

Sending teachers back into the inferno

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Idaho County Sheriff Doug Giddings came up with a clever analogy to support the idea of arming some of the teachers working in his jurisdiction:

It's the equivalent of equipping schools with fire sprinklers and alarms, then running everybody through periodic fire drills, Giddings told the Tribune's Mary Stone. And far more American children have died in school shootings than in fires, Giddings said.

"How many school shootings have we had (in the U.S)? We've had way too many," he said. "But nobody wants to address the issue because they're afraid of guns."

Of course, there's one huge fly buzzing around Giddings' ointment.

Fire drills build on what people would do naturally - fleeing danger - but in an orderly manner. Giddings suggests asking teachers who have safely escaped a burning building to don fire resistant clothing, strap on oxygen tanks, grab some equipment and rush back into that inferno.

So says a draft plan pending in Mountain View School District, which includes this statement: "The school board may, from time to time, authorize specific individuals to possess certain firearms or other equipment on school property, at school-sponsored events or school-related events, and at board meetings." The Salmon River School District in Riggins may do the same thing.

All of this is modeled after a policy launched in remote Garden Valley. It's seen as a remedy for rural schools that can not expect first responders to arrive in any reasonable amount of time.

But notice who's making the loudest complaints.

The teachers themselves.

"Not that I have much against guns," Grangeville educator Patrick Phillips told Stone. "I just have something against the gun-solves-everybody's-problem mentality that's promoted by the NRA."

For good reason.

People in law enforcement spend much of their time training for the moment they hope never comes - when they may have to draw and fire their weapon in a chaotic moment of peril. Ironically, most officers never take their weapons out of the holster. But they all understand they might.

Nobody goes into education even remotely expecting to become a "shooter." With the possible exceptions of a combat veteran or police officer who have turned to teaching, no amount of training is going to transform an educator into someone who can be expected to take a gun and fire at a living person - possibly a student he knows.

Which may explain why you don't hear this kind of idea coming from people at the national level who have taken a hard look at school violence and what may help avert it.

They know, for instance, that the FBI's 2014 survey of what it called 160 "active shooter" incidents found just one case from 2000 to 2013 in which an armed civilian who was not a security guard subdued an armed assailant.

It's also why you don't see Idaho's first lady, Lori Otter, making a pitch for arming teachers as she launches the Idaho Office of School Safety and Security.

It no doubt shows you why any number of isolated schools throughout Idaho - such as McCammon or Snake River school districts in southeastern Idaho or Orofino in our corner of the state - are in no hurry to sign up. Instead, they have pursued tried-and-true methods.

Such as stationing trained resource officers in the schools.

Or following the advice of security experts who show them how to reduce threats by renovating their buildings.

Or developing school lock-down procedures or even visitor screening protocols.

They also rely upon school counselors, social workers or even fellow students to recognize potential warning signs.

And if necessary, they turn to local taxpayers for the supplemental property tax dollars to pay for it.

What they don't do is embrace an idea so untested anywhere else that they end up experimenting with the lives of their children. - M.T.