

Message to CVUSD: Preventing shootings requires ‘self-assessments’

Your Turn

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Guest columnists

Three years ago, we ran an op-ed in this paper that acknowledged the efforts that school districts were making in trying to prevent school shootings. After a decade of tragedies that shook the sensibilities of the entire nation, schools throughout the country began adapting security strategies and introducing crisis intervention programs, counseling and education programs that were hoped to provide an effective response to this intractable problem.

In that article, we suggested that schools should also explore new and different approaches that focus more on *preventing* school shootings by systematically identifying and eliminating all known vulnerabilities, thereby greatly limiting the possibility of a tragic event occurring.

The recent student/parent protests in Thermal and Coachella make it very clear that traditional approaches are doing little to ease the concerns of students, teachers, or anyone who might become the victim of a deadly attack.

Despite the efforts of many well-intended people and the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars, school shootings continue to occur throughout the nation, and innocent children continue to die. In 2022 alone, there were 46 school shootings in the United States – the largest number for any single year in this

century. These assaults resulted in 34 deaths and exposed thousands of children to the trauma of watching friends and classmates murdered. The unbridled fear and sorrow associated with these incidents will undoubtedly affect these children and their families for the rest of their lives.

Those raising their voices in Coachella are speaking for students, parents and teachers throughout the country – and are pleading for something *different* to be done.

As professors and experts in our fields, and in pursuit of something different, we have studied the current crisis and have come up with an approach that will make a difference – *the facilitated 'self-assessment*

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In this effort, Cal State San Bernardino is partnering with George Mason University in Virginia to provide individual schools with a tool that fully engages the teachers, administrators, school staff and others at individual schools to identify and closely monitor the correction of vulnerabilities that are too often overlooked, and which are far too easy for the 'bad guys' to exploit.

In the current environment, there is simply no reason for school gates and doors to be left open, for security guards to

ever

leave their posts, for troubled students to be ignored, or for guns to be brought on campus.

The self-assessment process is characterized by candid discussions within the school community and regular reporting of both the ongoing vulnerabilities and the progress made to correct them to all community stakeholders – including parents. Our system helps schools conclude: Is a school vulnerable or not? If so,

schools must transparently explain and justify plans and actions to their communities.

Our approach was initially developed for the FBI and several other agencies to fight terrorism but has since been used in other areas where the goal is prevention.

In the aftermath of the tragic events at schools nationwide, we decided to apply the approach to the school shooting issue and to begin sharing it with school administrators, teachers, parents and the public. The provosts and deans at both schools have met, discussed, and endorsed this initiative and are fully supporting our efforts.

Sadly, the tragic events at Uvalde and other schools and the recent protest by students and parents at Coachella call out for an alternative approach to protecting the nation's schools. The starting point for this approach is a frank discussion about the extent to which the vulnerabilities that exist at your school or in your school district are known to school administrators, faculty, school staff, parents and students.

We have waited decades for gun control solutions to materialize, and we assume it will require several more years to see the effect of any measure enacted in the aftermath of the current crisis. Perhaps we should begin to heed the advice of the ancients, who simply proclaimed – *physician, heal thyself!*

There is so much more that can be done.

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