

Parents and lawmakers are deeply divided on whether to arm teachers

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(From left) President Donald Trump and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students Carson Abt and Ariana Klein listen as Carson's father, Frederick Abt, speaks during a listening session with high school students, teachers and others at the White House in Washington, D.C., February 21, 2018. Photo by: Carolyn Kaster/AP Photo

After yet another mass school shooting, there are deep divisions about whether or not teachers should be armed.

Lawmakers in several states are wrestling with the controversial idea. One of those states is Florida, where a shooter at a high school in Parkland took 17 lives.

President Trump might be in favor of arming teachers. During a listening session on Wednesday with parents and survivors of school shootings, he said that a teacher good at using firearms "could very well end the attack very quickly."

Randi Weingarten is the president of the 1.7 million-member American Federation of Teachers. She called arming teachers a horrible idea. She said an educator's handgun would be no match for the assault-style weapons often held by attackers. "The solution is to ban these military weapons from people who shouldn't have them," Weingarten said.

Head Of NRA Speaks Out

The National Association of School Resource Officers provides training to school-based law enforcement officers. The association is also against arming teachers. "Anyone who hasn't received the extensive training provided to law enforcement officers will likely be mentally unprepared to take a life, especially the life of a student assailant," it said in a statement Thursday.

Wayne LaPierre is head of the National Rifle Association, a powerful organization that supports gun ownership and has a lot of political influence. He said on Thursday that reactions like Weingarten's are expected after mass shootings.

LaPierre spoke to a conference of conservatives in Washington on Thursday. Conservatives tend to support gun ownership because the right to own guns is mentioned in the Constitution. "The whole idea from some of our opponents that armed security makes us less safe is completely ridiculous," he said.

"It should not be easier for a madman to shoot up a school than a bank or a jewelry store," LaPierre said.

Discussions Are Taking Place In Some States

In Florida, Republican state Senator Greg Steube has proposed allowing specially trained educators with military or law enforcement backgrounds to be armed. Similar discussions have taken place in other states. In Wisconsin, the attorney general, or head lawyer, said he's open to the idea.

"Our students do not need to be sitting ducks. Our teachers do not need to be defending themselves with a No. 2 pencil," said Alabama state Representative Will Ainsworth in proposing a bill days after the Valentine's Day shooting in Florida.

In contrast, a California law that took effect January 1 stopped school districts from allowing nonsecurity employees to carry guns on campus.

The general public is also weighing the idea. A poll released this week by ABC News/Washington Post says 42 percent of Americans believe teachers with guns could have prevented the Florida shooting.

Kasey Hansen, a teacher from Salt Lake City, Utah, got the idea to arm herself after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. In that instance, 20 children and six adults died.

Eight States Already Allow Concealed Weapons

"It just really hit home that these teachers, all they could do was pile those kids in a corner and stand in front of them and hope for the best," she said. She thinks having a gun is a better alternative.

Tara Bordeaux, a teacher in Austin, Texas, is comfortable with guns. However, she wonders whether she could pull the trigger on a student, even one who is armed.

"Would I get the same training and would I have the same type of instinct of when and how to use it?" asked Bordeaux, her state's 2018 teacher of the year. "I don't have any instincts in me to be an

officer of the law. My instincts are to be a teacher."

At least eight states allow, or don't specifically prohibit, concealed weapons in K-12 schools. That's according to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

Brock Cartwright is the superintendent in Claude, Texas. He won't reveal how many or who among his teachers is armed, but the district advertises the message to potential intruders on three signs: "Please be aware that the staff at Claude ISD is armed and may use whatever force necessary to protect our students."

Just Another Part Of Safety Plans?

Like other administrators, Cartwright said armed teachers are just one part of safety plans that include emergency drills and tightening building security. The small town doesn't have a police department. This raises concerns about the potential response time for law enforcement.

"Hopefully, we never have to use it," Cartwright said, "but if we do, our thought is we're going to hold off until help arrives."

Betsy DeVos, the U.S. secretary of education, was asked on the radio about the potential of arming teachers. She said states "clearly have the opportunity and the option to do that."

Robert Morpew, a parent from Magnolia, Texas, supports teachers having guns in his son's high school. He would want strict guidelines for teachers that are armed.

"I do think it would be a deterrent, there's no doubt," he said.

In Buffalo, New York, parent Wendy Diina disagreed.

"Why am I trying to prevent someone from having a gun by giving a gun to someone else?" the mother of two asked.