

## School Safety & Weapons in Schools

When the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Safety Commission came out with its recommendations in 2018, which then became legislation, I immediately got involved. As a parent with young children in public schools, I contacted our school's legislators, Senator Brandes and Representative Diamond, and encouraged everyone around here to do the same. I researched and advocated, connecting with the Pinellas County Schools Safety & Security Administrator to ask, "How is our school district interpreting and responding to this? What will this look like in our schools?" I also reached out to the head of pediatric neuroscience at All Children's Hospital to ask about potential impacts of monthly drills and videos on all ages of children. I shared what I learned with our dedicated school administration, and was ultimately successful in conveying the potential for damage and preventing the videos from being shown in elementary schools, as well as getting age-appropriate guidance provided to families. I also helped to rewrite and restructure the idea of drills in Pinellas County Schools.

On the topic of arming teachers, I believe that the only person who should have a weapon in a school setting is a licensed and trained professional for whom crisis response is her/his primary responsibility. As a former military officer, I was trained in firearms and know firsthand the responsibilities that come with carrying them. When it comes to violence in schools, I believe what we must focus on is the initial choice of people (typically adolescents in school shootings) wanting to harm others, and ensure that we are creating the kind of environment – and providing the kinds of health and guidance services – needed to ameliorate this kind of impulse.

Adolescent anxiety, depression and suicide have been on the rise for more than a decade. After reading the research and talking with professionals, I believe that monthly drills and additional weapons in the school setting will only contribute to declining mental health, as well as potentially increase violence.

In short: I am for appropriate school safety measures; commitment to restorative practices establishing a positive, communicative culture; increasing mental health, behavioral and counseling services; and common sense gun legislation. Not arming teachers.