



# BLUE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL DISTRICT

David H. Helsel, Ed.D.  
*Superintendent of Schools*

"DEDICATED TO EXCELLENCE"

March 15, 2018

Dear Legislators and Government Officials,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. As we all agree, student safety considerations are of paramount importance. This issue is much too complex to look toward a singular solution. I encourage you, the legislature, to grant school districts some latitude towards their efforts to keep their students safe. Our districts are very diverse in population, geographic size, staffing, and financial constraints. A "one-size fits all approach" will not be effective or feasible.

One of the ideas being discussed is arming teachers and other school district personnel. The Blue Mountain School District has been arming school district personnel for 5 years through assigning District maintenance staff to dual roles, that of armed security through Act 235 Certification as well as district and building maintenance responsibilities. We initially had two individuals trained and armed. We are currently down to one such individual due to a retirement. We have identified additional individuals for the training. Those individuals include maintenance and technology support positions.

Our district has been training our staff and students in the armed intruder defense plan referred to as ALICE for the last year and a half. ALICE is an acronym standing for Alert Lockdown Inform Counter Evacuate. As you may be aware, this training was developed by law enforcement professionals in response to previous school shootings like Columbine and Virginia Tech. ALICE empowers teachers and staff to determine whether emergency evacuation or barricading themselves into a room is the best response. Each room is being equipped with a device that makes entry into a classroom extremely difficult, if not impossible. In addition, we have equipped each classroom with a five-gallon bucket of river stone. If an armed intruder attempts to gain entry into our classrooms, they will face a classroom of students armed with rocks. They will certainly feel pain when being pelted with stone.

We do not presently plan to train teachers as Act 235 armed security due to their role in our planned response to armed intruders. Our plan requires teachers to lead their classroom's safety efforts. They will need to supervise the evacuation of their students or the barricading of their classroom. At this point, our teachers' responsibility is to address the safety of the classroom and not engage an armed intruder directly. We carefully select individuals for Act 235 training who do not have a primary responsibility of supervising a classroom of students. Our current plan does not mean that we do not support granting other districts the option of arming teachers or other school personnel.

I personally recommend that school districts be empowered to make individual decisions regarding armed personnel. Each district has unique situations where safety plans should be custom fitted to their circumstances. It is my opinion that identifying people with the correct skillset, personality, stress tolerance, and attitude is more important than job title. Providing the selected staff members high quality ongoing training is also a critical component to this endeavor.

Other considerations are:

- Mandate a safety plan be included in the Comprehensive Planning Process.
- Mandate interagency training and cooperation (school districts, law enforcement agencies, mental health organizations and human services agencies)
- Provide grant money for expenditures to improve safety. Qualifying purchases could include:
  - armed personnel
  - money for training existing personnel
  - cameras
  - improved communications tools
  - film and other materials to strengthen windows
  - equipment to secure doors (when in lockdown)
  - other devices for added security

Thank you again for allowing me to share this information with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David H. Helsel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David H. Helsel, Ed.D.  
Superintendent