

Superintendent Spicuzza

March 11, 2018

On March 6th I shared with all of you that as Superintendent of Prescott Schools I am deeply concerned by the repeated tragedies befalling our nation's children due to gun violence. It is easy to feel powerless in the aftermath of tragedies, such as this year's Valentine's Day school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Like the greater Prescott community, I've grown weary of flying our flags at half-staff in response to school shootings. Our children and our teachers should not have to constantly live with the fear that society's violence will creep through the doors of the Prescott Schools.

This week, on March 14th, there is a national call for a student walkout. This walk-out will call attention to the seventeen senseless deaths that occurred in Florida and will give students a forum to speak out on their current reality of gun violence in America and in our schools. I am so proud our students are choosing to exercise their constitutional right to engage responsibly in civic matters of great importance to them. Clearly, our school systems alone cannot solve the complex issue of gun violence. We need everyone's help. And while there are no easy answers to curb the menace of gun violence, there are paths forward. For Prescott schools, that path will not involve adding guns to our buildings.

Arming teachers is not the answer, as convincingly argued in two Washington Post articles from February 22 and 24th by teacher Victoria Barrett and journalist Eugene Robinson. Driving this position closer to home, last February in one of the North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale district's third-grade classroom, a student managed to access and discharge a police officer's holstered gun. Under any circumstance -- even for reasons of safety and defense -- the mere presence of a gun raises the risk of injury and death. Always.

In his 1997 book, "The Gift of Fear," Gavin De Becker illustrated the unacceptable risks associated with our nation's gun culture, at the same time pointing to the success of other similarly advanced democratic nations at curbing

gun violence. In the US, there are more firearms than there are adults, with more than 20,000 more guns entering the commerce stream every day. By this time tomorrow, more than 400 individuals will be shot in the US, and another 1,100 people will be confronted by someone carrying a gun. Conversely, Becker reported that in Japan -- an industrialized nation of more than 120 million people -- the number of gun-related deaths across an *entire year* equals the gun-related deaths of one large U.S. city over a *single weekend* (p.7). De Becker observed, "No contemplation of your safety in America can be sincere without taking a clear-eyed look down the barrel of that statistic."

Major cultural change occurs when situations once commonplace reach the tipping point of moral outrage or widespread unacceptability. Consider how as a country we have readily adapted to new laws that have made racial and gender discrimination, smoking indoors or on airplanes, and failure to wear a seat belt illegal. When it comes to promoting the common good, our country has a rich history of continually working towards a new and better normal.

In Prescott, we understand no school is immune to tragedy. Accordingly, we reject a passive approach to improving the safety of our children and staff. As we grapple with the long-term national debate on gun rights and school safety, I believe that working together, each one of us can take immediate steps to reduce the risk for violence and shape good future citizens here in Prescott. These steps include risk assessment, emergency response, and crisis training.

The Prescott Schools take responsibility for preparedness seriously:

- We have spent time training our staff on the use of assessment tools that help us identify and intervene with students who may need support.
- We have increased our internal capacity to screen individual students and to partner with external resources when appropriate.

- As administrators and teacher leadership teams we take steps to review our work environments and safety practices annually and throughout the school year.
- Each school has an identified emergency response team.
- Staff from the Prescott District spends considerable time to develop and refine crisis preparedness procedures for a broad range of emergency situations.
- We routinely practice emergency and lockdown drills and review these plans throughout the school year.
- Our school board has made decisions to finance expanded video monitoring in our schools. Additional approval will provide video cameras and audio capture on all of our buses by fall 2018.
- The school board, in concert with our administrative team, is dedicated to ongoing exploration of additional best practices around school safety and security.

This is a challenging time within our country and public school systems, but here in Prescott, we refuse to stand still and pledge to work tirelessly to protect our most prized assets and the promise for our future: our children and staff. I am calling on members of our community and leaders within Prescott to join our students by channeling our collective fears and engaging in constructive, civic-minded solutions. By working together we are more likely to strengthen the safety of our Prescott community.

Endnotes.

See Eugene Robinson's Washington Post's Article Feb. 24th

- Accuracy of highly trained officers, what occurs when requiring quick action drops to less than 13%. Do we believe providing guns to teachers as added protection will be the answer.
 - <http://wapo.st/2ot4xOH>

Victoria Barrett Washington Post Feb. 22 Why I will never carry a gun in my classroom

- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/02/22/why-i-will-never-carry-a-gun-in-my-classroom/>

North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale: February 2018

- <https://www.twincities.com/2018/02/05/maplewood-police-officers-gun-fires-at-school-no-injuries-reported/>

Professor Clifford Stott

- <https://www.keele.ac.uk/psychology/people/cliffordstott/>

Psychologist Howie Knoff

- <http://improvingourschools.blogspot.com/>