



Armed and considered capable? Law enforcement officers' attitudes about armed teacher policies in the USA

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Abstract

Active shooter events, including those in K-12 schools in the USA, continue to occur. In an effort to protect students, faculty, and staff, several states have implemented policies allowing teachers to be armed while on school premises, with more expected to follow suit. While recent research surveys the general public, school administrators, and policing executives (from a single state) regarding their perceptions of armed teacher policies, there is a dearth of literature that examines the issue from the law enforcement community's perspective. The present study utilizes a nationwide survey of law enforcement officers, collected in 2020, that encompass a wide variety of job duties, agency types/sizes, and types of communities served. We find widespread support for armed teacher policies; however, respondents expressed a desire for additional training for teachers to better prepare them to respond to an active shooter event. Additional implications for policymakers and school administrators considering this policy are offered.

Keywords Armed teachers · Law enforcement · School shootings · Gun policy · School safety

Introduction

High-profile mass shootings in schools, including those at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, CO (1999), Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT (2012), and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL (2018), have garnered considerable attention from the public and policymakers alike. In the aftermath of such tragedies, the national discourse about school safety has taken two divergent but parallel avenues (e.g., Madfis 2016; Schildkraut and Muschert 2019).

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The first of these is prevention of future attacks, with efforts including threat assessment protocols and anonymous tip lines. The second avenue focuses on responses to those attacks that do come to fruition, with efforts like target-hardening and emergency preparedness practices (e.g., lockdowns or active shooter drills) designed to minimize the loss of life or injuries in such situations. Among the most controversial policies to be proposed as a response strategy to active shooters in schools is armed teachers.

Following the Sandy Hook shooting, South Dakota became the first state to explicitly authorize educators to carry firearms on school grounds (Eligon 2013).¹ Armed teacher policies gained additional traction after the Parkland shooting more than five years later. The state of Florida enacted the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program, which established the criteria for educators to be permitted to carry firearms, as part of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act just over a month after the attack (Fla. S.B. 7026 2018; Florida Department of Education 2020). Other states also enacted similar legislation, though the requirements—particularly related to training—vary (Erwin 2019). All told, as of January 2020, teachers are permitted to carry firearms in more than 500 school districts (Owen 2019) in 28 states (RAND Corporation 2020) nationwide.

Public support for arming teachers remains largely divided (Baranauskas 2020, 2021; Jonson et al. 2021; Mancini et al. 2020). Those in support of such policies argue that the presence of armed individuals can serve as a deterrent for potential shooters (DeMitchell 2014; Nedzel 2014) and allow for resolution of the event more quickly when it does occur (Campbell 2016; DeMitchell and Rath 2019), particularly in rural areas where police response times can be longer (Buerger and Buerger 2010). Conversely, those in opposition suggest that such policies can alter the learning environment and teachers' roles within it (Rajan and Branas 2018), as well as lead to increased injury and death due to accidental discharges or people being caught in the crossfire during real-world events (DeMitchell and Rath 2019; Hansen 2018; National Association of School Resource Officers [NASRO], 2018; Weatherby 2015). Importantly, those individuals who are most likely to be impacted by such policies—students, teachers, and administrators—are less likely to endorse their adoption than the general public (Brenan 2018; Walker 2018; Weiler and Armenta 2014; Willner 2019).

Just two studies to date (Schildkraut and Martaindale 2022; Chrusciel et al. 2015) have considered whether law enforcement supports such policies. Understanding such perceptions, however, is crucial as officers would need to be able to differentiate between the perpetrator and the “good guy with the gun” (armed teachers) and do so with split-second precision to avoid collateral injuries or deaths if such a policy were enacted in their jurisdiction (Buerger and Buerger 2010; DeMitchell

¹ Notably, while the South Dakota law legalized the armed teachers policy, school personnel in other states were indirectly able to carry their firearms on campus at the time the legislation was enacted due to provisions in state laws or an absence of any type of restrictions. In Alabama, for example, guns in public schools were permitted provided that the carrier did not intend to harm others with it (Reeve 2013; see also AL Code § 13A-11-72, 2019).



and Rath 2019; NASRO 2018). Chrusciel and colleagues (2015) found that police executives were less likely to endorse arming teachers as compared to school resource officers, stemming from their beliefs that such a policy would not benefit the schools. Conversely, Schildkraut and Martaindale, (2022) found that while officers overwhelmingly supported the adoption of armed teacher policies, such backing was contingent upon the training required of participants. The present study extends this line of inquiry by providing descriptive findings from a national survey of officers regarding their perception of armed teacher policies to better understand the law enforcement perspective regarding capabilities, training, and certification.

Training for stress management and decision-making

As part of both initial and ongoing training, though there is no standardized curriculum used by all agencies (Perrett 2020), law enforcement officers receive considerable instruction on firearm handling and usage (Charles and Copay 2003). Among the skills taught are marksmanship at varying distances, loading and unloading of weapons, and how to clear malfunctions (Charles and Copay 2003; LaFrance 2021; Thomasson et al. 2014). During these trainings, officers also are taught about mindfulness and combat breathing, which allow them to fire their weapons during stressful situations (Schildkraut and Martaindale, 2022). This is particularly important as significant demands are put on the officers' nervous, muscular, and skeletal systems that may be further heightened in stressful situations, including active shooter events (Vila and Morrison 1994). In turn, this stress can negatively impact the officers' shooting accuracy (Landman et al. 2016), as can the increased heart rate and other physiological responses the officers may experience due to these intense situations (Male 2019; Thomasson et al. 2014). Furthermore, there is evidence that increased heart rate is correlated with increased perceptual distortions (e.g., tunnel vision, time manipulation, auditory exclusion) that can negatively impact an individual's ability to make quick and accurate decisions in stressful situations (Klinger and Brunson 2009).

Like law enforcement (LaFrance 2021), there is no standardized training curriculum to prepare educators to carry or fire their weapons in schools. With decisions typically left to states or the school districts themselves, this leads to considerable disparity in the skills being taught (Schildkraut and Martaindale, 2022). It is unlikely that armed teachers are receiving training on stress management practices to improve decision-making or undergoing thorough scenario-based training to better understand the complexities of responding to an active shooter event. Variability also exists relative to the number of hours of training required. Texas's school guardian program, which allows school personnel to be armed for the sole purpose of responding to active shooters, requires just 16 h of firearms training (Texas Government Code § 411.1901). By comparison, the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program in Florida mandates 144 h of instruction that includes foci on safety and proficiency, as well as scenario-based training on firearm use in active shooter and defensive situations (Fla. S.B. 7026 2018).



Both before and since Columbine, tactical training for law enforcement officers has continued to evolve (Martaindale and Blair 2019; Vila and Morrison 1994), yet concern continues to exist about officers' ability to accurately fire their weapons. Research has found that officers' hit rates rarely exceed 50% in real-world scenarios, meaning that targets are missed nearly as or more often than they are hit (Geller and Scott 1992; Lombardo 2016; Rotsker et al. 2018; White 2006). Hit rates, which are calculated based on number of incidents rather than the number of shots fired by law enforcement (which could translate to even lower statistics; see Donner and Popovich 2019), also are lower when fire is being returned at the officers compared to when it is not (Rotsker et al., 2018). Accuracy levels even may vary in training simulations based on the specific scenarios used as well as their relative degree of realism (Blacker et al. 2020; see also Male 2019; Thomasson et al. 2014).

When shots fired by police miss their intended target, they have the potential to lead to increased harm, particularly among those in the immediate vicinity of the incident. In 2012, for example, NYPD officers responded to a "shots fired" call at the Empire State Building. They quickly engaged the suspect, who ultimately was shot and killed, but injured nine bystanders in the process (Ariosto 2012). Collectively, the low hit rates in both training and actual incidents have led researchers (e.g., Lewinski et al. 2015) to conclude that the existing initial and ongoing firearms instruction for law enforcement is insufficient to both develop and maintain an expert marksmanship level, particularly that which is needed for accuracy in an actual shooting situation (Charles and Copay 2003). These same concerns raised about the translation of firearms skills from practice to use in a real-world situation like an active shooter also have been extended to armed teachers. Specifically, it is likely that armed teachers would have comparably lower hit rates compared to law enforcement due to their disparate training requirements (Hansen 2018; Lewinski et al. 2015; Weatherby 2015).

Additional considerations for implementing armed teacher policies

Beyond firearms training, there are other considerations that must be factored into decisions about the adoption of armed teacher policies. The physical security of the school must be considered in conjunction with safe weapon handling and storage. Unsecured firearms have been reportedly left unattended in schools (Drane 2020), increasing the potential for them to fall into the wrong hands (Weiler and Armenta 2014). Accidental discharges due to improper handling also increase the opportunity for increased casualties (DeMitchell and Rath 2019), as was the case in one California school when a gun discharged during a safety class and a student was injured from ricocheting bullet fragments (Caron 2018).

Other considerations center on the legal liability created by allowing firearms on campus, which may override the immunity typically afforded to schools for harms caused by third parties (Weatherby 2015). This then raises questions about schools' and districts' abilities to secure additional insurance to offset those risks, as providers may be reluctant to offer policies (Rostron 2014) or may charge high premiums



(McCausland 2018). Such costs then can be further compounded with expenditures related to background checks and mental health screenings, licensing, training, weapons (if provided by the school or district), bonuses,² and storage (DeMitchell and Rath 2019). Collectively, this may represent a considerable financial strain on already stretched-thin school budgets (Rogers et al. 2018).

In some states, armed teacher policies grant oversight to establish and/or maintain these programs to local law enforcement agencies. This can include providing initial training and continuing instruction, certification of individuals who meet the program requirements, maintaining necessary records (e.g., weapons inspections), and setting standards for who is qualified to participate in the program.³ As such, law enforcement officers and agencies are in a unique position to offer insight and recommendations regarding the structure and material taught to educators during armed teacher certification training. For this reason, the present study seeks to provide policymakers with a better understanding of the law enforcement perspective regarding armed teacher policies.

Method

Data were collected as part of a large cross-sectional survey delivered to law enforcement officers (LEOs) via Qualtrics after receiving approval from the primary author's institutional review board.⁴ A national law enforcement training center distributed the survey to a random sample of LEOs from their larger sampling frame of over 140,000 officers who participated in some form of training in the three years prior. Participants received an email solicitation through the Qualtrics platform. In total, approximately 3,900 surveys were delivered. Two reminder emails were sent to the sample, and the survey remained open for collection for one month. We received 380 useable responses.

Participants

Table 1 presents the sample's descriptive statistics. The majority of respondents self-identified as male (92%) and White (81%). Although similar, the sample is

² Armed teachers in Florida, for example, receive a one-time \$500 stipend under the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program (Florida Department of Education 2020).

³ For example, county sheriffs in Florida are responsible for establishing a guardian program upon a majority vote by the local school board. The agencies also are responsible for providing the associated mandated training and certifying all individuals who meet the requirements to serve as school guardians [Fla. Stat. §§ 30.15, 1006.12 (2020)]. In Tennessee, law enforcement agencies are responsible with providing initial and ongoing annual handgun instruction to candidates for the armed teacher program [TN Code § 49-6-816 (2019)]. In Oklahoma, school districts are required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with their local law enforcement agency to ensure compliance with state laws [70 OK Stat § 70-5-149.2 (2020)]; training requirements for the program also are established by the state's Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training [70 OK Stat § 70-3311 (2020)].

⁴ This project was approved by the Texas State University IRB under proposal # 7382.



Table 1 Sample descriptive statistics

	Mean	(SD)	N	Percent (%)
Age	42.87	(9.91)	366	
Years of service	17.31	(14.33)	366	
<i>Sex</i>				
Male		337	92.08	92.08
Female		29	7.92	7.92
<i>Race</i>				
White		294	80.77	80.77
Black		31	8.52	8.52
Latino		20	5.49	5.49
Other		19	5.22	5.22
<i>Rank</i>				
Non-supervisor		198	54.55	54.55
Current supervisor		162	44.63	44.63
Recently retired		3	0.83	0.83
<i>Assignment</i>				
Patrol		173	47.66	47.66
Administration		56	15.43	15.43
Investigations		42	11.57	11.57
Specialty unit		36	9.92	9.92
Sro		33	9.09	9.09
Other		23	6.34	6.34
<i>Department size</i>				
< 10		22	6.36	6.36
10–49		96	27.75	27.75
50–99		50	14.45	14.45
100–249		58	16.76	16.76
250–749		57	16.47	16.47
750+		63	18.21	18.21
<i>Agency type</i>				
Local le		296	81.99	81.99
State/federal le		65	18.01	18.01
<i>Community served</i>				
Urban		130	35.81	35.81
Suburban		125	34.44	34.44
Rural		108	29.75	29.75

slightly overrepresented compared to LEOs nationally (88% male, 73% White; see Hyland and Davis 2019). Respondents' mean age was 42.87 years, and they had served as a LEO an average of 17.31 years. They primarily worked for local enforcement agencies ($n=296$, 82%, compared to 80% nationally, see Hyland and Davis 2019), although state and federal agencies also were represented (18%). As seen in Table 1, several different job assignments were present in the sample. The majority



(57%) could be considered front-line LEOs (i.e., patrol or SRO). Approximately two-thirds of respondents served suburban or rural communities, and a wide range of department sizes were represented. Lastly, respondents from 44 states completed the survey.⁵

Since this project attempts to describe how LEOs perceive armed teacher policies, it is important that a wide variety of LEOs are represented. The above table highlights how the randomly drawn sample provided respondents from 44 states, multiple jobs duties, and agencies of varying sizes and urbanities, all while being demographically similar to the overall LEO community.

Analysis

This study provides descriptive analyses based on data drawn from a nationally representative sample of LEOs. We utilized several different data collection formats within the instrument. For the majority of questions, respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement to a series of statements related to armed teacher policies. Respondents used a 0 to 10 sliding scale where 0 indicated *Completely Disagree* and 10 indicated *Completely Agree*. As such, a score above 5 would indicate agreement and a score below 5 would indicate disagreement with a provided statement. One question asked respondents to rank-order items, while others simply asked them to select one (or more) options to a question.

Results

Armed teacher capabilities

Table 2 showcases results related to LEOs perception of teachers' capabilities to aid law enforcement in stopping an active shooter. As indicated, law enforcement in the present study overwhelmingly supports having armed teachers in schools (82% held favorable views; see Schildkraut and Martaindale, 2022). LEOs agree that armed teachers will aide law enforcement in their response to an active shooter ($\bar{x} = 6.93$), reduce the amount of time a shooter is active ($\bar{x} = 7.99$), and can stop an active shooter before LE arrive at the school ($\bar{x} = 8.02$). Conversely, LEOs did not believe that teachers have the necessary training to respond to an active shooter event ($\bar{x} = 7.60$). While LEOs do not perceive teachers to be trained well enough, they also did not believe that the risk of having armed teachers at schools outweighed the potential benefits of such a policy ($\bar{x} = 3.57$).

⁵ CT, NM, ND, SD, VT, and WY were not represented.



Table 2 Capabilities and training considerations

	Mean (SD)	N
<i>Armed teacher capabilities</i>		
Armed teachers in schools will aide LE in their response	6.93 (2.83)	379
Armed teachers can reduce the time a shooter is active	7.99 (2.48)	379
Armed teachers can neutralize an active shooter before LE arrive	8.02 (2.52)	379
Teachers do not generally have the necessary training to respond to an active shooter	7.60 (2.48)	376
The risk of having armed teachers outweighs the potential benefits	3.57 (3.12)	376
If armed teachers are present, responding LE would not know who the shooter is	5.29 (2.91)	374
<i>Training considerations ranked</i>		
Stress response and decision-making	2.94 (1.64)	376
Safe weapons handling and secure storage	3.01 (2.09)	376
Scenario-based training	3.26 (1.93)	376
Communications strategies with le	4.28 (1.94)	376
Legal considerations	4.89 (2.49)	376
Alternative responses to the threat	5.37 (2.30)	376
Concealment strategies	6.43 (1.69)	376
Firearm selection	6.94 (1.74)	376
Ammunition selection	7.89 (1.47)	376

Training considerations

Respondents were asked a series of questions specifically regarding training requirements. First, they were presented with nine training topics to rank from most important (1) to least important (9). The mean scores for each item were used to determine their respective rank (see Table 2). Respondents ranked training teachers on *Stress Response and Decision-Making* as the most important training topic ($\bar{x} = 2.94$) followed closely by *Safe Weapons Handling and Secure Storage* ($\bar{x} = 3.01$) and *Scenario-Based Training* ($\bar{x} = 3.26$). Interestingly, respondents did not focus solely on weapons and tactics; instead, they believed it was important for teachers to learn how to properly communicate with law enforcement ($\bar{x} = 4.28$) and to consider the legal ramifications of being armed and using deadly force ($\bar{x} = 4.89$). Respondents then ranked *Alternative Responses to the Threat* ($\bar{x} = 5.37$) as the next training topic. This would include alternative measures to deadly force with a firearm, such as using everyday items present in the school to defend oneself. *Concealment Strategies* ($\bar{x} = 6.43$), *Firearm Selection* ($\bar{x} = 6.94$), and *Ammunition Selection* ($\bar{x} = 7.89$) were ranked as the three least important topics for armed teacher training.

After establishing the LEOs' preferred training topics, respondents then were asked how many hours of training teachers should receive. As exhibited in Table 3, there was a lot of variability in response to this question. A small number ($n = 17$, 4.50%) believed teachers should only receive less than sixteen hours of training in order to be allowed to carry a firearm at school. On the other end of the spectrum,



Table 3 Minimum number of training hours (n = 378)

	N	Percent (%)
Less than 16	17	4.50
16–30	59	15.61
31–45	108	28.57
46–60	63	16.67
61–75	13	3.44
76–90	55	14.55
91–105	6	1.59
106–120	19	5.03
More than 120	38	10.05

Table 4 Firearm considerations and recertification

	N	Percent (%)
<i>Firearm Considerations</i>		
Handgun only	265	70.29
Handgun and Rifle	50	13.26
Handgun, Rifle, and Shotgun	45	11.94
Handgun and Shotgun	16	4.24
Shotgun only	1	0.27
<i>Firearm Recertification</i>		
Never	3	0.79
Once Every 3 Months	56	14.78
Once Every 6 Months	174	45.91
Once a Year	146	38.52

approximately 10% of respondents thought teachers should receive more than three weeks' worth of training before carrying a firearm at school (assuming forty hours of training in a week). One out of every four respondents, on average, believed teachers needed between 31 and 45 h of training (28.57%). This corresponds with approximately one week of training.

Firearms and proficiency certification

Respondents also were asked questions about types of firearms and the frequency in which teachers should have to recertify with their firearms. Table 4 shows that the overwhelming majority of LEOs believe teachers should only be allowed to carry handguns (70.29%). No officers indicated that teachers should only be able to use rifles (although one LEO believed teachers should only have a shotgun). The remaining officers selected a combination of handgun and rifle (13.26%), handgun and shotgun (4.24%), or any type of the three types of firearms listed (11.94%).



Table 5 Additional considerations

	Mean (SD)	N
Teachers with prior LE experience should be allowed to carry	8.60 (2.23)	380
Teachers with prior military experience should be allowed to carry (i.e., a member of a combat arms unit)	8.26 (2.38)	380
Teachers who wish to be armed should have additional licensing beyond a concealed carry license	8.42 (2.72)	380
Schools that permit armed teachers should carry liability insurance	7.63 (2.85)	378
Teachers who wish to be armed should carry liability insurance	5.18 (3.78)	379
Teachers should be required to store their firearms in a safe while teaching	3.87 (3.65)	378

When asked how often teachers should have to recertify with their firearms, respondents were primarily split between *Once Every 6 Months* (45.91%) and *Once a Year* (38.52%; see Table 4). Intuitively, this makes sense. LEOs are required to recertify with their duty weapons every six to twelve months in most agencies. For instance, the State of Pennsylvania's Municipal Police Officers' Education and Training Commission (2020) mandates annual recertification for municipal officers, whereas the State of New Jersey requires semi-annual firearm requalification (Fisher 2001).

Additional considerations

Respondents also were asked several questions that covered broader topics related to armed teacher policies. These results are presented in Table 5. These responses used the same 0 (Completely Disagree) to 10 (Completely Agree) scale as the data presented in Table 2. Respondents reported that teachers with prior law enforcement experience ($\bar{x} = 8.60$) or military experience as a member of a combat arms unit ($\bar{x} = 8.26$) should be allowed to carry a firearm without additional training. Still, respondents indicated that teachers who wish to be armed should have to meet additional licensing requirements beyond a general concealed carry license ($\bar{x} = 8.42$). This finding is in line with respondents' prior belief that teachers are not trained well enough to respond to an active shooter event and how teachers should consider the legal ramifications of being armed.

Additionally, respondents indicated that schools allowing armed teachers on their campus should be required to carry additional liability insurance ($\bar{x} = 7.63$). When asked about teachers being required to carry personal liability insurance, however, respondents were split nearly evenly ($\bar{x} = 5.18$) as to whether this should be a requirement. It is possible that LEOs may consider personal insurance requirements as a barrier to teachers who wish to be armed. Lastly, respondents did not think that teachers should be required to store their firearms in a safe while teaching ($\bar{x} = 3.87$).



Discussion

Active shooter events have spurred many policy makers to seek methods to improve safety among their constituents. This is especially true for schools. There have been a variety of proposed, and sometimes implemented, school safety measures including, but not limited to, automatic door locks, shot detection systems, panic buttons, or ballistic film to cover windows (Schildkraut and Muschert 2019). Some states even allow teachers to be armed while on school property. The goals of these policies are to bring active shooter events to an end more quickly and potentially reduce casualties. While some scholars (e.g., Chrusciel et al. 2015; Jonson et al. 2021; Willner 2019) have shown that teachers, school administrators, law enforcement executives, and the general public are not in favor of arming teachers, there is a dearth of literature that seeks to understand the general law enforcement perspective of armed teachers in schools (with Authors 2021, as a notable exception). The present study presented descriptive findings from a randomly selected sample of LEOs from across the USA. While we believe all the descriptive findings are important, there are two key takeaways that are worth highlighting: 1) LEOs support armed teacher policies, and 2) they believe armed teachers need to have substantial training.

First, LEOs overwhelmingly support policies allowing teachers to be armed in schools. This may suggest that LEOs are cognizant of average LE response time and actively are considering the potential loss of life before they arrive on scene. In this vein, their support for arming teachers makes sense. Prior research indicated that the general public, school administrators, and law enforcement executives were not supportive of armed teacher policies (Baranauskas 2020, 2021; Jonson et al. 2021; Mancini et al. 2020). The observed support differences between the prior studies and our LEO sample may simply be a matter of perspective: Our sample may be acutely aware of how long it takes to respond to a scene and what that means in terms of victim counts, whereas the non-LEO samples may not consider this aspect in their calculus. For LEOs, an armed teacher may make a tangible difference regarding how people are injured and/or killed. Whether that is accurate has yet to be addressed in the research (Rajan and Branas 2018), but our findings are clear that LEOs are in favor of armed teacher policies.

While LEOs did express support for armed teacher policies, they did not believe that teachers have adequate training to respond to an active shooter event. Further, they indicated that teachers should have additional instruction beyond a concealed carry license if they want to be armed on campus (see Table 5). This indicates that while LEOs support the idea of armed teachers, they do not think they are currently prepared to take on the responsibility. While there was a high rate of variability in terms of required training duration (e.g., less than two days to greater than three weeks), LEOs were more in sync about which training topics they believed were the most important. Specifically, the most important training topics for teachers, according to LEOs, touched on four distinct areas: understanding how stress impacts decision-making, learning how to safely handle and store weapons, completing scenario-based training, and being educated on how to effectively communicate with law enforcement during an event. It appears that respondents want teachers to have



a well-rounded training curriculum by ranking these as the most important training topics. These topics include practical skill building (i.e., weapons handling), foundational knowledge (i.e., stress response and decision-making), and applied skills (i.e., scenario-based training and communication strategies with LE). Interestingly, LEOs thought weapon/ammunition selection and concealment strategies were the least important training topics, which may reflect the fact that these issues are largely irrelevant when responding to an active shooter event already in progress. Conversely, the highest ranked topics reflect two distinct concerns law enforcement have about armed teachers' ability to perform under the increased stress present in an active shooter event. In other words, from law enforcement's perspective, the most critical concerns for armed teachers' ability to perform are 1) they need to be able to make fast and accurate decisions to correctly identify and engage the shooter while not injuring innocent bystanders (e.g., students and staff), and 2) they must maintain constant communication with responding LEOs to direct them to the attack location and to avoid being mistaken as a shooter.

As noted, LEOs have been largely left out of prior perception studies regarding armed teacher policies. We believe it is important that LEOs are included in the development of armed teacher policies and the training that follows. They are the first responders who will be required to interact with armed teachers when responding to an active shooter event and also may be involved in the processes of training such individuals and overseeing their certifications. For these reasons, it is imperative that the training encompasses topics relevant to improve the armed teacher's success (i.e., stopping the threat and not harming any innocent lives) while also being able to communicate with LEOs that are arriving on scene. Furthermore, even though this manuscript is couched under the umbrella of active shooter events, in all likelihood, there will be other situations where an armed teacher could respond, such as an individual actively stabbing students or staff.

Limitations

As with all studies, this research is not without limitations. While we received nearly 400 responses from a variety of department types and sizes across the nation, it is possible that the sample does not generalize to law enforcement as a whole. Replication studies could be performed to bolster the findings from the current project. Future studies should also consider specific groupings for comparison purposes. For instance, it is possible that SROs view armed teacher policies differently than other law enforcement officers, but we were unable to assess such a possibility given the low response rate from respondents currently serving as SROs. Additionally, this project asked for overall perceptions based on the topic of armed teachers. We did not ask about specific armed teacher policies already active. It is possible that LEOs are supportive of the idea as a whole; however, they may not be supportive of specific policies. For example, LEOs may not agree with the training curriculum present in current armed teacher policies. Furthermore, we believe this line of research could be strengthened through the use of qualitative methods (e.g., semi-structured



interviews) to better understand the underpinnings of why LEOs do or do not support armed teacher policies.

Conclusion

The current study provides valuable insight regarding the law enforcement perspective of armed teacher policies. It is important, however, to view these findings from a larger context. These findings are not only important for LEOs but also school administrators and policymakers considering the adoption of armed teacher policies. This is only the third study examining such initiatives with LEO respondents. Chrusciel et al. (2015) found law enforcement executives in a single state were not supportive of armed teacher policies, but their work did not attempt to understand if there is a perceived difference between ability to intervene and possessing the necessary training to be effective. Conversely, Schildkraut and Martaindale, (2022) found that, using a national sample, law enforcement did support armed teacher policies but not without conditions; although officers believed that training was a necessary component of such a plan, they did not provide insight into what that instruction should look like. The current project attempted to fill the gap left by both of these studies, offering insight into the topics that should be prioritized in training if such policies were to be adopted.

States and school districts that are considering implementing armed teacher policies should work closely with law enforcement to create robust, comprehensive programming. LEOs clearly believe armed teachers can help save lives in an active shooter event but may be better positioned to offer insight into what training is needed to yield the most accurate and effective response from such individuals. It also is likely that additional states and school districts will continue to adopt armed teacher policies in the future. Improved training programs that embrace the LEO perspective could result in greater coordination between the armed teachers and responding officers. The ultimate goal of any active shooter response policy (e.g., prevention or event response) is to save lives, but the implementation of any such effort should be done with fidelity and in coordination with all relevant stakeholders.

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