

*Policy Brief*  
**Safety at Schools: Identifying the Costs Associated with the Necessary  
Safeguards for Arming Educators**

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*Editors' note: The Rural Educator publishes a policy brief each issue, intended to explore topics pertinent to rural education policy and advocacy. The issue of school safety is particularly timely, especially for rural schools. We believe this essay, based on surveys of school leaders in Colorado, takes a unique perspective by examining the financial costs that might be associated with policies to place guns in schools.*

**Introduction**

As a result of extensive media coverage, the tragedies at Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School are etched into the collective memory of American society. These types of tragedies have occurred over 60 times since 1996 (O'Dea, 2015). In the first two months of 2018, there have been five shootings at schools that have resulted in an injury or death (Emery, 2018).

Shortly after the events at Sandy Hook, the National Rifle Association (NRA) presented a program to address student safety by arming educators (Crews, Crews, & Burton, 2013; Hutchinson, 2012). The idea of arming educators has gained traction despite the dearth of related research (Weiler & Armenta, 2014).

On the surface, the concept of arming educators may seem like a zero-cost attempt to solve the issue of gun related violence in schools. However, a more detailed analysis of such a proposal raises a number of questions and highlights the uncertainties, including unrealized possible expenses associated with the effort of arming educators. We recently surveyed Colorado superintendents in order to document the desired safeguards that would need to be in place in order for educators to become authorized to carry weapons into schools and to associate a cost to those safeguards. It was clear that additional data on the subject of arming educators was required to inform policymakers and public school administrators. Policymakers interested in augmenting student safety in public

schools should recognize that arming educators may include hidden costs.

**School Safety: An Overview**

Brown (2005) divided most of the safety measures introduced by school officials into one of two categories: soft control and hard control (p. 108). Examples of soft controls include programs aimed at teaching youth how to resolve conflict in a non-violent manner and to avoid "crime-associated problems" (Brown, 2005, p. 108). Hard control efforts focus on the identification and punishment of youth engaged in unsafe behaviors (Brown, 2005).

There is research suggesting that hard control measures have a negative impact on schools. Perumean-Chaney and Sutton (2013) referred to the "paradox of the fear of crime" and defined the paradox as, "the perceived risk of victimization is often greater than the actual likelihood of a criminal victimization" (p. 571). This dichotomy led Gastic (2011) to offer the following conclusion, "students' feelings and being safe at school are both important but not always compatible goals" (p. 487).

Mullet (2014) concluded that efforts aimed at reducing gun related violence in schools should include a prosocial behavior focus that motivates students to improve their decision-making skills. Kelly (2017) argued that a comprehensive approach at reducing gun related violence in schools must include programs that incorporate "social workers, psychologist, and counselors to address bullying and victimization in schools" (p. 204).

Table 1  
*Gun Legislation Enacted in 2013*

Gun Legislation Issue	Increased Gun Restrictions	Decreased Gun Restrictions
Carry concealed weapon into public or schools	0	31
Background check and mental health reporting	27	4
Gun permit requirements	1	28
Keeping guns from those banned from possessing them	9	2
Assault weapons and high-capacity magazine	6	1
Nullifying federal gun laws	0	4
Other	7	6

Following the tragedy at Sandy Hook, there was a rash of “emotionally charged legislation focused upon firearms” in a number of states (Elliott, 2015, p. 524). Early indicators suggest that the recent shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School may provide a comparable degree of influence on future legislation aimed at emotionally charged legislation, in the calendar year following the shooting at Sandy Hook there were 1,500 bills introduced in state legislatures across the nation that directly impacted the accessibility of guns and 109 of these bills became law (Buck, Yurvati, & Drake, 2013; Elliott, 2015; see Table 1).

### Surveys of Superintendents

We wanted to learn more about superintendents’ thoughts about arming teachers in classrooms and the safeguards they would want to have in place. We surveyed superintendents about safeguards that **MUST** be in place if educators were authorized to bring arms into schools, whether the school district should provide the educator with the weapon, and other thoughts related to this topic. Fifteen superintendents from mainly rural districts of various sizes (including 6 districts with fewer than 600 students and another 2 with fewer than 1,200 students) in the Western Slope, Front Range and Eastern Plains areas of Colorado (but not the urban Denver area) completed the survey.

Superintendents expressed a degree of hesitation with allowing any educator to carry a weapon on school grounds. One superintendent stated, “I do not believe there should be just an open authorization for any staff member to bring a weapon to school.” Another superintendent offered this observation, “There are teachers that

I barely trust with students, let alone guns.” On the other hand, superintendents reported a sense that having armed teachers is increasingly likely. One superintendent wrote, “I believe the day is coming where every school will have an armed staff member on duty.” Another stated, “It is a challenging topic. In our rural community there is support for arming staff.”

The superintendents were undecided if arming educators was a good idea. One superintendent stated, “I believe this would actually make our schools **LESS** safe. The data on gunshot victims is that most incidents are accidental. Guns simply hurt people.” Juxtapose that viewpoint with this statement offered by another superintendent who told us that “just the possibility of armed people in schools would lessen the likelihood of school shootings.”

The questionnaire also asked the participants to determine if the school district should provide the weapon to the educator or not. Views were mixed on this. Eight said the educator should provide the weapon, five said that the district should provide it, and two were undecided.

The superintendents identified safeguards they would want to have in place if they were mandated to have armed staff on school grounds. Colorado superintendents identified several safeguards. The need for gun-related training was mentioned by all 15 participants. For example, one superintendent wrote, “Quality training by a professional in the field that is completed at a minimum of yearly.” The most frequently identified safeguards are listed in Table 2.

We were interested in understanding the actual financial costs of these safeguards and determined an average cost for each. The identified safeguards were divided into two

Table 2  
*Superintendent Most Frequently Identified Safeguards*

Safeguards	Frequency
Extensive training/Law enforcement level training for the carrier	15
Clear and complete school board policy	9
School district insurance liability coverage	6
Inter-government agreement/Collaboration with law enforcement	5
School district selects the individual to carry the weapon	5
Psychological testing annually for the carrier	4
Annual review of school district practices by law enforcement	4
Gun safe/Restricted access to the weapon	4
Additional contract issues to the carrier issued annually	2
Quarterly training for the carrier	2
Signs on doors informing community of armed educators	2
Certification/Concealed weapon permit for the carrier	2
Regular shooting practice for the carrier	2
Drug testing of the carrier	1
Special holster for weapon to prevent accidents	1
Physical with medical personnel for the carrier annually	1
Rubber bullets instead of lethal ammo	1
Installation of security video system in all schools	1

categories: One-time/Occasional Expenses and Annual/On-Going Expenses. To determine the cost of arming educators for a school district, we calculated the average number of schools in a school district in Colorado (twelve). All of the costs for school districts presented here were built around the assumption that only one educator would carry a weapon in each school. Costs were calculated based on the average of cost estimates provided by three separate police stations.

The identified safeguards, as reported in Table 2, included seven one-time expenses that school district's budgets would have to include in the annual school district budget (See Table 3) and nine expenses that would have to be included in budgets on an annual or on-going basis (see Table 4).

Based on the data presented in Tables 3 and 4, the estimated cost of arming educators for a school district with 12 schools that only has one educator that is armed in each building is

Table 3  
*One-time or Occasional Costs*

Safeguard	Equation	Estimated Cost for 12 Schools
Clear and complete school board policy	16 hours X \$65/hour 2 hours to review @ \$125/hour Legal review \$500	\$1,700
Inter-government agreement-Collaboration with law enforcement	1 hour per school	\$780
School district selects the individual to carry the weapon	12 hours X \$65/hour	\$390
Gun safe/Restricted access to the weapon	.5 hours X \$65/hour	\$390
Signs on doors informing community of armed educators	\$100-\$1,000 per safe \$45 per sign + .5 hours installation X \$65 hour	\$1,200 - \$12,000 \$930
Special holster for weapon to prevent accidents	\$65 per holster	\$780
Firearm	\$550 per weapon	\$6,600
Total Cost for school district with 12 schools		\$12,470 - \$23,270

between \$93,565 and \$116,960 the first year and \$61,095 to \$93,690 each subsequent year. The total estimated cost associated with arming educators for the state of Colorado would be between \$16,654,570 and \$20,818,880 the first year and \$10,874,910 to \$16,676,820 each subsequent year. Nationally, it is estimated that the total cost to arm educators would be between \$974,625,000 and \$1,218,375,000 the first year and between \$636,375,000 and \$976,000,000 each subsequent year.

### Conclusion

The complexities associated with arming educators are captured in the following quote from one superintendent, “It is a challenging topic. In our rural community it takes law enforcement close to 40 minutes to respond to a call.” In rural communities, where law enforcement response time is restricted by geography, an armed educator may be seen as an option to promote school safety in the event of a gun related threat in a rural school.

Contrast this legitimate need for immediate response in geographically isolated areas with the previously reported concerns voiced by

Colorado superintendents. Specifically, participating superintendents questioned if educators could be properly trained to kill another human being or to make an accurate decision when faced with a “shoot/don’t shoot” situation. In addition, some superintendents felt that if the perceived threat was great enough to consider arming educators then school boards and state policymakers should hire security personnel.

Finally, the reported costs are for one educator per building, which may be insufficient to properly ensure student safety. If policymakers deem that the arming of educators is an effective strategy for increasing student safety at school then, at the very least, any enacted bill should include sufficient funding for school district officials to properly implement such a program. The allocation of funds would ensure that school district officials are able to introduce armed educators into schools properly. If state policymakers authorize or mandate the arming of educators but fail to fund the necessary safeguards, educational leaders may be forced to choose between school safety and other educational expenses.

Table 4  
*Annual or On-going Costs*

Safeguard	Per School	Estimated Cost for 12 Schools
Extensive training	40-80 hours X \$65/hour + 750-1,500 rounds (\$15/50 rounds)	\$31,425 - \$62,400
School district liability coverage	\$600	\$7,200*
Psychological testing	\$300	\$3,600
Annual review by law enforcement	1 hour per school	\$780
Additional contract issued to carrier	.5 hours per school X \$65/hour	\$390
Quarterly training for carrier	100-200 rounds (\$15/50 rounds) + 2 hours X \$65/hour X 4 times a year	\$6,600 - \$6,960
Concealed weapon permit for carrier	\$75-150 per permit	\$900 - \$1,800
Regular shooting practice	100-200 rounds (\$15/50 rounds) s + 2 hours X \$65/hour X 4 times a year	\$6,600 - \$6,960
Drug testing	\$50	\$600
Rubber or non-lethal ammunition	\$100 per 50 rounds	\$1,200
Physical for carrier	\$150	\$1,800
Total annual cost for a school district with 12 schools		\$61,095 - \$93,690

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