



BRIEFING

Strategy For School Security

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INTRODUCTION

Distributed Security, Inc. (DSI) is a private security company based in the upper Midwest, currently active in multiple venues from New York to Wyoming. DSI is the creator of Distributed Security Networks, which enable enterprises to develop private security forces capable of protecting their assets in the absence of or in cooperation with traditional law enforcement. DSI offers enterprises a turnkey package of services including assessments, infrastructure, training, provisioning, follow-on support, and outsourcing.

DSI is active in providing security solutions to American schools, from support of legislative initiatives and school board policy development, through broad spectrum security assessments, response planning and organization, and training of school personnel. Our experience enables us to provide the analysis and recommendations in this briefing document.

- 1. DSI's comprehensive strategy for school security.** Violence in schools, mass shootings in particular, must be addressed with a comprehensive strategy which begins with Passive Measures that are widely acknowledged and seldom controversial. They focus primarily upon deterrence and detection of potential threats. Unfortunately, while effective in preventing many potential incidents, these measures can and do fail - and by definition whenever a school shooting occurs, they have failed. A last line of defense must be provided by Active Measures, a key element of which is the presence of trained, armed personnel on site to protect innocent lives in the *critical response gap* before law enforcement is able to arrive and intervene.

Deterrence is the most desired outcome of all security systems and measures. This means that potential violent perpetrators will be discouraged from even initiating a violent attack, because it appears likely the attack would be detected, compromised, or defeated. These incidents are almost never impulse crimes: They are planned and prepared well in advance and executed because the

perpetrator is confident he can achieve his goals. If a culture of security awareness and a comprehensive security strategy are in place, he will lack that confidence.

- 1.1. Passive Measures, which DSI addresses through security assessments for schools and school districts, and with security education for employees, parents, and students include:
- Prevention programs that identify the root causes of violent behavior, identify troubled youth, and develop a culture of security awareness;
 - Early detection of potential threats through reporting of unacceptable behavior;
 - Early intervention to avert an incident; and
 - Physical security, such as barriers, detectors, access and perimeter control, to deny access, delay, and give early warning if a threat does materialize.
- 1.2. Active Measures provide response during and immediately after a life-threatening incident and are driven by the the concept of the *critical response gap*. Police response to almost any school in America is subject to the unavoidable tyrannies of time and distance; officers seldom arrive on scene in less than five to ten minutes, and then require minutes more to intervene effectively. But school shootings, historically, are usually over in less time than that. While other measures may help to delay or confound an aggressor, the only sure way to close that *critical response gap* is to have armed personnel on site, who can intervene within seconds or minutes to stop an attacker and save innocent lives before responding law enforcement arrives. Active Measures may include
- Comprehensive but simple and actionable Emergency Response Plans, exercised often, with all staff, so that everyone knows their roles and responsibilities and can perform them in a crisis situation.
 - Lockdown, barricading, and evacuation procedures to isolate potential victims from an attacker.
 - Medical training and equipment for all staff, to enable immediate life-saving intervention in the critical minutes before emergency medical services are available. EMS providers typically will not enter a scene until law enforcement declares it secure, and major bleeding or other severe trauma can result in death of a victim much sooner than that if appropriate care is not immediately available.
 - Law Enforcement: Although police response seldom occurs swiftly enough to stop an active shooter, there have been exceptions. Close coordination and liaison with local law enforcement before an incident occurs will improve the odds of this happening.
 - School Resource Officers (SRO): As discussed in detail below, armed SROs can provide a real, if limited, on site response capability, in addition to whatever deterrent value their visible presence provides.
 - Armed school staff members on site: Where it is enabled by statute and policy, this option contributes strongly to both deterrence and defense by confronting

a potential or actual aggressor with the knowledge that some employees, whose number, identity, and location he does not know, will be present, armed and able to resist.

2. **Armed Defense on Site.** The presence of armed defenders in a school can be controversial, but it is a vital component of a realistic security strategy, and is the primary focus of this briefing paper. A belief that schools can be protected from violent attack without this is what we call “security theater,” versus actual “security preparedness.” Passive measures can contribute to deterrence, and some active shooter training regimes such as ALICE that do not include armed defense can, under some circumstances, mitigate the consequences of a violent incident. All these approaches provide comforting reassurance that “something has been done,” but if the moment comes when all these measures fail and an active shooter event occurs, the result will very likely be lives lost and communities devastated unless there are armed personnel on site, able and willing to intervene immediate in the *critical response gap*.

This section will provide analysis and recommendations of how best to provide this vital capability.

- 2.1. Legal constraints. The Federal Gun Free School Zones Act (GFSZA) of 1996 makes it unlawful to possess a firearm within 1,000 feet of any public, private, or parochial K-12 school in America. Exceptions include on-duty law enforcement officers, anyone contracted by the school to carry a firearm, and anyone licensed by the state to do so. State laws often echo and reinforce this designation of schools as gun free zones. However, the GFSZA’s exception for state-licensed personnel can be satisfied by a concealed carry permit, if state law governing such permits explicitly allows carry on school grounds by all or a subset of permittees. This is the method used by many states to authorize firearms in schools. Others approaches to satisfying this GFSZA exception for licensing by the state include establishing a class of “enhanced” concealed carry permits with additional training requirements, or certifying staff members who meet specific requirements as (non-law enforcement) “school safety officers.”
- 2.2. Options for providing armed personnel. Working under any of the exceptions in the GFSZA, there are several distinct, alternative methods for schools that recognize the need to close the critical response gap with armed personnel on site. “Arming” is a convenient but misleading term that creates poor optics, because it implies action by a school or district to issue weapons, and to impose a requirement for armed response to a threat by educators, administrators, and other employees regardless of their willingness or readiness. There is in fact no known example of this course of action, mandating armed security duties, by any school governing body in America. Practical options that are in use across America include:
 - 2.2.1. School Resource Officers (SRO). School Resource Officers are usually commissioned law enforcement officers assigned full time to provide security for a school. This is often seen as a preferred solution to the active shooter threat. However, there are several shortcomings to this approach:
 - 2.2.1.1. In many venues, an SRO is an expensive option, with a burdened annual salary of up to \$90,000, although in some areas, retired officers work under a salary cap imposed by their pension plans, and may be available at lower cost. Costs are often shared between the schools and a local law enforcement agency. There is seldom more than one SRO assigned to a school and, in many districts, some schools have no SRO at all. An SRO, like any employee, may become ill, take time off to care for family members,

or be absent for other reasons. There are seldom enough officers to fill in for them at those times. SRO coverage is therefore usually neither comprehensive nor continuous.

- 2.2.1.2. Training for SROs is often problematic. It can be too broad, devoting too much of their limited training time to maintaining their certification for general police duties vs. the more narrow and specific responsibilities of school security. Rapid, aggressive response to an active shooter is a small piece of policing work, but the most critical justification for an SRO position.
- 2.2.1.3. There are many forms of bad behavior in student populations for which a uniformed police officer can provide both a highly visible deterrent and relatively swift on-scene intervention by someone known to both students and staff, who has training and legal authority in those situations. This is a widely acknowledged benefit of having an SRO in a school, but these functions can also detract from their alertness, readiness, and availability for response to lethal threats. Are they primarily hall monitors, or armed first responders?
- 2.2.1.4. Retired law enforcement officers serving as SROs bring a wealth of knowledge and experience, but are not always at a peak of fitness or readiness for an armed encounter. Active duty officers assigned to SRO positions by their agencies are often those nearing retirement, or officers deemed less effective in patrol duties, and it is not uncommon for them to remain in SRO assignments for years - eight years in the case of the Stoneman Douglas High School SRO in Parkland, Florida. As is often the case with any personnel assigned to armed security positions, they may lose what edge they have, when over time, "nothing happens" but routine interaction with students and staff. The actual track record of SROs in active shooter situations is far from perfect. It is fair to assume that their presence sometimes deters violence, but as previously noted, all forms of deterrence have by definition failed when the first shot is fired, and several high-profile shootings have occurred in schools even though SROs were present. SROs in those situations have not been consistently successful in stopping the shooter. There are certainly some admirable exceptions, and those need to be studied carefully to learn and apply the reasons for their success.
- 2.2.2. Unrestricted concealed carry. Some jurisdictions - the state of Utah is a well-known example - allow any citizen with a state concealed carry permit to carry on school property, without the specific knowledge or permission of school authorities. While this approach has not resulted in any serious mishap, many are uncomfortable with the idea of having legally armed persons present in the schools without the approval or even the knowledge of staff, administration, and law enforcement.
- 2.2.3. Concealed carry by school staff. School district employees, with concealed carry permits or another form of license by the state, are authorized to carry firearms on school property in many states, usually at the discretion of the local school board or other governing body. Legislation varies from state to state, but in most cases, staff members must first volunteer, and then meet requirements set by law and school policy. These usually include additional background checks, some form of psychological suitability evaluation, and successful completion of mandated training. In at least 14 states, such laws and programs have been in place for years. There have been no wrongful or accidental deaths

or serious injuries - and no active shooter events - in any school where selected, vetted, trained staff members carry concealed weapons; this is a remarkable record of success.

Although it is always difficult to prove the effectiveness of deterrence, it is reasonable to conclude that concealed carry by staff members, whose number, locations, and identities are not publicly disclosed, may have a higher deterrent value than a single uniformed SRO.

One of strongest arguments for this solution is its relatively low cost. For example, DSI's 40-hour initial training package for school staff is available for a course fee of less than \$2,300 per person, one time, with annual recurrent training costing between \$500 and \$1,000. A single year's typical salary for one active duty, commissioned SRO could fund between seven and twelve armed staff members for ten years.

2.2.4. SRO plus concealed carry by school staff. An SRO whose selection, training, supervision, readiness, and dedication avoid the pitfalls listed above could be an excellent coordinator and focal point for a team of armed staff members. We acknowledged the positive aspects of having a uniformed police officer in a school in situations below the threshold of lethal violence; and we should not expect school staff members to take on the broader responsibilities of law enforcement officers in those situations. However, volunteer staff members carrying concealed firearms, who have trained together for response to an active shooter, would constitute an enormous force multiplier to an SRO. Unlike the SRO, their presence and location would be difficult for a potential offender to predict, which would both enhance deterrence and increase the likelihood of swift intervention during the critical response gap, if an armed attacker does appear. Building-specific plans and training, coordinated by the SRO and his agency, could ensure a coordinated response by several competent armed individuals.

2.2.5. Firearms in locked storage, accessible to designated, trained staff members. This is sometimes considered as an alternative to concealed carry by school staff. The requirements and process for authorizing individuals would be no different: voluntary participation, vetting, and training would be approached in the same way as for concealed carry. The difference is that approved personnel would not carry a firearm on their person; weapons would instead be secured in locked containers accessible only to the individual, or perhaps to all approved personnel. Counter arguments to this approach arise from both its motivation and its utility.

2.2.5.1. One rationale for locked storage of firearms in schools is "atmospheric," a fear that concealed weapons carried by staff members will be detected by students and others, who will be distracted or intimidated. But policy, awareness, proper training, and best practices can ensure "deep concealment" of weapons to ensure that they are not visually detected. Teachers or other staff who are concerned about hugs and casual physical contact, or their own ability to keep a firearm concealed during their daily routines, should simply not volunteer. In addition, depending upon the details of the storage scheme, locked storage might actually increase the likelihood of weapons being seen. A lock box in an office or classroom may require that weapons be handled twice or more in a day, inserted into and extracted from the container. Firearms professionals understand that unnecessary manipulation of a weapon increases the risk of a safety mishap, and certainly it increases the likelihood that it will be seen. By contrast, a weapon that is carried concealed should be only handled

twice a day, in the privacy of the individual's home: checked and holstered in the morning before going to work, and extracted and stored in the evening after return home. The only time students should see a firearm is if it is being deployed to save innocent lives.

2.2.5.2. The second rationale for storage in locked containers is a fear that a holstered, concealed weapon might be seized and used against a staff member or others. There are strong counter-arguments to this concern. Any professional training program will include training in proven methods of weapon retention. Employees who fear being overpowered and losing control of their weapon should probably not volunteer. But the foremost counter-argument is that there is no documented case of this occurring, even once, in any of the 14 states allowing concealed carry by trained school staff members, or the ten or more additional states that allow concealed carry by staff plus non-staff personnel under varying conditions.

2.2.5.3. Another argument against locked storage is that firearms stored in centralized locations may not be accessible to authorized users in a crisis that will be over within minutes of its initiation.

3. **Moving forward.** A broad, sustained effort to implement and sustain a comprehensive security strategy should include all the Passive and Active measures listed in Section 2 of this document. DSI believes that a critical element of any effective strategy is ensuring the presence of trained, armed personnel on site to protect lives in the event that all other measures fail. While SROs can be part of this solution, they are both expensive and of uncertain value unless augmented by selected school staff members carrying concealed firearms. This may be the most controversial and problematic element in your security strategy, so we will define a sensible path forward.

3.1. First Steps. A solid foundation of legal authority and enabling policy must be in place before any school or district can proceed.

3.1.1. Ensure legal authority: State law must enable the school's administration or governing body, through exceptions to the federal Gun Free School Zones Act, to authorize the possession of firearms on school property. Provisions of state law that themselves prohibit firearms in schools must be suitably amended. Examples abound, in the states that already have such statutes and programs in place: These include Ohio, Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas, and Vermont. Several other states have such legislation pending in 2018.

If your state does not already have statutes in place authorizing armed non-law enforcement personnel in schools, you cannot proceed until this is accomplished.

There are many alternative approaches that may be considered and compared, before the best are selected, reconciled, passed, and signed into law. In addition to the technical and tactical merits of different solutions discussed elsewhere in this document, DSI has three recommendations for those pursuing legal authorization at the state level for armed, non-law enforcement personnel in the schools:

- Pursue legislation that has a realistic chance of success, even if it appears less than optimum in any of its particulars. As with any complex legislation, it will require legal and administrative review and interpretation, and may be amended and improved in the future.
- Confer a measure of local control, allowing school boards or other governing bodies the final say in how and when to implement the authority granted by law. Much opposition at the state level will be overcome if local governing bodies are given this discretion, and successful implementation in even a handful of venues will, based on experience across the country, lead to further acceptance elsewhere.
- Limit the persons authorized to carry (or have access to) weapons in the schools to school staff members, specifically approved by and known to the administration and/or the governing body.

3.1.2. Enact school governing body policy: Once enabling legislation is in place, and especially if a provision for “local control” is included, school boards or governing bodies that choose to proceed will have to create policy addressing specifics that are left to their discretion; these are likely to include:

- Cost and funding issues
- Relationship to other security programs, e.g. prevention, detection, physical security, and emergency planning
- Application, approval, and review processes for armed employees, e.g. qualifications and prerequisites, supervisory recommendation, tenure, drug or alcohol screening, and psychological suitability evaluations
- Training and equipment requirements
- Choose on-person concealed carry, or locked containers, or a combination of the two
- Protecting the identity of armed personnel
- Day-to-day management by the school’s administrative team
- Local law enforcement and other first responder involvement
- Strict criteria for the use of deadly force - avoiding “mission creep” into other security/law enforcement roles

3.2. Action Plan: Portions of this plan may be addressed concurrently with the formulation, debate, and passage of local policy. There are no generic solutions or right answers for any element of this plan; solutions will be local and specific, and most will require the assistance of experts with domain knowledge and experience, who may come from the private sector, but should also include local enforcement personnel who have a direct stake in school security.

3.2.1. Analysis: A Security Assessment with the following four components should be completed as a foundation for any security strategy. It is vitally necessary if you intend to implement armed, non-law enforcement personnel in your schools.

- Threat Assessment - For your specific location(s), characterize potential threats on the basis of likelihood and consequence.

- Assets Evaluation - Assets are agencies, programs, and individuals that will respond to an incident at your location and assist in resolving or mitigating the incident, but are not under your direct control. You must identify all “first responders” (e.g. police, fire, and medical), their capabilities and response times.
- Site Survey - Develop an honest and complete characterization of your site(s) and activities, both under current conditions, and taking into account of programs and upgrades that are currently funded but not yet fully implemented.
- Vulnerability Analysis - Pose potential threats that you have identified against the strengths and weaknesses of your site(s) to identify gaps in your security.

3.2.2. Organization

- Solicit volunteers - 10-20% of staff is a reasonable outcome, and only volunteers who meet all requirements should be accepted.
- Consider the pros & cons of allowing instructional vs. only non-instructional positions; these may include staff such as maintenance, grounds, custodial, etc.
- Apply consistent criteria in a multi-stage selection process.
- Protect the identity of those who volunteer, and those who are approved; Uncertainty regarding who and how many may be armed contributes greatly to the deterrent value of armed staff.

3.2.3. Provisioning: Provide or regulate the selection of privately owned firearms, ammunition, holsters, and equipment. There are two approaches.

- Authorized individuals provide their own equipment, which must meet specific requirements that you specify to ensure the safety and reliability of the firearm, effectiveness of the caliber and specific ammunition choice, and the concealability and security of holsters. Technically qualified subject matter advisors can help write requirements and monitor compliance. DSI strongly recommends this approach.
- The school or district procures and issues firearms and other equipment. While this ensures standardization and relieves a financial burden on individuals, it has several drawbacks: secure storage facilities, a qualified armorer, parts and spares, and an inventory control system would be required. The school or district would incur additional liability exposure for the possibility of loss or misuse of weapons during non-work hours if the weapons are not drawn and turned in on a daily basis.

3.2.4. Planning: Plan, organize, and rehearse leaders, administrators, and staff before, during, and after armed staff training. This usually requires a comprehensive review and revision of existing Emergency or Active Shooter response plans.

- Incorporate the results of your Security Assessment.
- Prepare orientation and training for all your employees - and for parents, volunteers, and any others that are on your premises on a regular basis - that will prepare them for the presence of armed defenders on site.
- Conduct tabletop exercises & rehearsals in each building involving key staff, administrators, and first responders. Individual skills and readiness must be integrated into plans and shared understanding of roles and actions necessary in a crisis. Recognize the truism that plans, while necessary, always fall short in a crisis and at best provide a starting point for informed decision making and initiative on the part of key personnel.

3.2.5. Training:

- Establish requirements for individual and collective training. Law enforcement agencies and outside Subject Matter Experts can assist in the formulation of requirements. Beware of facile solutions, such as the assumption that more hours spent in training is equivalent to better training. Training should be performance-based, ensuring mastery of specific critical skills.
- Issue a Request for Proposals, and evaluate proposals. Review and approve proposed course curriculum, to ensure that training aligns with requirements of the law, local policy, and emergency planning. Consider the experience and expertise of trainers in working with civilians who are not law enforcement or military personnel.
- Invite local law enforcement officers to observe and participate in all phases of training.
- Conduct initial training for all approved personnel. Ensure that all established standards and requirements are met.
- Formulate and present training to the personnel who are approved to carry (or to access) firearms, to ensure their understanding of and alignment with plans, policy, and expectations. This is an internal responsibility that cannot be outsourced.
- Establish and enforce requirements for the frequency, scope, and quality of recurrent training, to sustain perishable skills.

3.2.6. Validation: Conduct validation exercises to test training, plans, and policy against realistic threats and realistic conditions. Methods include:

- Tabletop Exercises
- Tactical Decision Games
- Reality-Based Training

- Repeat on an established schedule, or whenever conditions or key personnel change.
- Follow up all training events, actual incidents, and “near misses” with a formal After Action Review (AAR) to identify successes and areas needing improvement

3.2.7. Mobilization: Only when all prior steps have been completed, should you “go operational” with armed personnel in your school(s). Selection and training of individuals is only a small part of implementing this vital portion of a sound security strategy.

CONCLUSION:

Securing a school against the threat of an armed attack is subject to the tyranny of time, specifically the time required for effective law enforcement response. Physical security measures such as locked doors and controlled access, while helpful against lesser threats, do little more than delay a determined, armed attacker. These and other passive measures have their place in a well-planned comprehensive security strategy, but without the last line of active, armed defense against violent attack, lives will remain unacceptably at risk.

DSI addresses the full spectrum from support of legislative initiatives and school board policy development through broad spectrum security assessments, response planning and organization, and training of school personnel. From proven, off-the-shelf training packages to custom engagements built to address local needs and requirements, we are prepared to enhance security in any educational environment. Please contact us with questions or for any other assistance we may provide.