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School Shooting Story
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At Platte Canyon High School in Baily, Colorado, a gunman entered the school, molested six students and killed one before killing himself.

At a rural high school in Wisconsin, a student took two guns with him to school where he fatally shot the principle in a struggle for the weapons.

At an Amish school in Pennsylvania, a heavily armed gunman entered the school, lined up a class of Amish girls and opened fire. Five were killed and six injured before he took his own life.

All of these deadly school shootings occurred between Sept. 26 and Oct. 3, within one week of each other. They've brought the issue of school violence back into the spotlight. Pittsburgh citizens as well as school and political officials are weighing in with their opinions on what should be done, and what is to blame.

Although there are a variety of differing opinions among those interviewed, respondents seemed able to agree on one thing. Teachers should not be armed with guns.

This comes after Republican Rep. Frank Lasee of Wisconsin suggested earlier this month that teachers, principals and other personnel should be armed with guns as a safety measure and deterrent to future would-be attackers, a USA Today article said.

"I don't trust a teacher to know when to use a gun," said Cody Vasko, 15, an Elizabeth Forward sophomore.

Another high school student from Baldwin agreed: "I think I might actually feel less safe with teachers packing heat," Donovan Miller, 16, said.

Students themselves aren't the only ones in disagreement with the Wisconsin state lawmaker's opinion. Jim Marshal, 49, a salesman and a father, takes criticism of arming teachers even farther.

"We should be giving out fewer guns, not more of them," he said. Others have centered on gun-control as an important topic in light of string of recent school shootings.

"Violence doesn't solve violence," Lindsay Monaco, a 20-year-old education and psychology major at University of Pittsburgh said. She thinks that stricter gun control laws would help drive that message home.

But Monaco has opponents right on the streets of Pittsburgh. "You can't take guns away from law abiding citizens because there are a few law breakers out there," Linda Harvey, 68, a retiree said.

Gun debates aside, what else can schools do to create a safer environment for students? Monaco recalls that at Brentwood High School, where she graduated, doors are locked during classes.

People wanting to get into the school have to ring a buzzer at the main entrance, and then speak with a receptionist who can see them over a security camera. There is no such system in place at Elizabeth Forward, Vasko said. She agreed that it sounds like a good idea.

Among other ideas, interviewed Pittsburghers suggested metal detectors and an increased number of security guards or police officers inside of the schools. “There should be at least one police officer inside every school at all times during classes,” Marshal said.

Others support the installation of metal detectors. “With the way things are these days there’s no reason not to have metal detectors at every entrance,” said Joe Tumas, a 51-year-old contractor from Mount Oliver.

Evan Himel, 21, a senior at Robert Morris University, can think of one reason. “Metal detectors are big and intimidating,” he said. Himel thinks metal detectors send the wrong message to kids. One, that they can’t be trusted. Two, that they are entering an unsafe environment every day, he said.

Reita Melvin, a social worker in the Baldwin-Whitehall School District, agrees that the issue is important. “Our duty is to keep our children safe and to educate them without fear of harm,” she said in an interview via e-mail.

As for security guards, metal detectors and locked doors: “many schools, if not most, have implemented policies and procedures to ensure safety,” Melvin said.

Opinions on what is the cause for these deadly school shootings are just as varied as those about what should be done about them.

Retiree Linda Harvey blames the media. “Kids are playing too much Grand Theft Auto. I wouldn’t let my children play those games, I don’t like my grandchildren playing them,” she said.

One high school student, however, isn’t convinced. “I play violent video games, but I don’t want to bring a gun to school and start shooting,” Miller said.

But others agree with at least half of Harvey’s assessment that parents need to be paying more attention. “These kids are making bombs in their basements and the parents are clueless as to what they’re doing,” Himel said.

Others point to the pressures of society as a potential cause. “People feel pressure to be perfect and to keep their problems quiet. Eventually it builds up,” education and psychology major Lindsay Monaco said.

Melvin, the social worker in Baldwin-Whitehall, agrees with some of what interviewed citizens pointed to as potential causes. “Violence on television, the movies and video games” play a part, she said.

She also agrees that a lack of parental supervision, and poor communication with children about right and wrong and the difference between reality and fiction are also problems that need addressed.

Melvin also cited “increased levels of frustration and anger,” and “an inability to adequately communicate these feelings” as more factors that lead to the types of violence recently witnessed in the nation’s schools.

“I do believe that communication and feelings identification are key factors in positively impacting this issue,” she concluded.