**Coachella Valley schools should work to prevent shootings with safety 'self-assessments'**

Enough is enough. Parents and students are right to be wary of an unknown but ever-present, life-threatening danger of an active shooter who is quite possibly lurking around the parking lots and the hallways of our school buildings.

Current strategies, whether active shooter drills or threat and risk assessments, offer some help, but a more comprehensive approach is needed.

Most schools today focus on threat assessments; very few schools undertake a comprehensive assessment of vulnerabilities, which generally includes a systematic agenda of corrective action.

We as experts studying this field have consistently maintained that judgments about the weaknesses in school conditions and circumstances, policies and practices, are best made by the teachers, administrators and staff who work at the individual schools – not teams of specialists or consultants.

Over the past year, California State University, San Bernardino and George Mason University of Northern Virginia have teamed up to conduct intense research on all 331 school shootings that have occurred in the U.S. since 1999. Our research has identified five categories of vulnerabilities that have played a significant part in each incident:

1. Social work/mental health – the inability to identify and assist all troubled students enrolled in the school.
2. Intelligence – inadequate or insufficient process/protocol for collecting/evaluating all relevant information.
3. School administration – lack of full engagement on the part of administrators, teachers and staff in following the school’s safety policy, ignoring continuing vulnerabilities, or permitting vulnerabilities to remain unaddressed.
4. External environment and community climate – insufficient awareness and limited dialogue with parents and the surrounding community.
5. Law enforcement and security – security measures do not address all the physical vulnerabilities.

Not one of the 331 school shootings reviewed was identified as having a vulnerability outside of those identified by our program. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that if vulnerability assessments had been effectively performed in these situations and corrective action identified, many of these tragic outcomes could have been avoided.

Effective school vulnerability assessments focus on identifying and correcting shortcomings identified by people working in individual schools. Consider the difference that a vulnerability assessment might have made in Uvalde if it revealed that an entrance to the school building was often left unguarded, or that an unknown person could walk unimpeded across the front lawn of the school.

We know that the shooter in Nashville conducted his own vulnerability assessment as he considered the resistance he might face at other locations before deciding that The Covenant School’s vulnerabilities made it the easier target.

Once completed and discussed, a vulnerability assessment provides parents and stakeholders with the confidence that something definitive is being done – which seems to be what parents in the Coachella Valley are looking for.

We stand by to assist any individual school that is willing to try to complete a vulnerability assessment. Cal State, San Bernardino and George Mason University of Northern Virginia recently signed a five-year agreement to develop a comprehensive program to reduce school vulnerabilities.

We will work with individual schools to compete a full assessment upon request. These assessments typically involve 10 to 15 teachers and school administrators and will generally take three to four hours to discuss and complete. While there may ultimately be a nominal charge to facilitate the vulnerability assessments, there will be *no charge* for schools that wish to participate at this time.

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