

# Selling School Safety

## Surveillance, Commercialism, and a Not-So-Hidden Curriculum

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I AM GRATEFUL TO TOM POETTER and the Board of the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* for the honor of giving the keynote address at this Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice. I am also thankful to my colleagues, especially my Miami University friends, who joined me in this conversation. This keynote provided an opportunity to explore a topic that has captured my attention and is rooted in my longstanding interest in curriculum studies. My goal is to begin a conversation with curriculum scholars about the phenomenon I have been calling *Selling School Safety*.

This article has been adapted from the keynote address presented at the Conference on Curriculum Theorizing and Classroom Practice. The keynote has been revised for readability as a manuscript and updated to reflect current policy developments and research.

Throughout this article, I use the term *selling school safety* to describe the growing commercialization of school safety through products, services, surveillance technologies, professional development, consulting, and policy initiatives that promise to make schools safer while simultaneously creating a new educational marketplace. The purpose of this critical examination is not to question or cast doubt on the good intentions of any company, organization, or individual discussed within this article, but instead to challenge the current conditions in our society through which the commodification of school safety has become both normalized and commonplace.



Since Alex Molnar's (2005) pathbreaking work, *School Commercialism*, curriculum studies scholars have examined how schools, schooling, and curriculum intersect with the marketplace. That publishers and corporations have long sought to profit from schools and school children is concerning enough, but now there is a new marketplace that has emerged, given the tragic ubiquity of school shootings: the selling of school safety.

This article examines the chilling new phenomenon of companies increasingly entering the schoolhouse with the purported purpose of keeping young people safe. From surveillance products and panoptical practices to on-demand mental health services from for-profit companies, and even the arming of teachers, schools continue to be places for commercialism to flourish. School safety has increasingly become a commercial marketplace in which fear, surveillance, and security are commodified, shaping the hidden curriculum of schooling and influencing how students, educators, and communities understand safety itself.

### **Acknowledgment of Land**

I begin with a land acknowledgment and ponder the space in which I conduct my work, the indigenous people's land that Miami University inhabits. The same people, the Myaamia people, the Shawnee people, and other indigenous peoples, were on that land and the land where Bergamo sits, and they were forcibly removed because of the Treaty of Greenville (Miami University, 2023a). Those tribes are now mostly located in Miami, Oklahoma. I want to think about the space I occupy as I engage with a topic I hope is relevant to all of us, but complicated by the fact that I do so on land with a contested history.

I am inspired by the work of Daryl Baldwin and his colleagues, such as George Ironstrack at Miami University and the Myaamia Center, to revitalize the language and culture of the Myaamia people (MacArthur Foundation, 2023; Miami University, 2023b; NEH, 2023). It challenges me to acknowledge that although I am invested in decolonizing my curriculum, there is so much more work to do. I encourage you to check out the Myaamia website (Miami University, 2023b). It has many resources that I imagine would be transferable to the spaces where you work and live.

### **Acknowledgment of the Current Moment**

I also want to acknowledge the chilling events that surround this profound debate about how to keep schools safe. We have Alex Jones and *Infowars*, with a jury awarding more than a billion dollars in damages for his fake news and conspiracy theories surrounding the Sandy Hook (Connecticut) school shooting (Hammond et al., 2022; Merlan, 2022). On October 13, 2022, a jury recommended life in prison without parole for Nikolas Cruz, the gunman in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Florida) shooting (Wamsley, 2022). And we cannot forget the children and teachers killed in the Uvalde, Texas, school shooting (AP, 2023), or the ongoing toll that school shootings continue to take on our country. I hope this work, at least in a small way, honors their memories and prompts us to consider what actions we might take in this moment.

### **Selling School Safety: Roadmap**

In the fall semester of 2022, while teaching a senior capstone class at Miami University focused on social action curriculum projects, I presented my students with a draft of the keynote I delivered at Bergamo. I asked them for feedback, and they gave it. Hopefully, what I present here will be a little better because of my students' insights and ideas and their urging me to create a roadmap.

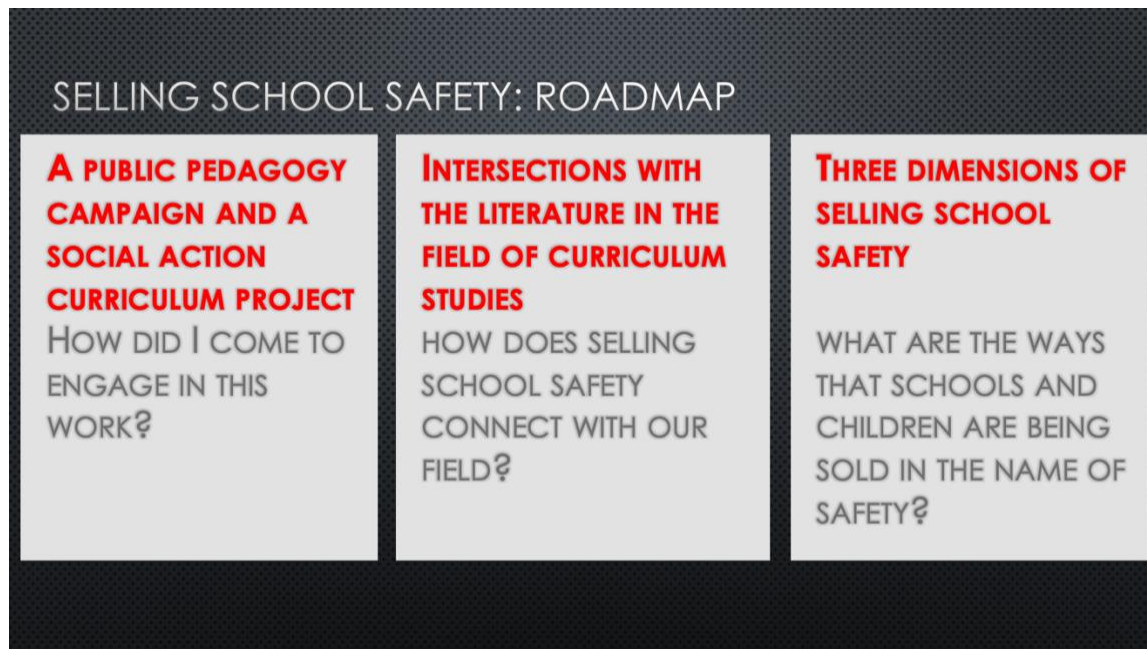


Figure 1: Selling School Safety: Roadmap

This article unfolds in three parts. The first part begins with a public pedagogy campaign and a social action curriculum project. Although I have explored public pedagogy with colleagues (Sandlin et al., 2011), this wasn't my public pedagogy campaign. Rather, it was a response to a public pedagogy effort, a resultant social action curriculum project in which I engaged, and how I came to be interested in this work. As a newcomer fascinated by this phenomenon, especially how it intersects with our field, the analysis in which I engage here is exploratory rather than definitive. The second part focuses on the intersections between selling school safety and the literature in curriculum studies. How does selling school safety connect with the field of curriculum studies? The third part of my roadmap is to consider what I am outlining as three dimensions of selling school safety. What are the ways that schools and children are being sold in the name of safety?

The first part centers on a particular public pedagogy (Sandlin et al., 2011) campaign. Those local to southwest Ohio might recognize Sheriff Richard Jones. Although I often disagree with the positions he advances, Sheriff Jones is a remarkably effective public pedagogue, particularly on issues of school safety. He has been featured on CNN (2017) and Fox News (2020) because of his polarizing ideas. Engaging with some of these ideas can prompt us to consider the phenomenon of selling school safety.

### **A Public Pedagogy Campaign and A Social Action Curriculum Project: How did I come to engage in this work?**

In 2018, Sheriff Richard Jones responded to an opportunity. The opportunity was a local school district just down the road from Bergamo and close to Miami University: Hamilton City School District. Hamilton was embroiled in an alleged scandal concerning an upper-level administrator. Allegations centered around accusations of sexual harassment, creating a hostile work environment, and violating board policies (BieryGolick, 2018). Sheriff Jones went to work. As you can see in the photo in Figure 2, he took out billboards across town. Jones saw an

opportunity not to focus explicitly on the allegations, but to challenge the parents and citizens in Hamilton to consider whether their schools were safe and secure more broadly.



**Richard K. Jones** ✓  
@butlersheriff

...

This went up today...think they will get the picture?



1:14 PM · Jun 25, 2018

Figure 2: Image of a billboard that was put up by Butler County Sheriff Richard Jones as part of a public pedagogy campaign to force parents to reconcile how safe Hamilton City Schools are. (Jones, 2018)

Since there had been a lack of transparency regarding this matter, Jones proposed that the district arm teachers to make schools safer and more secure. He leveraged a somewhat tangential issue in wondrous ways to challenge the community about school safety. Jones created a spectacle in many different ways. In this case, the literal spectacle of a billboard. He also prompted people to think introspectively about how safe their children were as they entered the schoolhouse. His public pedagogy campaign started this conversation about arming teachers. What could I do to challenge this idea?

It's important to step back for just a minute to take a tiny toe dip into the facts about school shootings. These are some pieces of information that might help us understand the context in which Sheriff Jones engaged in this public pedagogy campaign. In Figure 3, a blank covers the number of school shootings that the United States had in 2018 compared to other industrialized nations.

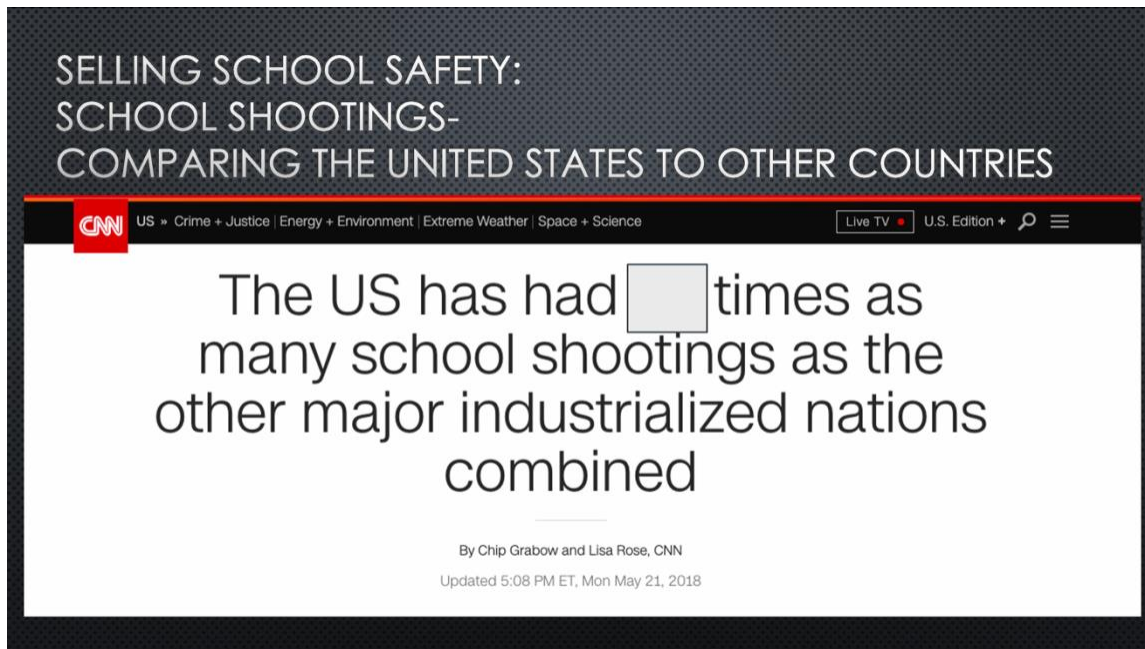


Figure 3: School shooting guessing game. (Gabrow & Rose, 2018; slide from Noltemeyer et al., 2019)

When I asked the audience to guess the number being covered, the answers ranged from 400 down to 12. The actual number is 57. Fifty-seven times more school shootings occurred in the United States in 2018 than in other industrialized countries combined (Gabrow & Rose, 2018). Other important questions concern whether empirical evidence supports arming teachers. Is there empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of arming teachers? Do professional organizations endorse arming teachers? Is there empirical evidence that arming teachers prevents violence? Based on current research, the answer is no. The first group of professional organizations includes the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2018). It is not surprising that this organization would oppose arming teachers, but perhaps more striking are the strange bedfellows, including the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO, 2018), which also opposes arming teachers.



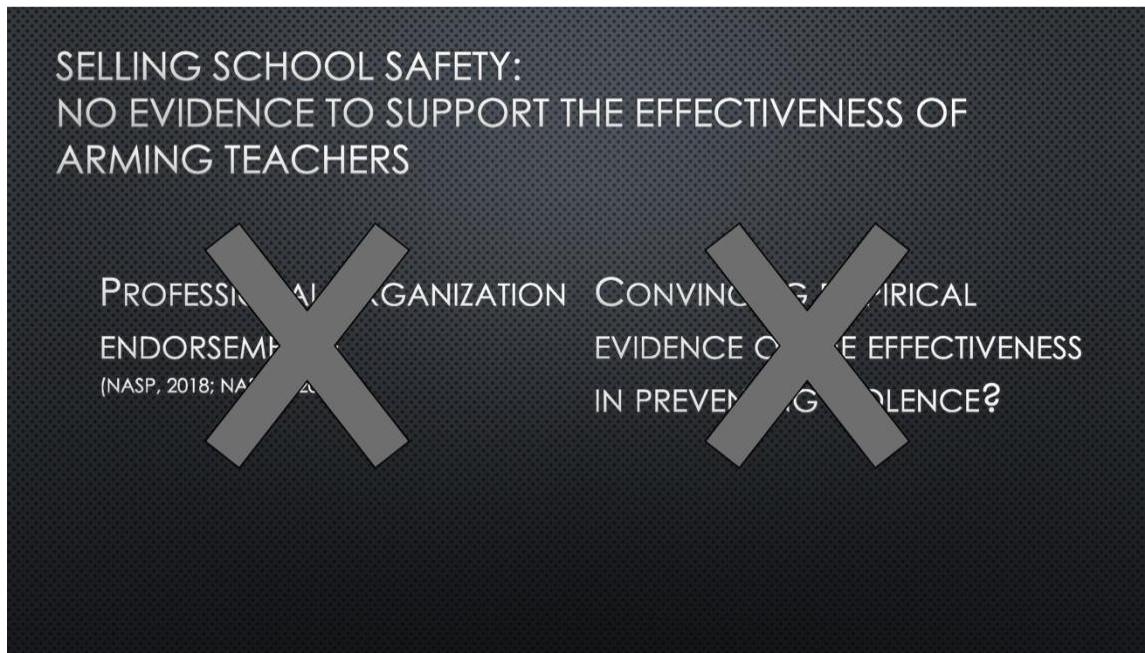


Figure 4: Selling school safety: There are no professional organizations endorsing the arming of teachers, perhaps because there is no evidence of its efficacy. (slide from Noltemeyer et al., 2019)

This raises another policy issue: Whether there should be school resource officers or police in schools. What we have here is particularly important evidence that paints a picture of what is happening with the arming of teachers. We do have some guidance and a framework for safe and effective schools from the National Association of School Psychologists (Cowan et al., 2013). We have very limited research on the effectiveness of arming educators. One study, a meta-analysis by the RAND Corporation (2020), examined studies that were at least tangentially related. The study found that evidence on the effectiveness of arming teachers remains inconclusive.

We do not have enough information, in part due to the 1996 federal spending bill which included the Dickey Amendment that effectively prevented federal funding for gun violence research (Rostron, 2018). For decades, obstacles prevented federally funded research into, for instance, whether arming teachers would be helpful. In 2019, after two decades without funding for firearm injury prevention, Congress reached a bipartisan compromise that restored \$25 million in federal funding, split between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health (Lin et al., 2024; Van Sant, 2019). Whereas this appropriation pales in comparison to other federally funded research, the fact that federally funded research is permitted at all offers some cautious hope.

What we do know is that when we arm teachers, we are taking resources away from other possibilities. That is an obvious thing. School budgets are finite. When we think about what we are going to spend money on in schools, if we start arming teachers, we're probably not going to be able to fund other things. It diverts resources, time, and other funds away from opportunities that have been shown to reduce school violence. For instance, there are significant resources and research on preventing school violence and bullying (see CDC, 2023; NASP, 2023; NCBI, 2023). A couple of promising options include mental health services and crisis prevention, restorative justice practices, and multi-tiered systems that can help support young people and teachers in

schools (see Cowan et al., 2013; Fronius et al., 2019; NASP, 2018). Again, when we think about arming teachers, what are we then taking those resources away from?

It is no wonder that people were paying attention to Sheriff Jones' public pedagogy campaign to arm teachers in a local school district. This attention made sense because of the significant increase in school shootings. The Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS, 2023) maintained a database detailing K-12 school shooting incidents. The site provides charts and graphs documenting details about school shootings. For example, one chart shows where school shootings happen, and another shows the shooter's relation to the school, making clear that most shooters are students or former students at the school where the shooting took place. Another chart, provided as Figure 5, shows the number of school shootings from 1970 to 2022. In 2021, there were 250 incidents of school shootings. Pretty sobering, to say the least.

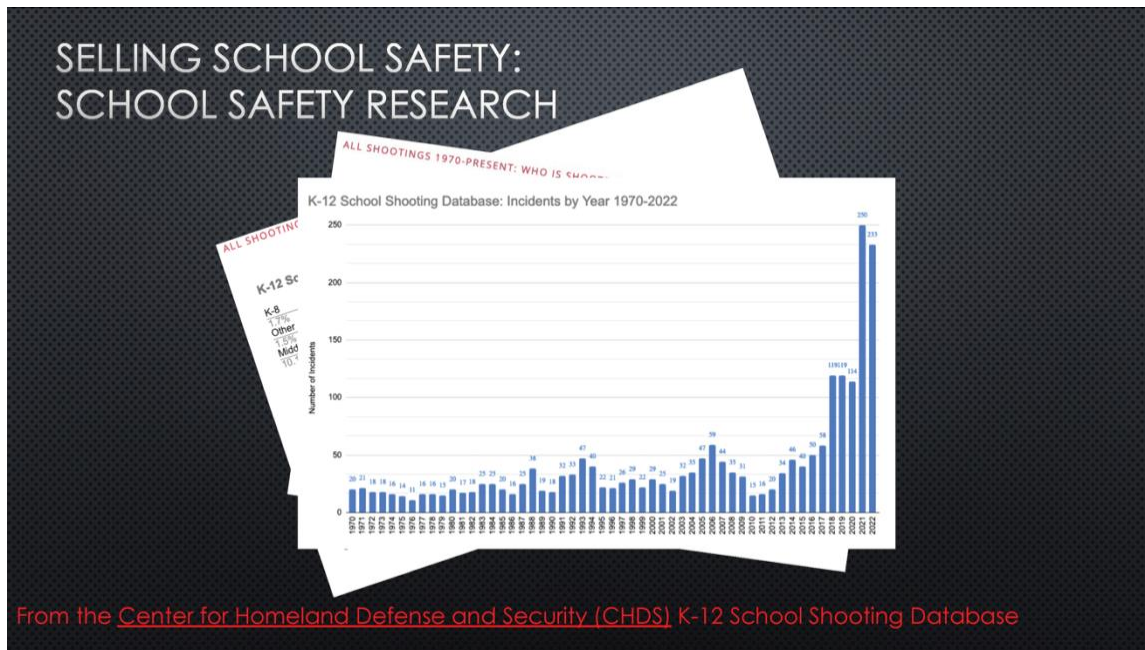


Figure 5: The Center for Homeland Defense and Security maintained a K-12 School Shooting Database documenting the massive uptick in school shootings over a 50-year period from 1970 to 2022. (CHDS, 2023)

While Sheriff Jones was doing his work in 2018, my colleagues and I had to figure out what to do. Some of you might be familiar with my work related to social action curriculum projects. This is when those with the most at stake in a particular context identify a problem and consider alternative solutions to address it. They engage in what Katherine Isaac (1992) has called “techniques for participation” (p. 155) to take intentional action in order to solve a problem.

Together, my colleagues and I engaged in a social action curriculum project. I did not want to be a department chair and professor placing students, our future teachers, into schools where teachers might be armed. We used many different ways of taking action. We wrote a fact sheet. We attended school board meetings. We tried to write collectively to board members. We navigated institutional policies as we took action. For instance, we had to ensure that our actions were not considered political activity but rather part of our work as professors. When we wrote a *Letter to the Editor* for a local newspaper (Noltemeyer & Schultz, 2018), we were concerned that we might run afoul of university rules because our university affiliations appeared in our bylines

rather than our being identified simply as private citizens. The point here is that we made a concerted effort to engage in techniques for participation to educate the Hamilton City School Board about the potential impact that arming its teachers could have on the community. And we had a small victory.

Our social action curriculum project, which focused on preventing a local school board from permitting teachers to be armed, prompted additional scholarship. We reviewed existing literature on the effectiveness of arming teachers (Olson et al., 2022). In addition, we surveyed pre-service teachers to better understand their perceptions about arming teachers (Wood et al., manuscript under review). We highlighted how some teachers were encouraging alternatives to being armed through their #ArmMeWith campaign, which focused on preventive strategies and resources (Noltemeyer et al., 2019).

Parents mobilized in the community. We would like to believe that, in a very small part, our efforts in organizing helped influence that, but I don't know that they did. When the school district voted, they voted unanimously against arming teachers. But importantly, a headline after the vote, grabbed from a local news affiliate, read: "Hamilton City School District Opts Not to Arm Teachers (For Now)" (FOX19 NOW, 2018) (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: A social action curriculum project may have, in part, influenced the Hamilton school board to not allow for arming its teachers. (FOX19 NOW, 2018; Levy, 2028; Parker & Harper, 2028)

The “for now” is key because when we fast-forward to 2021 and 2022, the Ohio legislature moved to allow teachers to be armed with a mere 24 hours of training (H.B. 99, 2022). When I was preparing my keynote, I was trying to put that amount of training into context. Prior to the legislation that required only 24 hours of training to arm teachers becoming law, and in part what prompted the legislature to take such drastic action, parents sued a different local school district in southwest Ohio because the district had armed civilians in their schools with what the parents argued was an inadequate number of hours of training required under the law at the time. In a victory before the Ohio Supreme Court, which agreed with the parents’ contention, their attorney



was quoted in a local news report. One highlight that stuck out to me was how the attorney framed the victory in the context of how few hours had been required: Little League umpires and manicurists needed more training than a teacher needed to be armed (Baker, 2021).

Obviously, Ohio is the belly of the beast for me, but what is happening in Ohio is not so distant from what is happening across the U.S. At the time of the keynote, 29 states allowed teachers to be armed. More recent data suggest that between 30 and 33 states allow school personnel to be armed (Giffords Law Center, n.d.; Rock, 2025). Because there is no federal registry of state laws allowing school personnel to be armed, we must look to organizations that aggregate these laws. The “Summary of State Law” section of Giffords Law Center’s (n.d.) *Guns in Schools* webpage and a review by *Campus Safety Magazine* (Rock, 2025) provide state-by-state analyses of who may carry a firearm on school property. Giffords Law Center provides this guidance to highlight what it views as the threat that guns in schools pose to children’s safety. Given this proliferation and the lack of movements opposing such laws and practices, how do we approach taking action?

One important feature of Ohio House Bill 99 is that it reduced the training requirement for non-law-enforcement personnel to be armed in schools from 700 hours to just 24 hours. There are some other interesting parts of the law. For instance, before the law, school districts could, in private session, decide to arm a teacher, and they did not have to tell anybody about it. Now, even though they only need the 24 hours of training, they must disclose to the public that they have armed civilians in their schools. There are other provisions in the legislation regarding obtaining a background check, holding a concealed carry permit, and other particulars.

In the summer of 2022, something told me to attend the Ohio Teacher Leader Summit in Columbus (ODEW, 2022). I am not sure what was prompting me. It certainly was not something that I was excited by, but I needed to go there, like a feeling inside me was telling me to show up. It turned out that Ohio Governor Mike DeWine was giving a welcome address at the Summit. I knew that House Bill 99, the legislation that would allow teachers to be armed with 24 hours of training, was on his desk. He had already agreed to sign it, but he had not yet done so. I waited for him in the hallway after he gave his welcome remarks to the teacher leader group. Mike DeWine attended Miami University and graduated with a degree in Social Studies Education, which would have been from the department I then chaired. That was my way in.

In the hallway after his greeting, I said to him, “When you were talking about celebrating teachers, your degree came from my department.” I continued, “Some colleagues and I have written about arming teachers. I know you’re considering this legislation.” After greeting him with the respect his position deserves, I asked the governor, “Would you be interested in reading [the research]?” He said, “Yes!” and referred to me by name after just a quick introduction, suggesting I share it with one of his handlers.

Three days later, Governor DeWine signed the bill into law, and here we are now, with Ohio having passed H.B. 99, which requires only 24 hours of training for a teacher to be armed. As a result, we see how this has created all sorts of openings and opportunities for the selling of school safety. At the Teacher Leader Summit welcome session, Governor DeWine discussed an event that would take place later that summer: the Ohio School Safety Summit (OSSC, 2022a, 2022b). He encouraged everybody in attendance to check it out. So, that is what I did.



Since I delivered the keynote on which this article is based in 2022, gun violence has continued to seriously affect schools. In 2022, the K-12 School Shooting Database's founder, David Riedman, transitioned the database from the CHDS website to the independent K-12 School Shooting Database, which is dedicated to "using data to prevent violence at schools" (Riedman, 2026). Without disregarding the overall gravity of the situation, Riedman's more recent analyses reveal some modest declines in school shooting incidents. According to his research, after hitting an all-time high of 352 shooting incidents in 2023, the next two years show 336 incidents in 2024 and 235 incidents in 2025. Now, halfway through 2026, 89 incidents have been recorded. Although these data demonstrate promising trends and Congress's renewed appropriations for research on gun violence prevention provide an additional reason to be hopeful, the situation remains sobering. This ongoing context helps us to understand the phenomenon of selling school safety through the lens of curriculum studies.

### **Selling School Safety Through the Lens of Curriculum Studies Literature: How does selling school safety intersect with our field?**

Three major areas of connection exist between the literature of curriculum studies and the selling of school safety: the hidden curriculum, school commercialism, and school surveillance. Each of these provides an avenue for meaning making about the phenomenon of selling school safety. I have cited some foundational texts by scholars from our field who have engaged in this work. When we think about hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968; Snyder, 1970) through the lens of selling school safety, we recognize that schools communicate unintended messages beyond the "official curriculum" (see Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979). These are things that are not planned; they are not overt; there is constant messaging in schools. Overlaying the phenomenon of selling school safety raises some interesting questions. What is unintended in the school curriculum that students and teachers learn? What messages are sent and received by the selling of school safety?

A second area of curriculum studies literature that helps us understand the phenomenon of selling school safety is school commercialism. Because of school commercialism, schools have become marketplaces (Walker, 2015). Companies are making profits on the backs of children, particularly children in public schools, and especially young people in the most historically marginalized communities. Private corporations see many different opportunities.

In preparing for the keynote on which this article is based, I came across a 1979 book by Sheila Harty called *Hucksters in the Classroom*. It was published by the Center for the Study of Responsible Law. That is one of Ralph Nader's nonprofit organizations. This was from the abstract found on the Google Books site: "Public relations efforts by industries have extended into the school classroom, where corporate promotion and product advertising are cloaked under the guise of education." There is nothing particularly radical here, but it reminds us that this is far from a new phenomenon. Corporations have long seen the opportunities, if you will, to make money off schools and kids in schools.

I recall being at Bergamo in 2005, and just hot off the presses in the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, Deron Boyles wrote an article titled "Would You Like Values with That? Chick-fil-A and Character Education" (Boyles, 2005). The article intrigued me so much that I contacted Chick-fil-A. I wanted their character education curriculum for my students in Chicago (Core Essentials,

n.d.). Chick-fil-A responded and said, “You just need to partner with a Chick-fil-A restaurant, and we’d be happy to get our character education program in your school.” They didn’t know I was a new assistant professor who would explore the character education curriculum in my social foundations class as we discussed school commercialism. At the time, there were no Chick-fil-A restaurants in Chicago. I wrote back. I said, “I don’t have a Chick-fil-A to partner with.” Then they told me that I could buy their curriculum for \$500. I said, “Oh, I don’t have that kind of money.” Then I fed into the tropes that I suspected were part of this kind of curriculum. I said, “I teach in a school that serves a housing project community.” As I recall, decades after the interaction, they said something to the effect of, “Oh, oh, yes. Those students *need* this character education,” so they gave it to me for \$25.

I never used it with my elementary students, but I did use it with my college students. Along with analyses of other corporations’ intrusions into schools, my students and I offered some critiques of the Chick-fil-A curriculum. Regarding Chick-fil-A, we focused primarily on its problematic Christian-normative character education curriculum. Their partner, Core Essentials, organized the curriculum by month. Like, what do you think the character trait for December was? Generosity, of course, because that’s when Christmas is, so you have to be generous.

I like what Alex Molnar (2005) captured nearly two decades ago, and, more recently, with Faith Boninger (Molnar & Boninger, 2015, 2020), regarding various appropriations of the schoolhouse. Whether a scoreboard is named or a Junior Achievement (n.d.) corporate “volunteer” enters the classroom, we see the many ways school commercialism plays out. This presents more questions. What are the ways that schools sell out? Commodities, ads, and other things that make schools, quote-unquote, “safer” have implications. What are the messages sent and received by the selling of school safety?

The third area of the curriculum studies literature concerns surveillance. The notion of surveillance in schools and the idea that children and teachers need to be watched is quite common. The premise of constant visibility is troubling, but it is a manifestation of power (Foucault, 1977). When those who are being watched don’t know whether they are being watched, or when they are being watched, that changes their behavior, of course.

This particular image in Figure 7 was shared with me by a pre-service teacher during her field placement. She snapped a photo with her phone that shows the output of the school’s surveillance cameras. What she also mentioned, which I found fascinating, was that teachers and students talked about finding places where they could whisper without being on camera. But what happens when we start to surveil classrooms in these ways?

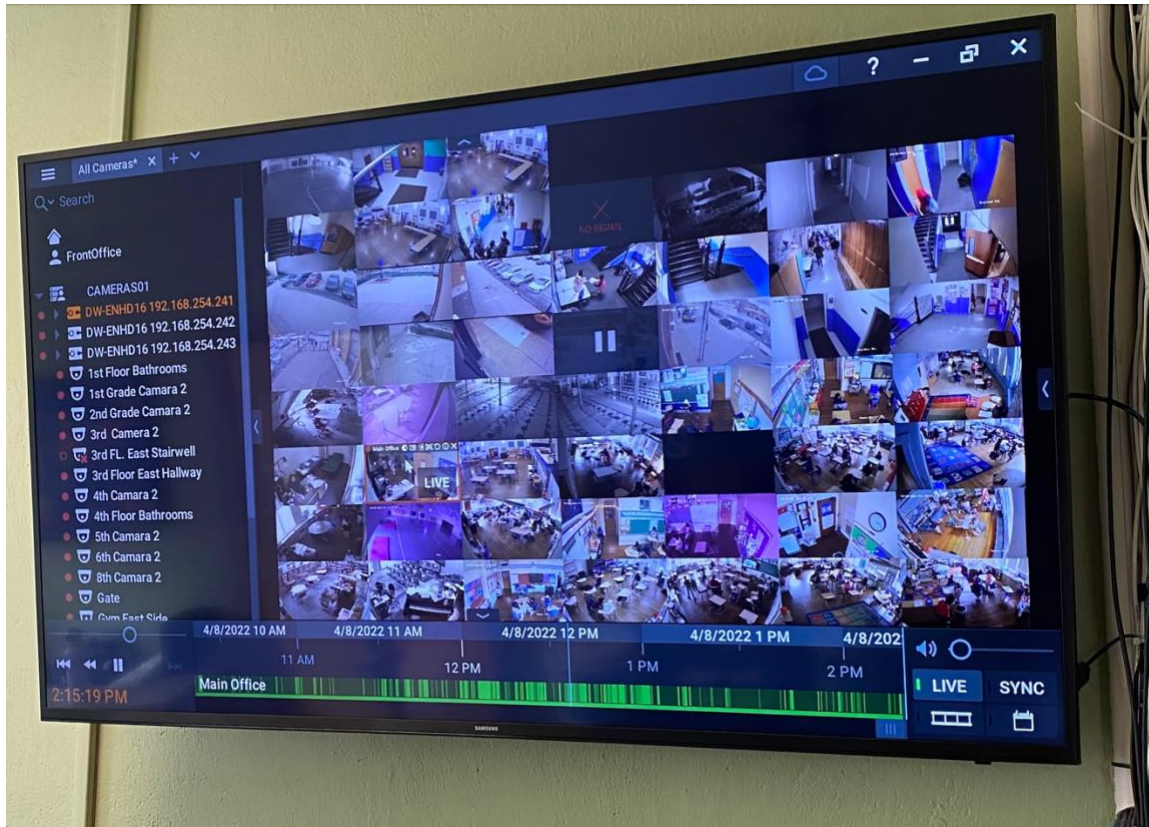


Figure 7: Photo captured by a student during her clinical field experience showing a ubiquitous surveillance panopticon on display in the school office.

This leads us to consider and trouble the idea of who is deemed good and who is deemed bad in school, and what about that false binary? It makes me think of Sheri Leafgren (2011), another curriculum studies scholar, and her powerful example in her book *Reuben's Fall* (2011), where the good/bad binary becomes particularly prominent. A boy named Reuben falls while walking in his kindergarten line, and his peer steps out of line to help him, only to get in trouble. What are the implications of how we think about the ways we need to watch children in schools? Further, what messages are sent and received when we watch students and their teachers, or need to watch them? What are the implications of selling school safety, particularly with the need to always know, in the name of keeping schools and children safe, of course?

### **Three Dimensions of Selling School Safety: What are the ways that schools and children are being sold in the name of safety?**

Going back to my chance encounter with Governor DeWine and my visit to the School Safety Summit, three dimensions of selling school safety emerged from the exhibit hall. Although these examples come from the Ohio School Safety Summit, the ideas they represent extend far beyond Ohio. The first dimension involves mental health capacity building. I want to trouble this dimension because improving mental health is intrinsically good, yet when mental health becomes commodified, it can also have a nuanced and darker side. The second dimension encompasses surveillance, products, and the selling of items that promote safety in schools. The third centers on the arming of teachers, which returns to Sheriff Jones' public pedagogy campaign.



## The First Dimension of Selling School Safety: Mental Health Capacity Building

This first dimension of building mental health capacity is complicated. Research shows that building students' mental health capacity in schools helps prevent violence in schools (see Cowan et al., 2013; NASP, 2018). We may be able to avoid some of the tragic events I opened with by focusing on what we need to think about in our current context.

A good example at the School Safety Summit of an organization working to build mental health capacity is ROX-Ruling Our eXperiences, from Columbus, Ohio. This nonprofit organization is focused on empowering girls (ROX, 2023). At the summit, I learned that the organization operates as an after-school program and is externally funded. I am not critiquing its work; it is evidence-based, fascinating, and encouraging. My critique is that ROX's work is not integrated into the curriculum. Instead, it is an add-on to the regular school day. This troubles me because school safety, mental health capacity building, and empowerment ought to be part of everyday school life for young women, in this case.

Mental health capacity building can be thought about in different ways. We might be in a better place if we invested in more school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and therapists in schools, and if every kid had access to them as a right within the classroom. For instance, to meet the 2026 NASP Federal Policy Priorities recommendation of having one school psychologist for every 500 students, the country would need to double the current number of school psychologists (NASP, 2026), at a yearly cost of billions of dollars. Instead, nonprofits and for-profit companies are now entering this space and filling the gap left by the shortage of mental health providers. As this happens, the mental health supports can cross into that surveillance space. These companies are surveilling emails and Google Classroom to offer just-in-time counseling services that the school district can pay for because, for example, the district does not have enough social workers on hand. When they scan Google Classroom and detect that somebody has written down that they are going to shoot up the school or that they are contemplating suicide, there is an understandable response: "Okay, we don't want to let that go."

A colleague at Miami University runs a school-based mental health program. She secures multimillion-dollar grants that help schools and school districts provide mental health services. I would argue that she is in a good space to build capacity for mental health supports. But this kind of work, which is supported by external grants, raises some questions: Why do schools not have these as their normal practices? Why is it that grants need to be written for millions of dollars, but only work with a select number of school districts? How much capacity do she and her team have?

Because teachers cannot realistically monitor all student-written communication, some concerning things will likely be missed. But if a teacher has a tool that scans Google Classroom to flag problematic statements or comments, what else are they flagging? What are they determining is permissible and what is not okay? Who is getting targeted and who is not? This, too, is complicated because schools certainly do not want to miss red flags.

Technologies of all sorts have become more commonplace in schools for various reasons, but some that are used to support teachers and students can also create problematic situations. An example is the classroom use of Proctorio, a remote software platform that helps educators monitor academic integrity during computer-based exams. In recent years, Proctorio has been embroiled in lawsuits alleging its software disproportionately flags students of color compared with their white counterparts (Clark, 2021). Likewise, other similar technology-based platforms that use facial recognition algorithms have been featured in media coverage because the software is allegedly inconsistent in detecting skin tones across demographic groups (see Meaker, 2023). As

these tools and their associated practices become increasingly used in schools, we need to be mindful of how they are used and the consequences that may follow.

For instance, while walking around the School Safety Summit exhibits, I met some people working for a company called Gaggle. One commented to me, “At least we are in this space rather than in some of the other spaces,” referring to providing mental health supports and detection software, as opposed to the more product-oriented resources used to harden schools. Gaggle’s (2023) mission is “to ensure the safety and well-being of students and schools by leveraging people and technology.” I do think that Gaggle is providing a good service, especially if schools are unwilling to invest or lack the resources to build mental health capacity to ensure students have access to mental health care and people who can help them in moments of crisis, in particular.

### The Second Dimension of Selling School Safety: Surveillance and Products

The second dimension of the phenomenon of selling school safety concerns surveillance and products sold to schools. One of the most memorable products at the exhibition was called Wingshield. As you can see in Figure 8, it’s a movable bulletproof whiteboard that can create a doorway barrier, as its handwritten sign stated: “Turn any room into a SAFEROOM in seconds.”

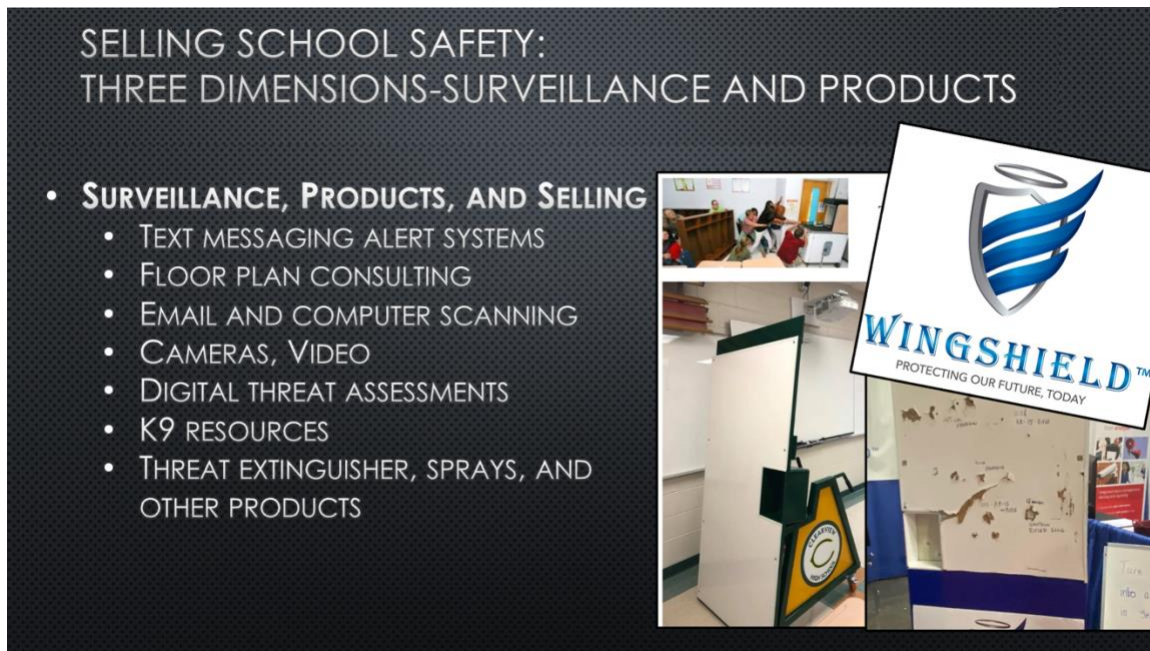


Figure 8: School safety surveillance products, technologies, and deterrents are commodified through products such as the Wingshield, a movable bulletproof whiteboard that serves as a door barrier and is marketed to enhance school safety. (OSSC, 2022a, 2022b)

The vendor who was demonstrating the Wingshield was eager to share it with me. He had tried out his product with his guns. The Wingshield could be added to any classroom for \$6,000 to protect your students and barricade them in. He had me use the wheel stop so I could move it around. It was easy to maneuver. I agreed with him that I could easily move it, but I was troubled by what it represented. Another vendor enthusiastically shared The Threat Extinguisher. It looks like a fire extinguisher with a bigger nozzle on the end. You use it to spray a school shooter.



Figure 9: School safety products displayed and advertised in the exhibit hall of the Ohio School Safety Summit illustrate the breadth of ways school safety is being commodified. (OSSC, 2022a, 2022b)

“Summertime is installation time!” When I saw this, it felt ironic, as if teachers are not spending their summers contemplating how they might engage young people with a rich curriculum, making, doing, building, and all those things that teachers do during the summer months.

In some ways, I found myself poking fun at some of their selling strategies that need critical examination. But my reaction, too, deserves to be troubled. I should not be poking fun at this because the underlying issue is that we, as a society, have to figure something out. If schools do not have those mental health capacity-building resources, students can be at risk. We are in a moment where we cannot have another school shooting, and we cannot allow people like Alex Jones to claim that victims were actors and that the school shootings were staged.

As parents, we get text messages about our children’s schools and what is happening. There are text messages. There are alert systems. There is floor plan consulting. There are canine services. There is bear spray for school shooters. There are all sorts of ways to surveil and watch, with cameras and videos.

The state of Ohio has made significant investments in school safety products beyond the legislation to enable schools to enhance their school safety infrastructure. Through its K-12 School Safety Grant Program, Ohio awarded over 3,400 grants to more than 2,700 schools between 2021 and 2023. Spending over \$215 million in state and federal taxpayer funds, “the program was created to help schools pay for physical security expenses such as new security cameras, public address systems, automatic door locks, visitor badging systems, and exterior lighting” (OFCC, 2023). More recently, in 2024, the Ohio Controlling Board approved the purchase of modular mobile “shoot houses” to be used by the Ohio School Safety Center, “with the goal of providing better tactical training for armed teachers and staff” (Crawford, 2024). Using public funding mechanisms to purchase products from the private sector to enhance school safety demonstrates the proliferation of this marketplace beyond legislative mandates. This again raises



many questions about how funds are being used, what strategies are prioritized, whether those strategies focus on prevention, and, in turn, what qualifies as prevention.

The surveillance dimension is particularly disconcerting. It's like, "How can we totally cover a specific area so that we see everything?" Just like my former student told me, "Everybody knows where you can go to not be heard or seen." What messaging is that giving to students as they are in those spaces where they are constantly being watched? I always have to ask: Who is also being watched more or scrutinized more?



Figure 10: Technology-based surveillance products marketed to schools show the significant expansion of commercialized tools designed to enhance school safety. (OSSC, 2022a, 2022b)

### The Third Dimension of Selling School Safety: Arming Teachers

The third dimension of the phenomenon of selling school safety is the arming of teachers. I already provided the context on Sheriff Richard Jones and his push to arm teachers in Hamilton, Ohio. Although that failed, we now have this happening ubiquitously. With just 24 hours and the school board's approval, a teacher can be armed in Ohio. All a teacher needs to do the next year, after they get that certification, if you will, is only eight hours of renewed training. This, too, is a bit ironic given that keeping your teaching license in Ohio requires 180 hours of continuing education over five years, or 36 hours per year. *The New York Times* published an article in 2022 with the headline, "Trained, Armed, and Ready. To Teach Kindergarten" (Mervosh, 2022). It features a kindergarten teacher (Figure 12) who wants to keep her students safe.



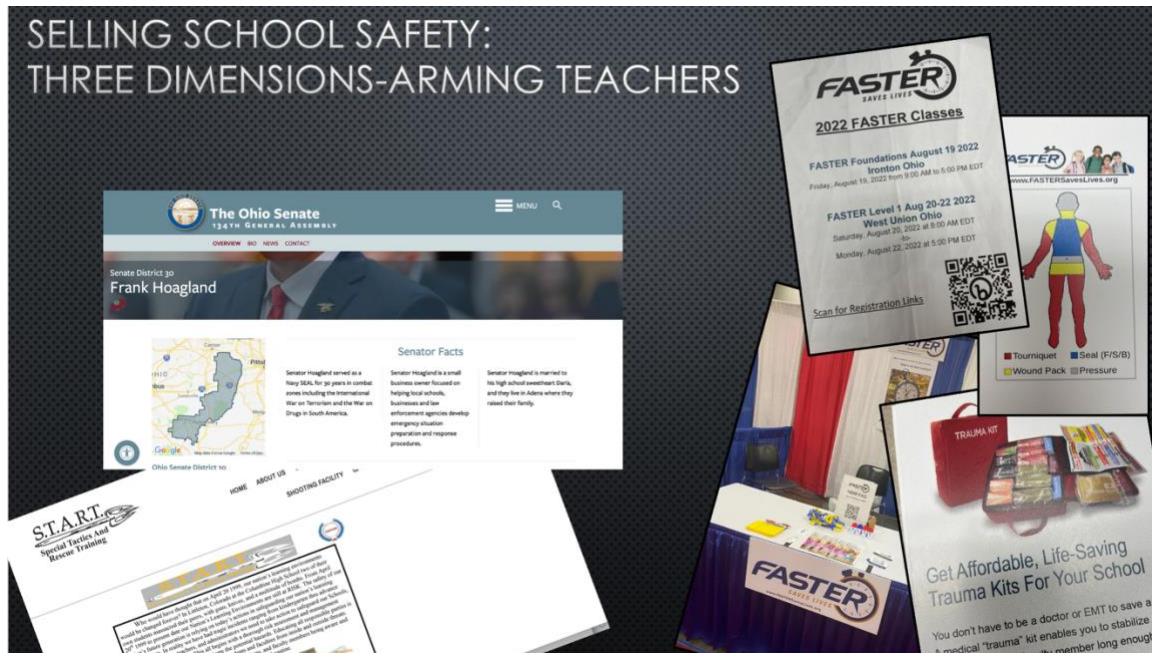


Figure 11: Organizations and legislators have turned to arming civilians, including classroom teachers, as a means to promote school safety. (Buckeye Firearm Foundation, 2022; OSSC, 2022a, 2022b; S.T.A.R.T., 2018)



Figure 12: Front-page image from the *New York Times* (Mervosh, July 31, 2022) showing how a controversial Ohio law has led organizations such as FASTER to train teachers to carry firearms in schools after substantially reducing training requirements.

Another organization that was selling safety, or at least featuring their work at that exhibition, was called FASTER, which was highlighted in the *New York Times* article. Part of the premise of FASTER, according to the gentleman I spoke to at the summit, who agreed that more needs to be done to protect children in schools, is in the name itself: If we can respond to an active shooter situation faster, we may save lives. FASTER is an affiliated organization of the Buckeye

Firearms Association, which is a state affiliate of the National Rifle Association. FASTER trains teachers to be armed for free. But Molnar and Boninger (2020) remind us that “free” is not necessarily “free” in the same sense. It might not cost anything for a teacher to complete that training, but resources are being diverted, and it is complicated.

The *Times* piece highlighted some pretty interesting facts. One line that caught my attention said,

That she was being trained at all spoke to the country’s painful failure to stop mass shootings and to the heavy responsibilities piled onto teachers. Catching students up from the pandemic; handling mental health crises in children; navigating conflicts over the teaching of race and gender; and now, for some, defending their schools. (Mervosh, 2022)

This article mentioned a data point I found fascinating. In 2018, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, only 2.6% of schools allowed faculty to be armed. In more recent data published by the Institute of Education Sciences (2022), of 2,400 schools surveyed, 3% of all public schools and 6% of rural public schools reported that non-law-enforcement personnel carried firearms on their school property. Although I am unaware of more recent national data, in Ohio, one year after H.B. 99 went into effect, allowing school boards to arm teachers and staff, 46 of 611 (7.5%) school districts had authorized non-law-enforcement personnel to carry firearms in schools (ODEW, 2023; Otilie, 2023). Will the number of school districts continue to grow, given these new laws? As there is no statewide registry of school districts choosing to arm personnel, looking to local reporting helps answer this question. An article published in 2024 by *The Ohio Newsroom* reported that 67 districts had made provisions for arming school personnel (Crawford, 2024). In 2025, Spectrum News 1 and Columbus CBS affiliate WBNS 10TV reported that nearly 15% of Ohio’s 613 school districts (90 school districts) had authorized armed school personnel as a result of H.B. 99 (Harms, 2025; Landers, 2025).

Another organization, like FASTER, that was not present at the School Safety Summit but engages in similar work is the Special Tactics and Rescue Training (S.T.A.R.T.). Former Ohio State Senator Frank Hoagland, who owns this company, cosponsored H.B. 99. According to a local journalist, S.T.A.R.T. will charge your school or district to train your teachers to be armed (Trau, 2022). According to a local journalist’s reporting, when this went through the legislative process, there was no conflict-of-interest issue with Hoagland promoting the legislation because it was stated that this is the work he does, and the legislation does not require this particular company to be used (Trau, 2022).

Frank Hoagland, I don’t know him. I understand that he’s a storied Navy SEAL veteran. He’s likely done some good things defending our country. It’s no disrespect to him. We are all, indeed, trying to figure out how to create safer schools. This is the work he does, and this is what he is promoting, although it is troubling that this is one of the approaches being taken to address the current safety crisis. I have to wonder, though, whether arming teachers is the right way to keep schools safer.

### **Concluding Thoughts: Questions, Hopes, and Dreams**

I am going to end with some concluding thoughts, but I dislike concluding thoughts as I find that our work is never finished. It is always in the making. Maybe these are less concluding

thoughts and more continuing questions. Where does this take us? I want to acknowledge that I am not a school safety expert. Rather, I am fascinated by how we are selling school safety, its implications, and how this phenomenon intersects with the scholarship that has influenced me.

What troubles me most is that schools are spending precious resources on unproven products and services in the name of safety, while this school safety marketplace raises significant questions and concerns about how we value children, safety, and curriculum. Perhaps, in the spirit of curriculum studies, we need to keep asking questions. What can be done to keep young people and schools safe, given the urgency of the moment? How can we increase mental health supports in schools? What is being lost when schools spend scarce resources on surveillance and safety products? How do these shape the hidden curriculum of schools? Where do we see commercialism playing out through the selling of school safety? How does surveillance change the relationships among teachers, students, subject matter, and the contextual factors affecting schools?

As curriculum scholars begin to wrestle with these questions, it becomes more and more evident that the phenomenon of selling school safety not only has an obvious marketplace aspect but is also a curricular one. Selling school safety informs students, teachers, and society what schools are for, whom they should fear, and the kinds of safety that are worth investing in. These lessons are inherent to schooling's hidden curriculum, and these lessons deserve critical attention from curriculum scholars.

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