A cop in every school:

*The perceived presence of police deters criminal activity*

As a potential preventative measure a trained armed guard stationed in every school is both logical and intuitive. However, because the NRA supports the idea it has undoubtedly lost appeal among some groups. Otherwise, the main argument against the idea is cost. However, there is a way to implement the plan at a fraction of its implied cost.

The idea of police presence is not only intuitive it is supported by research. Some years ago I investigated the relative effectiveness of the risk of being arrested versus police presence as a crime deterrent (*Enforcement risk and deterrence: a reexamination*, *Jo. of Socio-economics, v.23, n. 3 & 4, pp. 645-655*). The study indicates that police presence is more effective as a crime deterrent although the two variables are positively related.

The measure of police presence employed was the number of officers per reported offense. This objective measure served as a proxy for *perceived* police presence. The latter variable is clearly more relevant. Thus, as far as protecting school children and school personnel are concerned it is vital that potential shooters perceive that armed protection exists at each school. *Note: Arming a school official/staff member does not qualify as police presence. Teachers or administrators access to firearms could prove to be a disaster waiting to happen.*

It is, however, not necessary to actually have an armed police officer positioned at each school all the time. For instance, if a police vehicle were parked each day at a highly visible and strategic location at each school an effective deterrent may be generated whether or not a police officer was actually inside the school.

There are some caveats to this plan: One, potential shooters could learn this action was just a ruse and ignore the patrol car. Thus, officers would have to be stationed at varying and randomly chosen schools in sufficient numbers to raise doubt in the potential shooters mind about the ruse. One officer per four schools comes to mind.

A second caveat is the position of the patrol car. If it remained in the same spot and the same position each day that again could suggest a ruse. Thus, the patrol car would have to change position to varying degrees each day. A simple solution is to allow a school official to drive the car to and from school.

The third caveat is the dead giveaway of two patrol cars when an officer is present in the school. Thus, the officer would need to drive a civilian (their own perhaps) or unmarked car to the selected schools.

Fourth, the cost of placing patrol cars and their inaccessibility for normal police duties could result in considerable expense to school districts. A solution would be to use only cars purchased from police departments near the end of their useful law enforcement lifetimes. The cars could still be used by school officials to drive to and from school for an indefinite period. As it stands, current police practice is to sell the vehicles after so many miles. School districts could eventually sell the retired vehicles to salvage or scrap dealers to minimize the cost of their initial purchase from police departments. Of course the vehicles would have to be visibly maintained during the interim.

Under this proposal, would be shooters would never know whether an officer were present at that school on that day. In the same manner potential terrorists do not know which flights armed marshals are flying. There is at least one additional caveat to this plan. If it proved to be effective, potential shooters could select other ‘soft’ targets such as shopping centers/malls, movie theaters, sporting events and, God forbid, churches. Any plan that effectively deters shooters carries the risk of simply transferring the grievous action to another venue. The perceived presence of armed officers in schools would at least protect school children.