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SECUR PROGRAM

SCHOOL ENTRY CONTROL AND URGENT RESPONSE

INTRODUCTION

We should protect our children at school at least as well as we protect our politicians at work.

With the steadily growing number of school killings, it has become obvious that action must be taken. If every gun control proposal under consideration were enacted, and worked as planned—a proposition about which many are skeptical—it would not remove all firearms, and would be unlikely to prevent all future school attacks. Something else must be done.

There is a reason the legislators of the General Assembly do not simply carry their own guns for protection at work, but rely on single-point entry and armed guards.

This concept paper outlines a three-point plan to use proven, off-the-shelf technology and tried-and-true tactics to bring the same protection to Ohio's schools that are in place in most government offices, and even many businesses.

There is no single, easy solution. Other elements—notably mental illness, communications between the school and law enforcement, a culture that glorifies violence and plain, old-fashioned and ever-present evil—all play contributing roles. But this concept paper outlines concrete actionable steps that can be undertaken now.

BACKGROUND

Ohio has 3,505 public school buildings, and about 5,200 school buildings total, including private schools. Since 2015, each school building must have a "school safety plan" on file with the state. The plan notes key emergency features of the facility and includes a description of emergency response measures.

The school buildings themselves vary widely, from new facilities with modern electronic locks and related security systems to old buildings with retrofitted security—or nothing at all but a simple mechanical lock, which may or may not be engaged.

Ohio has made great progress in the past few years, and Ohio Department of Public Safety personnel have made individual trips to every school to verify building blueprints and conduct individual school building vulnerability assessments.

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However, Ohio has a strong tradition of local control of schools, and there is no statewide security standard. Each school system makes its own plans—and there is no statewide database about how prepared each school building is.

Between 2013 and early 2017, Ohio had a small grant program through the Ohio School Facilities Commission that reimbursed schools for purchase of an emergency communications system or a lock system for one entrance, capped at $2,000 and $5,000 respectively. The program was funded for $15.7 million—a small amount of money, especially considering that some buildings could not use a locking system without alterations to the physical building.

The deadline for applications under that program was in November of 2016, and the program itself expired in March of 2017. Nothing has taken its place.

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Ohio funds the state portion of school construction with bonds, and over 20 years has disbursed $11.5 billion. A similar bond could fund the capital costs of retrofitting and securing K-12 school facilities.

Phase 1

Partnering with the Department of Homeland Security, the Ohio Department of Education, local schools and law enforcement, the state would undertake a comprehensive vulnerability inventory of all state school buildings.

Phase 2

Using the information obtained through the vulnerability inventory, projects would be prioritized to bring each school building to a condition with controlled entry point or points, with remote electronic lock systems, and such other features as might be useful.

Phase 3

The Ohio Peace Officers Training Academy (OPOTA), in conjunction with leading experts, would develop a specialized program designed to give advanced training for current teachers who have served in military or law enforcement roles to respond to active killer scenarios in a school situation.

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Phase 1

The Comprehensive School Vulnerability Inventory

Some schools have excellent safety plans, modern school physical facilities with strong access controls and on-site staff expertise, up to, and including, armed officers. Others have minimal controls and no one on-site able to confront an armed threat.

It is not enough to merely send money to local schools and hope for the best; nor is every school in equal need of state assistance. A comprehensive, statewide vulnerability inventory would enable Ohio to send money where it is most needed, and to achieve a statewide minimum floor for security for all school buildings and their students.

The first step would be to set up a working group of security experts, law enforcement and educators to establish a set of objectives for the inventory. With objectives in hand, the group could then write a uniform inventory instrument—essentially a checklist that would establish how safe or vulnerable each school building is. Among the items checked would be the grading of the entry point or points, existence of electronic locks and lockdown zones, existence of video camera systems with monitoring and communication ability, and how many school resource officers are assigned.

The General Assembly should make this detailed information confidential, so as to avoid giving would-be killers a road map for their crimes. Public accountability would be established by stratifying the aggregate data and showing which quintile each building is in, and publishing this information. Parents would know how their school building stacks up against the rest of the state, without identifying specific points of vulnerability.

The vulnerability inventory would be performed by a coalition of willing law enforcement agencies across the state. It is important to note that some law enforcement agencies are too thinly staffed to participate. OPOTA could conduct training via webinar for local agencies, walking through a school and conducting an inventory on video to connect the visual experience with the categories and definitions of the inventory tool itself.

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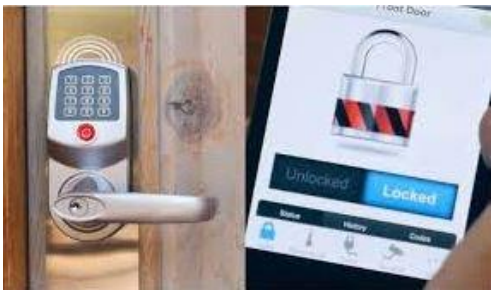
Phase 2

Controlling Access

Controlling access to a building is the first step in securing it. Most government offices and many businesses protect workers by limiting who can enter a building or an area of a building. This is accomplished by limiting the number of entry points, often to only one. Individual areas inside the buildings have electronic locks with individual keycard access.

These measures are not common in our schools. Many do not have remotely controlled electronic locks. Some school buildings are not designed with entry points that may be easily adapted to physical control.



The Phase 1 vulnerability inventory would provide objective data to understand the current condition of the state's school buildings, and to be able to rank buildings in an order of priority. Schools that require architectural changes to effectively control entry should be prioritized, followed by electronic lock systems with the ability to remotely lock down zones of the school building. Video camera systems, monitoring and a means to communicate with first responders would also be a priority.

Ohio issued more than $11 billion in school construction bonds in the wake of the Supreme Court's *DeRolph* decisions. Another bond of at least $100 million should be issued to fund school security improvements and raise all school buildings in the state to an agreed minimum level.

A similar statewide project was initiated by former Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Tom Moyer. County courthouses, which had traditionally had multiple points of entry, and little to no control over them, were directed to limit entry to a single point.

Today, courthouses have many entrances blocked and locked. Everyone who works in the courthouse, or has business there, goes through a single point of entry, attended by an armed guard and a magnetometer.

These changes were not universally welcomed at first, but today these precautions are second nature. Similar changes in our schools will also be met with some resistance—but the need to secure our schools is at least as great as the need to secure our courthouses was 20 years ago.

In recognition of the wide range of environments in which our schools operate, individual design will necessarily be controlled at the local level. But the overall principles that secure the places where public business is done should be extended to our schools.

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Phase 3

Training On-Site Staff

A report by the FBI found that the average response time for law enforcement to a school mass killing was 18 minutes. Even where that time is dramatically reduced, the number of casualties rises dramatically with each passing minute.

There is simply no substitute for an on-site response. School Resource Officers (SRO) are the ideal solution, and the Phase 1 vulnerability inventory should establish how many schools do not have SROs. Since the salary of an SRO is not a capital item, it would be inappropriate to attempt to fund additional SROs through the bond—but the Phase 1 vulnerability inventory will allow state policy makers to put a price tag on funding this operational expense.

Even if every school had an SRO, additional on-site responders may be necessary in the event of unavailability, wounding or other failure of the SRO. Redundancy could be ensured by well-trained, armed on-site staff volunteers.

The Ohio Police Officers Training Academy, in conjunction with other experts and educators, should develop a school-specific advanced training program for teachers or other staff who have a background in law enforcement and the military, and are willing and able to provide a first line of on-site defense.

This program would be conducted on a "Train the Trainer" model and allow local law enforcement to conduct the training of local school personnel.

Responding to a mass killer situation ideally asks for more than an armed citizen. This new training course would exceed the requirements for a concealed carry license, and include additional training designed to simulate the stress and confusion of a school attack. The trained staff volunteer would be required to take continued periodic training.

The Shelby County model, developed by Sheriff John Lenhart, has weapons secured in biometric lockboxes accessible only to trained and permitted staff within seconds. This program could provide a template to be improved upon and replicated in other parts of the state.

Many teachers do not wish to play this role, and should not be asked to do so. However, many teachers are willing—Butler County Sheriff Richard Jones had 300 sign up for training the first day he offered it. The Buckeye Firearms Association pays for teacher training through its FASTER program, and has also seen robust demand.

No teacher should be required to be armed, of course, and local districts should be allowed to decide whether to participate. But having well-trained volunteers on-site will unquestionably make for a faster response, and save lives.

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CONCLUSION

The first purpose of government is public safety. Without it, no other function of government means much—what good are paved streets or excellent schools if one is not safe from harm in using them?

Protecting the unprotected—defending the defenseless—has the first call on our hearts, our purpose and our treasure. These matters must be taken up by the Ohio General Assembly now, without delay.