

SCHOOL VIOLENCE

They're killing us with safety!

Installing metal detectors in schools could increase violence, not deter it.

BY GLENN CAMPBELL

In response to recent well-publicized shootings near public schools, the principal of Canyon Springs High School wants walk-through metal detectors installed on his campus. A local study by the National Association of School Safety and Law Enforcement Officers also recommends metal detectors, but the hand-held kind that can be used to scan students at random.

This comes at a time when the number of guns seized in Clark County schools has actually dropped—from a high of 84 guns in the 2004-05 school year to only 12 in the current one. The recent shootings happened off-campus, where metal detectors wouldn't help.

Still, you can never be too safe, experts say.

The "experts," of course, are people who have dedicated their lives to safety and security. If you bring them any problem, no matter how complex, what do you think their answer is going to be? More safety. More security.

Even one gun on campus is too many, experts say, and if they had their way, they wouldn't stop beefing up security until that one gun is found or everyone is wearing bulletproof vests.

Maybe metal detectors will reduce the number of weapons on campus—or maybe increase them! To predict the impact of increased security, you need to think about not just the few students who are carrying weapons but the 300,000 who currently aren't.

What message does it send to kids when they have to pass through airport security every day or are subject to random wandings?

"We don't trust you."

Apart from the cost of purchasing and operating the equipment—which must be diverted from actual teaching—this kind of security would be just one more step in the transformation of our educational system into a prison system.

Las Vegas high schools are already massive prison-like structures housing thousands of students each. They look less like schools than processing facilities. Metal detectors would complete the impression that each student is just a small cog in a huge machine, forced to be there against his will, worthy of no respect or trust as an individual.

Behavioral studies show that people who are treated like prisoners soon start acting like them. They start conspiring against their guards and looking for

sneaky ways around the rules.

This is why anything short of airtight TSA-style security would probably be counterproductive. Security itself tends to create an environment of distrust that breeds the same violence and deceit it is supposed to stamp out.

This is especially true for young people, who look to the adults around them to tell them, implicitly, what is important in life. You don't want them to think that what education is all about is whether or not to bring a gun.

Education is supposed to be a cooperative effort between teacher and student. You can't force a child to learn just by locking him in a building six hours a day. He has to want to learn and feel he is gaining independence by it.

You want students to graduate from your school system as free-thinking adults who have learned to use their choices wisely. You don't encourage this growth by telling a kid "We don't trust you" and violating his personal space every day.

Nonetheless, there have been shootings near schools, with the violence leaking into well-heeled neighborhoods, so something must be done. Sadly, that's what always dominates Nevada politics: "Something must be done" about whatever hysteria is currently in the news.

So, one way or another, something probably will be done, something visible and revenue-neutral that lets politicians and school officials claim they have taken action.

Unfortunately, it probably won't be something that best addresses the underlying problem.

—G.C.