

**A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT:  
IMPACT OF A SCHOOL SHOOTING**

**Penelope (Penny) Eucker Executive Director, retired**

**STEM School Highlands Ranch**

**[pjeucker@gmail.com](mailto:pjeucker@gmail.com)**

**November 14, 2023**

## FOG OF WAR DURING A SCHOOL ATTACK

- During our attack, students and staff were well trained and all responded exactly as drilled. Many lives were saved. One student was killed and 8 were wounded.
- Law enforcement was onsite within minutes. One was not in uniform with a weapon and the armed security guard, still hunting for active shooters, fired at her. The exchange resulted in bullets entering classrooms where students were sheltering on the floor in the corner. Several middle school students were hit.
- Over 300 first responders swarmed the school with assault rifles. The images and trauma experience by students, staff and law enforcement remains. As a K-12 school, the youngest are now in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Vulnerabilities occur at the intersection of fire code and secure facilities.
  - Rapid egress of students require a ratio of doors to population. The exit doors must have crash bars which should be alarmed except during a fire drill. These doors can be used by perpetrators when an accomplice is inside the school.
  - Schools must practice fire drills once each month. Large populations can be exited within minutes resulting in a hugely vulnerable unprotected crowd. These drills are kept highly confidential for premeditated attacks yet the risk is constant.
  - Fire code has prevented death by fire in schools since 1958. The landscape has changed but not the rules.

# HOW PREPARED ARE OUR SCHOOLS TODAY?

**Mission:** Protect 50 million students who attend school each day K-12 in the US.

**Problem needing solving:**

Basic security has 3 pillars that remain unmet partially due to local control of schools. TSA maintains high compliance at airports with federal oversight.

- Trained staff and students
- Secure facility
- Coordination with law enforcement

STEM School Highlands Ranch was fully prepared and yet the unimaginable happened.

# IN NEED OF DEVELOPMENT

- Minimum standards of safety in all schools.
- Playbook for schools after a school shooting- school leaders are on their own.
- A few examples of the unmet needs:
  - Details such as retrieving personal belongings and cars in a crime scene that was sealed for days. Many staff members had no transportation or a way to open their apartments.
  - Transportation- in freezing rain, 3 available buses were sent when 36 were needed. The scale of the crisis was not accommodated.
  - Reunification- The incident commander ordered 1800 K-12 students into alphabetical order to reunite with 3,000 parents. A 5 year-old next to a 18 year old and all experiencing acute trauma had to be quickly rethought.
  - The aftermath playbook could be adapted to many situations experienced in schools.

WE REMAIN UNPREPARED

50 million students K-12 depend on us- we  
can do much more to protect our most  
precious assets.

[pjeucker@gmail.com](mailto:pjeucker@gmail.com)