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## Fwd: It's time to stop scaring kids and parents

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## August board meeting

Sent from my iPhone

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## It's time to stop scaring kids and parents

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

Social attention is focused strongly on guns and gun-violence again. It happens with increasing frequency, often with negative concerns about the safety of children at school. Every parent and school board member - and certainly every policymaker - should read this message from [University of Michigan researchers](#):

"School shootings are a focus of media attention and raise awareness about the problem of firearm deaths among children and teens. *But they remain the smallest proportion of deaths*, accounting for 1.2% of all homicides among 5 to 18-year-olds." The fact is, guns kill lots of American children, but *rarely in school settings*.

That's not to say we should just not concern ourselves with the safety of school children. It's just an evidence-based fact that, if the goal is to keep children from being killed with firearms, the places to look that are clearly of highest priority do not include the schools. Their homes and the streets are where they usually die.

As University of Michigan faculty members Marc Zimmerman, Patrick Carter and Rebecca Cunningham report, death by firearm is the second leading cause of death for children and teens - and it has been by far the *leading cause of death* for African-American children for decades. It's just rare in school settings.

Those researchers have posted an article on [The Conversation](#) that all leaders in society - certainly educators and public policymakers - should be aware of. Gun violence is a children's life issue, beyond all doubt.

**The raw data of recent years is disturbing.** The authors call gun violence a "uniquely American epidemic." Consider, for example, the experience of 2010 and the research of Dr. Erin Grinshteyn (University of Nevada) and Dr. David Hemenway (Harvard University), published by the [American Journal of Medicine](#).

Firearm death data from 23 countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States) were subjected to regression analysis.

The authors documented amazingly high U.S. rates of death by firearm. The rate of homicide by firearm was 25.2 times higher in the U.S. than the other 22 countries; *for 15- to 24-year-olds, the US rate was 49 times higher*. Suicides rates were comparable overall, but the *U.S. rate of suicide by firearm was 8 times higher*.

Counting all 2010 deaths by firearms in all 23 countries - the most industrial developed nations with the highest incomes in the world - the authors found that "90% of women, 91% of children aged 0 to 14 years, 92% of youth aged 15 to 24 years, and 82% of all people killed by firearms were from the United States."

**What about school shootings in Illinois?** The Center for Homeland Defense & Security at the Naval Postgraduate School has tracked every "school shooting incident" that's occurred in the U.S. since 1970. An "incident" does not mean someone died - or even that anyone was shot. It just means a gun was fired or displayed.

Data that can be downloaded (but with great difficulty) from the Center's web site lists 65 incidents occurring in Illinois, the fourth-largest number behind California (162), Texas (134) and Florida (90). [New York, only 48?] You can download an Excel file I made of the Illinois incidents (sorted alphabetically by city) [at this link](#).

As you can see, 34 "school shooting incident" deaths were reported in the 49 years since 1970. In the most tragic incident, five people died outside a Chicago private school that the shooter never entered.

Forty of the 65 Illinois school incidents were reported to have occurred in Chicago. Shooters were almost all students or former students who targeted specific victims. Victims were mostly other students; some were teachers or other school staff.

The CHDS researchers "summarized" the incidents in ways that characterized them. Were they gang-related? Did an argument get out of hand? Was the shooter obviously in poor mental health? (The Excel file on the ISNS site gives you only the brief version of the summary. You can get the [complete CHDS file here](#).)

**School shooting incidents have peaks and valleys**, by year. They rose a bit in the 1990s and again in the aughts, with the peak being 59 incidents in 2006 - until 2018, that is. The CHDS recorded 110 school shooting incidents in 2018, and such events are [on track to match or exceed that record](#) in the current year.

So it is true that there have been more incidents in recent years than in the past. But to double a very small number still results in a very small number. The evidence-based analysis is clear: children are safer in a public school than in any other setting - including their homes. *Inciting fear to the contrary is villainous*.

That is not the same as saying, "Don't worry, be happy." While absolute safety (or almost anything) is always impossible, anything that can approach it is worth considering. Since most school shooters are students or former students, those who know them best - trained educators, social workers, counselors - should lead the effort.

What about "school resource officers" (armed police)? [Justice Policy Institute](#) executive director Marc Schindler describes the SRO movement as the "most expensive and least effective" school safety strategy. A trained school counselor seems preferable to an armed amateur who claims such a relationship with children.

**It is a difficult subject to raise, but it must be confronted** in this connection. A couple of years ago, an administrator who should have known better chose an SRO, rather than a counselor or school psychologist, to join him in an interrogation of a 16-year-old boy who was said to have put a "sex video" on his phone.

The youth's parents were not contacted in advance of the meeting, the subject of which reportedly included warnings about the seriousness of being charged with production and possession of child-pornography. The honor-roll student subsequently *jumped to his death* from the top of a parking garage.

The parents sued, of course, but a judge dismissed the case. It is reportedly under appeal. In any case, it seems worth considering whether it would have been better for the administrator to (1) notify a parent and (2) invite a professional who deals with children in stressful situations - rather than a cop - to the meeting.

[In response to that tragic incident](#), the General Assembly passed a bill this year requiring parental notification before a student can be detained and interrogated. [HB 2627](#) passed with comfortable majority votes, even though it [was opposed](#) by police groups and, sadly, the Statewide School Management Alliance.

Generally, having a visible police presence will tell children that they are in a dangerous place. Now, there are schools who *should deliver that message*. But schools that are actually located in demonstrably secure environments should not burden children and their parents - entire communities - with such false fears.

**Now that I have irritated one of Illinois' fastest-growing** organizations, and the decision-makers who hire its members, let's return our attention to that "uniquely American epidemic." It was just a few years ago, according to federal research, that the number of "civilian firearms" [grew to exceed the number of civilians](#) in America.

"The Obama years were a boom time for America's gun manufacturers, which doubled their annual output between 2009 and 2013, fueled in part by fears of a federal crackdown on gun ownership that never materialized," Washington Post data analyst [Christopher Ingraham reported](#) last year.

The [2018 Small Arms Survey](#) found that, "In the United States alone civilians acquired at least 122 million new or imported firearms during the period 2006-17." There are now more than 393 million civilian firearms in American, or almost half as many as the 857 million total in the other 230 surveyed nations and territories.

Guns. We got guns. Nothing *intrinsically* wrong with that. Guns are part of many family traditions, as they have been mine. But we gun-owners should be held accountable for what we - or others - do with our guns. And to enjoy target shooting or hunting does not require that we join a Second-Amendment NRA cult.

Also, a society that's awash with firearms - especially when they are easily acquired by just anybody - just has to expect a high percentage of crimes to be committed with guns, high numbers of deaths and injuries to involve guns. Correlation is not causation, but the correlation in this case sure is strong.

**Gov JB Pritzker still has bills to sign - or veto.** Including [HB 2627](#), the bill requiring the parents to be notified before their child is hauled into an interrogation room, the [ISNS bill-tracking page](#) lists 29 bills that the legislature has passed and still await the governor's action - sign the bill into law or veto it.

At this time, the governor has taken action on 39 measures. He has signed 38 of them into law and (although I told you it would not happen) he has vetoed one bill. [HB 423](#) would have suspended the "Test of Basic Skills" for aspiring teachers until July 1, 2025, by which time ISBE was to study and revise the test.

Pritzker found [HB 423](#) in conflict with [SB 1952](#) - a more comprehensive educator credentialing bill - which he signed and *permanently* eliminates the Basic Skills Test, no study or revision needed. There will be no "override" effort on [HB 423](#), but if there were one it would require 71 votes in the House and 36 in the Senate. Impossible.

Although he can act at any time on a bill that's in his custody, Pritzker's deadline for action arrives within a week for seven pending bills on the ISNS bill-tracking page. After August 20, the deadlines on the remaining 22 bills will arrive by August 28. He must act on HB 2627 by August 27, or it will become law without him.

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