a strong deterrent in helping to ensure policies and procedures are being followed.

There is now gun detection technology that can detect weapons as soon as they are visible on camera, flagging threats before shots are fired.

It is critical that as soon as the first shot is fired, emergency responders are notified and respond immediately to locate the shooter and neutralize the threat. A gunshot detection and localization system that is integrated into a video surveillance system is highly effective and gets information out quickly.

Additionally, if the video is transmitted over a network, it is possible to allow law enforcement personnel to view the cameras from their emergency command center and for the responding officers to view this from their vehicles.

School Board members, superintendents, administrators, teachers, parents, and students need to be willing to make changes, but those need to be intelligent changes that make use of the proper security technology, policies, and procedures to make your campuses safer and more secure.

It is evident in the last five years that the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is still not enough to compel us as a nation toward implementing comprehensive solutions to truly protect our 50 million students in more than 130,000 schools. Appallingly, there have already been 6 school shootings in the first month of 2023. Protecting the lives of our children cannot wait any longer.

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