



Justice Talking Radio Transcript

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The school shooting in an Amish community near Lancaster, Pennsylvania points out that school violence can occur anywhere in the nation, from inner city neighborhoods to suburban or rural schools. But will lock-downs, random searches and metal detectors make students safer? And do programs to reduce bullying really work? On this edition of Justice Talking we take a look at the ways policymakers and educators are trying to prevent school violence.

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MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. In the eight years since the school shootings at Columbine there have been numerous incidents across the country where students have taken guns to school and killed classmates and teachers. Just a few months ago there was a school shooting in Tacoma, Washington. More recently in suburban Philadelphia a boy took an AK-47 to school and committed suicide in a hallway. School shootings have drawn attention to just how vulnerable our schools can be.

To get a better sense of how often these kinds of incidents occur and what makes a student resort to extreme violence, I talked with Katherine Newman. She's a professor of public affairs at Princeton University. She is the co-author of "Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings." Welcome to the show, Katherine.

KATHERINE NEWMAN: Thanks Margot.

MARGOT ADLER: Katherine, give us a sense of what's actually happening in our nation's schools and how big of a problem it is.

KATHERINE NEWMAN: The problem of rampage shootings is actually fairly modest in the sense that it happens relatively rarely, but, of course, it's devastating when it does happen. There is a great deal more background violence of a much less catastrophic nature. The chances of dying in school from homicide or suicide were less than one in two million in the worst year that we have on record, 1998-99, while the rate of out-of-school homicides is about 40 times higher. So schools are actually among the safest place that children can be, but when these rampage school shootings happen it certainly doesn't feel that way.

MARGOT ADLER: A few years ago there were a lot of articles saying that school violence had declined over the last ten years by as much as 20 percent. Recently there have been reports of an upsurge in violence. What's the truth?

KATHERINE NEWMAN: The truth is hostage to these definitions, and so it depends a great deal on what it is people are measuring. We certainly do know that violence is a problem, and when we measure things like adolescent depression, which often follows from the experience of violence, ranging from psychological to physical, that is quite extreme and appears to be growing.

MARGOT ADLER: Katherine, in your book "Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings," you say that most assessments of the kids who commit school shootings don't give the full picture because they only emphasize the child's psychological problems. Could you please explain this?

KATHERINE NEWMAN: When we look at the anatomy of a school shooting it begins with forms of social exclusion that most kids experience at one point or another--which is not to minimize their damage, they are extremely damaging--but the kind of kid who ends up becoming a school shooter is one--for him that fairly garden variety of bullying or friendlessness or sense of marginality is magnified by their own psychological despair, which often, if they survive an attack, mutates into clinically recognizable symptoms of mental illness. There are fewer opportunities for boys to establish an identity that's satisfying outside of the football field or other forms of highly masculine endeavors. And the boys who commit school shootings often are failures in that particular tournament or arena. So the origins of the rage that fuels school shootings comes really from the sense of failure to establish an acceptable social identity, and then the search for a way to reverse that failure, a way to reverse that reputation as a loser. And we argue in this book that that's really what school shootings emanate from, a desire to change one's social reputation from a loser into a notorious, dangerous anti-hero who will sadly be better respected than the loser he feels himself to be.

MARGOT ADLER: What you say brings up the stereotype that I have, that fights and knifings and student-on-student violence most often occur in urban inner-city schools, while school shootings most often occur among whites in suburban or rural areas. Is that true or is it a stereotype?

KATHERINE NEWMAN: It's true that school shootings typically happen in isolated rural communities and that tends to be in areas that are populated by whites. So although there have been occasionally, very rarely I might say, minorities involved in school shootings, on the whole

it has been young white men who engage in school shootings. Violence in cities--and here again I have to emphasize that school is probably the safest place to be if you're a young man in the city--is more likely to take place out on the streets, and often is a very serious problem for ethnic minorities.

MARGOT ADLER: Do you believe that violence in our schools has changed in the last 20 years?

KATHERINE NEWMAN: Well, during that period one of the things that really hasn't changed that much is gun availability. I know it seems as though that's an odd claim, but, in fact, there are many more guns in American society today. However, those more guns are held by the same number of people. We have the same number of gun owners who now own more guns, rather than more gun owners. And so it's hard to credit that as an explanation for why school shootings have suddenly become such an issue, unless you believe that somehow the possession of more guns by the same number of people is having a tremendous impact. And I don't credit that explanation.

MARGOT ADLER: And if you listen to pundits in the media you're going to hear things about video games and movies and media. What's your attitude to that?

KATHERINE NEWMAN: I think the media plays a role, but not the one that pundits generally identify; that is, when we hear about media we usually are led to believe that it sparks a kind of rage in the viewer. And that's not what we discovered. What we found was that the cult of the masculine, violent anti-hero is one that has a tremendous amount of popular culture support. I mean, it's in practically every action movie you can see on the silver screen. And what that does is set up an image of masculinity and of a kind of heroism or anti-heroism, as the case may be, that is attractive to these boys. It looks more alluring and attractive than the image they feel they project in their own community, which is that of a dweeb and a loser.

MARGOT ADLER: Your work on this issue after the Columbine school killings was requested by Congress to find out why mass murders were happening in America's high schools. What have we learned from Columbine? And what changes have been implemented since then?

KATHERINE NEWMAN: Well, we learned a lot from Columbine as part of a larger pattern. And there are changes that have taken place as a consequence of the funding of, for example, school resources officers who are much more plentiful now. These are soft cops who--

MARGOT ADLER: Soft cops?

KATHERINE NEWMAN: Yes. They don't wear police uniforms and sport weapons. They wear soft uniforms, and their job is really to blend into the school community, to have lunch with the kids in the lunchroom, to sort of keep their ears to the ground, and to be a safe and strong resource for kids who hear rumors of violence and are looking for someone that can come forward to. And this has been, I think, a significant success. In fact, when we look at the cases that I would describe as near miss cases, plots of school violence that were on the way, one of the very few options for stopping them in their tracks is when children who hear rumors come

forward. And they seem to be more comfortable coming forward to school resource officers than regular school officials or to other adults in the community. They trust them. They believe that they'll keep their confidence, but that they will investigate carefully. And they do.

MARGOT ADLER: So if you had one or two big recommendations to lessen violence in schools, what would they be?

KATHERINE NEWMAN: Well, if we're talking about school shootings, which as I said is a particular type of violence, I think the most important thing we can do is be sure that kids feel they can come forward with information they hear, because they always do. These school shootings are never spontaneous; they are always planned and other people virtually always know something's coming. Some of the school shooters we study had left a trail of behavioral problems behind in their middle school, but when they moved to high school no one in the high school was the wiser; those records didn't follow them. And there's a good reason why. We don't want to prejudice next year's teachers with the awkward behavior or trouble of last year. We are a second-chance, clean-slate society. But we lose information when we do that. So there are lots of things we can do, I think, to prevent this kind of school shooting from happening. They are not 100 percent effective; they never will be. But I don't think that we should set perfection as the benchmark. We need to make improvement rather than perfection our litmus test.

MARGOT ADLER: Katherine Newman is a professor of public affairs at Princeton University. She is the co-author of "Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings." Thank you so much for being on Justice Talking.

KATHERINE NEWMAN: My pleasure, Margot.

MARGOT ADLER: In her book "Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings," sociologist Katherine Newman studied several school shootings and says there has to be a rare combination of social exclusion and desperation for a child to be driven to the extreme type of violence, like what happened at Columbine High School in Colorado. That incident left many students and parents fearful of what might happen in their school. But the reality is that these incidents are still very rare.

We talked with some high school seniors in Philadelphia at Lamberton High School, a neighborhood public high school with 450 students. They say they worry about something like Columbine happening, but it's the day-to-day interactions with other students they worry about most.

STUDENT: The school violence starts off from the kids. The kids are coming to school talking about this person or what they have on. Somebody always has something to say. If it's not what you have on it's who you are or what kind of group you hang out with.

STUDENT: I see a lot of fights. Most of my friends be in them. So it bothers me.

STUDENT: Pettiness, foolishness, playing around, money, arguments.

STUDENT: Guns at school. That's a no-no. I don't think somebody would bring a gun to this school. But it could happen; we never know.

STUDENT: Last year it almost did escalate into a sort of gun violence. It was a threat to me that he was going to come up here with a gun, but he didn't. You know, after the fight it was over. So he didn't come to school for a couple of days, came back, told me was going to bring up a gun. And I said okay. And he just didn't come back.

STUDENT: I remember it was in the eighth grade and this boy, he brought like all these weapons to school, he brought knives. And he was supposed to get in a fight with somebody. I guess he was scared or something like that. It was a scary situation because you don't know what can happen.

STUDENT: Security guards, like, they do make me feel a little safer, even though, like, most of the time I think we need more. Because I remember the last fight that was here: they could not break it up. It was too many people in the fight.

STUDENT: Everyone doesn't go through the metal detector, like, a certain way where everybody goes around it and still gets in the school, like without even going through the metal detector.

STUDENT: Violence is in our community, is in society, is in the media, schools. It's a part of our culture. We can try our best to avoid it, but you know sometimes it's just that time of day.

MARGOT ADLER: Coming up, we'll hear what one teacher at a Philadelphia public high school says is the answer to controlling violence at his school.

TEACHER: About three years ago I was asked if I had a wish list what it would be. I said for one thing I wish we had cameras. I think the cameras would serve as a deterrent if kids knew if I'm sneaking in the back door they're going to catch me on camera.

MARGOT ADLER: School violence, whether our schools are safe and how violence can be prevented--stay with us.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. Our show today is on school violence. To talk with me about how safe our schools really are and how they can be made safer I'm joined by Ken Trump, the president of National School Safety and Security Services, a consulting firm specializing in school security. I'm also joined by Peter Sheras, a psychologist and a professor of education at the University of Virginia. Welcome to both of you.

KEN TRUMP: Good to be with you. Thank you.

PETER SHERAS: Thank you. Great to be here.

MARGOT ADLER: I'd like each of you to define school violence. Ken, you first.

KEN TRUMP: I think that we have to look at violence from several different perspectives. On a day-to-day basis most school administrators are dealing with aggressive behavior, bullying-type issues, intimidation, harassment. At the worst scenario, however, we also have extreme cases of violence which include school assaults, stabbings and shootings. So there's a continuum, a wide range of violence incidents that school administrators have to be prepared to deal with, all the way from bullying to the worst extreme of a school shooting.

MARGOT ADLER: Peter?

PETER SHERAS: I basically agree. I think I would add that violence tends to be acts or behaviors that are designed to hurt or intimidate another person. And so that does include a wide range of behaviors. It can be threatening behaviors, acts of intimidation, and it can be much more serious behaviors as well. Many of which are defined in the law.

MARGOT ADLER: How big of a problem is school violence in America? You hear both that schools are the safest place to be and that violence is increasing. Is it increasing? Has the nature of it changed? Peter, you first.

PETER SHERAS: Well, I think there may be a little disagreement here, but we certainly believe in the research that we've done that violence in school, generally speaking, has been decreasing over the last 10 or 12 years. And publicity for the acts of violence--and certainly there are very heinous acts of violence--is increasing. Fear is increasing. But if you look at the statistics, reports by principals and students and law enforcement officers and teachers, the general trend is downward, significantly downward both in terms of homicides at school and other acts of violence at school. It doesn't mean, however, that acts of intimidation aren't occurring at school and that bullying isn't occurring at school. Those things do continue. But the most severe acts of violence, the things that tend to get the media attention, severe crimes, bombings, and shootings, those are decreasing.

MARGOT ADLER: Ken, would you agree?

KEN TRUMP: Actually just the opposite. I'll have to respectfully disagree, as Peter already knew that I would. I think that you have to put it in perspective because I do agree with Peter that the media tends to overstate it, tends to often over dramatize it. And the reality is this: Federal statistics and academic statistics grossly underestimate the extent of school violence. Public perception and the media coverage tend to overstate it. Reality exists somewhere in between, based on our experience working in schools of 45 states. But statistically, in real numbers of actual crimes, nobody, nobody honestly knows what those numbers are.

MARGOT ADLER: What are the challenges for schools in controlling violence? And are they different for each school, whether they're urban or rural, whether they're small schools or big schools? Is there a distinction between how violence takes place, whether it's in a suburban or rural or urban school? Ken?

KEN TRUMP: I believe the public perception is that our urban schools are often more violent. And I think the biggest obstacle that we really battle is the issue of denial, image concerns and school community politics as it relates to this. In our suburban, our rural, and even in our private independent schools, many of those schools are still struggling to get past the it-can't-happen-here mentality or this-is-an-urban-inner-city-problem, so denial, image concerns, school community politics. Downplaying, denying and getting over that hurdle tends to be an issue in suburban rural and even private schools much more than we find in urban districts.

MARGOT ADLER: My sense is that the school shootings have happened more in suburban schools than in urban schools. Am I right, Peter?

PETER SHERAS: There is evidence that that's the case, and you might argue that in the suburbs the school plays a different role in the community as compared to a neighborhood; a lot of times in suburban areas there's less of something that really stands as a community, less of a core or a center. And in cities there are more places where those kinds of acts of violence might occur.

MARGOT ADLER: Peter, after Columbine, schools around the country issued zero-tolerance policies. First of all, explain how these policies work.

PETER SHERAS: Zero tolerance is a policy that actually began in the Navy, related to substance abuse, and it's basically a single-sanction notion that if you do something that there's no forgiveness for that particular thing. And that makes it zero tolerance. Now zero tolerance is a good idea in that we don't want to tolerate violence in school; nobody does. We certainly don't want to tolerate school shootings. But the definition of what zero tolerances apply to tends to be broadened: in some school districts zero tolerance isn't just for guns or weapons in school, but look-alike guns or BB guns or airsoft guns or toy guns or miniature guns. And in those cases when zero tolerance is applied to make examples of people we have circumstances where we have first graders who are expelled for bringing a one-inch GI Joe gun to school. And that has significant impact on the educational trajectories of those kinds of kids. So we think zero tolerance tends to be overdone. There's very little evidence that zero tolerance policies have either increased academic achievement or reduced violence. What it has done is it's increased the numbers of expulsions from school.

MARGOT ADLER: Ken, do you agree that zero tolerance has some problems?

KEN TRUMP: First of all, what is zero tolerance? It's become such a political buzzword. It's a word that's gotten a lot of attention in the political community and the academic community. And in reality school discipline, in my experience of over 20 years of working in school, is based on firm, fair and consistent discipline applied with good common sense. And when we hear those GI Joe cases, as Peter mentioned, it's that last piece, the lack of good common sense and common judgment versus this mass conspiracy that some see as being zero tolerance. I don't

find that. I always wonder when I hear a school official or a political official say there's a new zero tolerance program. What did they have before? Fifty percent tolerance for violence, a 75 percent tolerance for it? It's a political word. So the focus is on whether or not we have firm, fair and consistent discipline applied with good common sense. The anecdotal cases where we have extreme measures tend to be the lack of good common sense.

MARGOT ADLER: I'm speaking with Ken Trump, the president of National School Safety and Security Services and Peter Sheras, a psychologist and a professor of education at the University of Virginia. Our topic is school violence and school shootings, and this is Justice Talking. Ken, you develop safety plans for schools. What's the most common recommendation that you make to schools for increasing safety?

KEN TRUMP: The first and best line of defense is a well-trained, highly-alert staff and student body. There are some schools that may need some type of equipment. Typically if there is equipment oriented it's actually practical things like two-way radios, so that they can communicate on a day-to-day basis for security or in an emergency. But what the number one thing that we find is that there are many training, awareness and procedural matters, as well as preparedness measures and relationship building with students, public safety officials, that are the biggest gap. This fourth R in education today is relationships: reading, writing, arithmetic and relationships. We want educators to have better relationships with kids, to recognize early warning signs, potential violent behavioral changes. And we want educators to have relationships with their public safety partners--police, fire, emergency medical services, emergency management agencies--so they can develop preparedness plans for all hazards.

MARGOT ADLER: Peter, would you agree with him?

PETER SHERAS: The key as far as I'm concerned is to make sure that we are working early enough with the children in our schools to create a climate in school where violence is not tolerated, so that ultimately, and I'm sure Ken will agree with this, ultimately we don't want to have to have those security measures. Those are interim measures until people can learn how to resolve the issues that they have. I think we would emphasize a little bit more the early prevention efforts, targeted at everybody in school, to create a climate where there's no bullying, where there's an ability to resolve conflicts and also an ability to assess threats as they occur to see if they are really serious and make some interventions. In our studies, when we have done threat assessment and looked at the threats, the likelihood that those events that were threatened would occur later on is decreased considerably. They almost never occur.

MARGOT ADLER: We were just in a Philadelphia city high school and we asked the dean of students if he had a blank check to increase school security what he would do. And he said he would install surveillance cameras everywhere. And this kind of surprised us. Peter, what would you have told him to spend his school district's money on?

PETER SHERAS: Certainly there are places in schools that we know are dangerous and may need some security, but I would put a little bit of money into that, and I would put the rest of the money into programs that dealt with issues related to interpersonal relationships that basically help teachers speak with students to create curriculum that really helped them to resolve the

issues that they had, and also to create more opportunity, more training, for teachers and principals, school resource officers, to assess the threats that occur. In almost all cases of school shootings and severe violence a threat had been made prior to the occurrence of the event. If we had been better at picking up that threat, at noticing that threat, that would have happened well before a gun was brought to school or well before someone was shot.

MARGOT ADLER: Do you believe that there should be metal detectors in every public high school in America, Ken?

KEN TRUMP: You're talking about equipment. Whether it's a principal who wants to put tons of money into surveillance cameras or whether it's metal detectors, the answer is that most schools don't need metal detectors. Most schools don't have metal detectors. Most schools that we find that have security cameras aren't using them very effectively; they're often not monitored, they don't have adequate retention policy. But there are some schools where it's necessary. And Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, they're going to base their needs on equipment based on the history of weapons, the threat that they have faced in the past from weapons-related incidents and violence. And it may be an extra tool, but I would also say that most school administrators in those cities will tell you that they also value the human efforts. And I'm always perplexed and challenged as to why we can't find a common ground of better security and prevention working hand-in-hand.

MARGOT ADLER: I've heard people say that after Columbine there was a lot of emphasis on security plans and metal detectors, but that the various plans that were suggested to improve the social fabric of schools often got lost, and those reports gathered dust. You know, are we going on both tracks, or are we only going down one?

PETER SHERAS: Well, there's research beginning to emerge on both sides. The research about equipment and security has shown a decrease in violence, but not necessarily an increase in positive school atmosphere or positive achievement. It has produced more expulsions because kids are certainly caught for more things. The work and threat assessment prevention program is beginning to show that there are positive signs of working early in middle school and elementary school. So there's a lot of work to be done here. But I think we do want to shift the emphasis from just being frightened about the dangers and looking at what we like about our kids, what's humane about them and how we want to train them growing up.

MARGOT ADLER: Peter Sheras is a psychologist and a professor of education at the University of Virginia. Ken, when you go into schools what's shocking to you when you look at safety measures?

KEN TRUMP: We're headed now toward the decade past Columbine, and what's shocking to me is that both the prevention and the security and emergency planning efforts are actually pushed to the back burner and the back shelf in many school districts. The training, the awareness, the efforts on threat assessment, on early warning signs of violence, on behavioral issues, as well as on security planning and emergency planning, have taken a back seat because of the emphasis on academics and test scores, in particular with No Child Left Behind. And while our number one reason for kids to be in school is academics, kids are not going to learn if

they're not safe. The times that we have found cuts for prevention programs, for intervention programs and for security and emergency planning, along with the cuts to school safety funding, has actually pushed both tracks, prevention and security, to the back burner, particularly in the last three to four years. And what is most concerning to me is how our tunnel vision focus on meeting those test score numbers has actually resulted in less of an emphasis in many school districts across the country on the prevention and security issues related to keeping schools safe.

MARGOT ADLER: Peter, what do you think we should do going forward?

PETER SHERAS: I agree with Ken that there isn't enough energy and consciousness and awareness. I mean, it's too bad that it takes shootings and school violence of the magnitude that we have seen, rare as it may actually be, to get people's attention. You know, schools are unsafe or feel unsafe at a variety of levels. You don't have to be afraid to be shot to have trouble concentrating in school, the incidence of bullying in school, the inability of people to resolve issues. The school's actually not enforcing the rules that they already have continues to be a problem. And I do agree that the emphasis on high-stakes testing and on meeting certain academic requirements, while we want that to be the goal of schools, can't so completely overwhelm the need for some prevention and some security that students don't feel like they can actually be in school.

MARGOT ADLER: Peter Sheras is a psychologist and a professor of education at the University of Virginia. Ken Trump is the president of National School Safety and Security Services. Thank you both for being on Justice Talking.

PETER SHERAS: Thank you.

KEN TRUMP: Thank you.

MARGOT ADLER: We just heard from two people who have studied different approaches to making schools safe, everything from metal detectors to student counseling. Earlier in the show some high school students from Philadelphia weighed in on how safe they thought their school was. Now teachers from that same school share some of their thoughts.

TEACHER: What I see here in school is an outgrowth of what happens in the neighborhood. Everything that happens in this neighborhood up here comes into this school. By the same token everything that happens in this school goes out to the neighborhoods.

TEACHER: The types of violence that we have are not as bad as at some of the larger, more comprehensive high schools with more students, but we still have problems, with fighting for the most part, children getting angry and feeling that the only way they can compensate is by hitting someone else.

TEACHER: I haven't worried about any violence in the schools since I've been with Philadelphia. I have never had a problem. The security guards seem to have a handle on as much as they can do.

TEACHER: About three years ago I was asked if I had a wish list what it would be. I said for one thing I wish we had cameras. I think the cameras will serve as a deterrent if kids knew if I'm sneaking in the back door they're going to catch me on camera.

TEACHER: All the students that I have that I know and that know me feel that I am the alpha dog. However, when I walk around to the ninth grade wing I don't know those students and it's difficult to say something to them, because just like a stranger on the street you don't know what their reaction is going to be.

TEACHER: You seldom hear about a Columbine situation occurring in the inner city. I think the schools in the inner cities were among the first to get scans and more security, and the suburban schools felt a sense of safety.

TEACHER: I think the metal detectors help, but again it's a security problem. With 14 doors in this building, if I really want to get a weapon into this school I can do it.

MARGOT ADLER: Coming up, a Wisconsin state representative says the answer to gun violence in schools is to put guns in schools for teachers and administrators to use in case of emergency.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I have gotten letters and emails and calls from people who work in our schools that say: You know what, I served in Iraq. I want the ability to protect myself and the kids I work with every day if someone came in here with a gun. I know how to do it and I'm very frustrated that I can't do that now.

MARGOT ADLER: We'll hear whether a gun in a school could make students safer. And we'll talk about school bullies and violence. Stay with us.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. When a school community experiences violence, the affects can be felt long after the incident occurs. From Los Angeles, reporter Heidi Pickman visits a community to see how it dealt with the aftermath of a murder on its high school campus.

HEIDI PICKMAN: One afternoon last June the school bell rang signaling the end of the day at Venice High. Kids poured out of the classrooms, couples said their goodbyes, friends shared songs on their MP3 players. Unbeknownst to school administrators or the Los Angeles school police officer on duty there, two young men who did not go to the school had entered the campus through the ungated faculty parking lot. According to then-sophomore Alejo Contraros, the two

men asked him for the silver cross that hung around his neck. He refused and a fight ensued. When his older brother Augustine, a junior, came to help, he was fatally shot. It was the first on-campus shooting in the Los Angeles school district in ten years. Venice High student Denisia, a sophomore, remembers the incident.

DENISIA: I mean, all of my friends know him, so it's like him not being there--I mean, I think it's just sad how somebody could just kill somebody over being upset. It didn't make any sense.

HEIDI PICKMAN: Jim Hubbard is the creative director of Venice Arts, a community arts organization. He tries to make sense of the shooting.

JIM HUBBARD: I've always tried to explain my world through photography. And the kids love to do that. But it affected me to the extent that I wanted to do something around what I find yet another outrage in Los Angeles, the killings here, and particularly at the high school, when there were hundreds of kids standing around, there was a police officer a few feet from the kid who did the killing. It was outrageous.

HEIDI PICKMAN: The shooting inspired Hubbard to prompt the high school students in his photography class to tell their own stories. Some knew Augustine and were directly affected by the Venice High shooting, while others had been affected by other incidents of violence.

JIM HUBBARD: Well, there was one photograph--they use a fence or a gate or bars on a window to show either shoot outward or shoot inward in a house or a school building or a rec and parks building where there are the gates, that kind of suggest an imprisonment kind of situation in some parts of their lives.

HEIDI PICKMAN: The high school is in the Venice neighborhood of Los Angeles. It is home to about 3,000 students and famous for its role as Rydell High in the movie "Grease." The back of the school is fenced in, but the front is open to a busy street that runs from the beach to downtown Los Angeles. After the shooting, Principal Jan Davis had teachers ask their students about whether a fence surrounding the campus would make them feel safer.

JAN DAVIS: They said somebody can put a gun through a fence and shoot, that a fence isn't going to help. It's not going to make that much of a difference. And they liked the fact that the school was open and does not look like a prison.

HEIDI PICKMAN: After the killing, the school did fence in the faculty parking lot where the shooting took place and surveillance cameras are being installed. But other safety measures, such as random searches with mobile metal detectors and patrols by administrators and the school's police officer have been the standard safety policy for all seven years that Davis has been principal. Davis also says the faculty is trained to be sensitive to the students.

JAN DAVIS: If you are having problems with other students you need to come to an office so we can mediate. We've done some peer mediation and we do a lot of mediation where an adult is the mediator between the students. And we encourage them: before you have a physical confrontation, let's talk about it.

HEIDI PICKMAN: Davis adds that for the most part the kids feel safe. The kids I spoke to concurred. Marcus is a sophomore.

MARCUS: Yeah, actually I live like a couple blocks away from the school and I heard all the helicopters and police things and it kind of worried me coming into the school. I was like oh, if this is going on over there, then I don't really want to be there. But it doesn't happen--it's very rare for something like that to happen.

HEIDI PICKMAN: And Nicole, also a sophomore, says if you're smart you'll be safe.

NICOLE: I still feel safe because you need to be smart enough to know oh, there's a crowd, let me not go over there, because you know something might be going on. Let me just walk past it, because a lot of kids are nosy and like let me see what's going on. But, like, I still feel safe because like I said, whatever happens happens and, like, I don't surround myself in that type of crowd, so I don't think, you know, I need to worry about that.

HEIDI PICKMAN: The trend at Venice High holds true for the rest of the schools in Los Angeles. Overall, according to the Los Angeles School Police Department, on-campus crime has seen a 25 percent reduction in the last four years. But Augustine's murder reminds Jim Hubbard that violence is part of these kids' reality, but only part.

JIM HUBBARD: It's all there, life on the streets. And I'm talking about a two or three block area where there's been a number of killings, and yet there's a vibrant, vibrant family life and love and friendships between a lot of the people in the neighborhood. And it's a struggling neighborhood, a very struggling neighborhood.

HEIDI PICKMAN: Venice High has come a long way from the post-Rodney King days in the early 1990s when gang tension was at its height. Seven months after the tragic shooting it is considered to be an aberration. There are few traces of the tragedy left. Even though the murder hasn't been forgotten, life at the school is back to normal. For Justice Talking, I'm Heidi Pickman.

MARGOT ADLER: Schools like Venice High School often put tighter safety measures in place in response to violent attacks. But a state representative from Wisconsin suggests that one way to prevent school shootings would be to have a gun in school for teachers or administrators to use in case of emergency.

Frank Lasee is a Republican state representative who recently introduced this idea. I asked him how it would work.

FRANK LASEE: What I would do is allow them to access a weapon in the school, either in a locked case or in a safe, a gun safe. And now we make those with--you can access them with your thumbprint. You put your thumb on it and it opens up, so there's quick access in case

someone comes into a school with a gun. Through the training they'd only be accessing this gun or weapon when someone came into the school with a gun intending to do something bad.

MARGOT ADLER: So they wouldn't be carrying it all the time, it would just happen when there was an intruder that was considered a threat.

FRANK LASEE: Exactly. They wouldn't be having it in their purse or under their arm or carrying it around with them on their hip, as many people envision. This would be a weapon in the school or more than one depending on how many people you had trained, who were trained and willing and able to use it who would access it and get it when someone came into the school with a gun.

MARGOT ADLER: I would assume that most teachers don't have an extensive background in handling guns.

FRANK LASEE: Most teachers do not, most people in schools. But you only need one or two or three in a school to make it safer.

MARGOT ADLER: Now you're not saying that all teachers should have guns. Just a certain few, I guess.

FRANK LASEE: Exactly. And it's not only teachers. It could be the superintendent. It could be the custodian. It could be a counselor. It could be anyone who works in a school. And we have people--and often what's overlooked is we have people in our schools who have been in the military, are in the military reserve or the National Guard, have experience with guns, or are members of gun clubs and enjoy doing that as a hobby. So we could build upon their expertise that they already have and use that. And I certainly wouldn't advocate that anyone who is not comfortable having a gun or thinks guns are the real problem--they wouldn't be good candidates to do this. I have gotten letters and emails and calls from people who work in our schools who say: You know what, I served in Iraq. I want the ability to protect myself and the kids I work with every day. If someone came in here with a gun I know how to do it and I'm very frustrated that I can't do that now.

MARGOT ADLER: Where are you finding your greatest support?

FRANK LASEE: There's a variety of support from people who are in our schools and want the ability to protect themselves and their kids who think this is a good idea. And that's the major place of support for this idea. I know I'm swimming uphill, particularly here in Wisconsin, where Wisconsin and Illinois are the only two states left in the nation that do not allow concealed carry permits for lawful people with background checks. So this is somewhat an extension of that. There are three states in our country--Oregon, Utah, and New Hampshire--that allow concealed carry permit holders into their schools today. I know in Utah there are thousands of teachers who actually have concealed carry permits and they can conceivably be legally carrying weapons into their schools. And interestingly enough all three of those states have never had a fatal shooting in a school.

MARGOT ADLER: But some, I guess, would argue that the real issue would be dealing with bullying in schools, dealing with stress in schools, dealing with violence that's all around us. How do you react to those kinds of suggestions?

FRANK LASEE: I wish we lived in a world where we didn't have people who hurt other people. I wish we didn't have as many people in prison as we have. I wish we could solve all of life's problems and help everyone not hurt other people. Saying at all that this is the only idea to make our kids safer--I challenge others to come up with good ideas to make our schools safer as well. And you can't stop all of the bad things that go on out there with what you've just suggested.

MARGOT ADLER: Why do you think there's been an increase in school shootings?

FRANK LASEE: I think one part has to do with the publicization of this and kind of the 15 minutes of fame that some people might be getting. There have been cases of kids wanting to shoot people or doing it, and everyone around them, including their family members said I never thought they'd do anything like that. And so it's hard to identify all of them up front. And this focus is on that period of time of when they're in the school or coming into the school with a weapon. And there are nine cases that we've been able to document where non-police officers have accessed a gun and stopped either kids or shooters from continuing to shoot or stopped them before they've shot anybody.

MARGOT ADLER: Thank you so much for talking with me.

FRANK LASEE: You're very welcome. Have a good day.

MARGOT ADLER: That was Wisconsin Republican State Representative Frank Lasee, who recently proposed that school officials should be able to have access to guns.

MARGOT ADLER: After Columbine, the Secret Service issued a study that looked at the root causes of school shootings. The report concluded that two-thirds of school shooters had been the victim of bullying. Many adults look at bullying as just a part of growing up. But new research finds that the affects on children can be devastating. To talk with me about the effects of bullying is Jaana Juvonen. She is a professor of developmental psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles. Her area of expertise is adolescent peer relationships and bullying. Welcome to Justice Talking.

JAANA JUVONEN: Thank you.

MARGOT ADLER: Define bullying for me.

JAANA JUVONEN: Bullying can be defined in very broad terms. The shortest explanation or definition is that which involves intimidation. There's an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim or the target. And this can be accomplished, this kind of imbalance of power, intimidation, in various ways: using name calling, direct verbal tactics. Other than name

calling, indirect tactics, like spreading of rumors. And then of course shoving, kicking, hitting, etc.

MARGOT ADLER: You've spoken to a lot of students. How common is bullying in schools?

JAANA JUVONEN: Bullying is very common. Most students--70 to 80 percent of students--report having experienced bullying at some point or another. And most kids are concerned about it.

MARGOT ADLER: And what types of behavior do most kids complain about?

JAANA JUVONEN: Interestingly enough, kids really complain mostly about these tactics that teachers are less likely to intervene with. So, for example, name calling, rumors, and these covert tactics--exclusion from activities is another set of behaviors that concern students.

MARGOT ADLER: And what ages are we talking about here? Does bullying begin at a certain age?

JAANA JUVONEN: No, bullying--you can say that bullying starts when kids are in groups with other kids.

MARGOT ADLER: So in kindergarten there's bullying.

JAANA JUVONEN: You even see bullying in preschool. And it certainly continues all the way to the workplace.

MARGOT ADLER: Tell me a little about the affects of bullying on children.

JAANA JUVONEN: What's interesting about the affects is that there's this myth out there which is that bullying experiences build character. It's something that's necessary and good for kids. And, in fact, the research quite clearly shows that bullying has only detrimental effects.

MARGOT ADLER: I would imagine that most children wouldn't want to admit to being bullied, out of fear that they would be seen as a victim or as a snitch. How willing are children to talk about their experiences?

JAANA JUVONEN: This is probably one of the biggest challenges to trying to deal with bullying: the fact that kids don't talk about it. And the older kids are even less likely to talk about it. It's not cool for a middle school student to admit that they get bullied.

MARGOT ADLER: Can you draw any conclusions about why a child becomes a bully? The traditional understanding seems to be that bullies often pick on their peers because they feel bad about themselves. Is this something you found to be true?

JAANA JUVONEN: In fact, we don't find support for this. We don't find that bullies would be feeling bad about themselves. Quite the contrary, we feel that they are the least likely to feel

depressed, lonely or socially anxious. And that can be explained in part by the popularity that they enjoy. There are a number of factors that we know that predict bullying behavior. Some of these have to do with early precursors, for example, family dynamics. In households where the parents are very harsh, maybe there are role models for ways in which to intimidate other kids. That increases the likelihood of kids bullying themselves. There are also other predictors. When a child puts another kid down they are in control of the social situations. And that can be very rewarding for a kid.

MARGOT ADLER: How willing are most teachers to intervene? And when should a teacher intervene when it comes to peer to peer bullying?

JAANA JUVONEN: I really think that teachers should be intervening more rather than less. And the reason being that any time a teacher walks by an incident, let's say one kid is calling another kid a nasty name, by not intervening, the teacher is sending a message: this is your problem, you should be able to handle it on your own. And, in fact, when we asked teachers why they don't intervene--often this happens more with teachers of older kids--they feel that, you know, by this age kids should be handling their problems on their own.

MARGOT ADLER: What can you tell us about the race, gender and class of bullies?

JAANA JUVONEN: Bullying cuts across race and class and other demographic indicators. In other words, this is a universal type of behavior that kids engage in. The manifestations of the behavior, whether it is direct physical aggression as opposed to these more covert tactics that are relied on, may vary across demographic groups. But the phenomenon is the same. The experience is the same.

MARGOT ADLER: What can schools do about bullying?

JAANA JUVONEN: The number one challenge for schools is to recognize this as an issue, as an important issue, not to downplay the affects of bullying. And basically this involves--this kind of a schoolwide approach requires that the school has very explicit rules about bullying, but moreover that teachers practice what they preach, that there's follow through of incidents. And it's really the consistency of that intervention that makes a big difference.

MARGOT ADLER: Thank you so much for talking with me.

JAANA JUVONEN: Thank you, Margot. It was my pleasure.

MARGOT ADLER: Jaana Juvonen is a professor of developmental psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles. She studies bullying.

That brings us to the end of our show. Give us your thoughts about school violence on our website justicetalking.org. You can sign up for our e-newsletter there and you can podcast our show too. Thanks for joining me. I hope you'll tune in next week. I'm Margot Adler.
