



## When Teachers Aren't Safe at School

January 8, 2023 by Educator Barnes

Twice in my career, a student has threatened to kill me. Neither student was expelled. One student was suspended for several days, and the other student was back in my class the next day. Being a teacher should not be a dangerous profession; however, with school shootings every year, we have to accept that teaching is a dangerous profession.

The latest shooting was by a six-year-old first grader at Richneck Elementary School in Virginia on Friday, January 6. The student shot his teacher, and several reports suggest the

shooting was intentional and not accidental. Richneck Elementary School principal Briana Foster Newton sent a letter to families saying the school would be closed on January 9 and January 10. In that letter, she also said:

*As a parent and educator, I know how difficult it is for us to process what happened while supporting and caring for our children. To assist us, the school division has established a 24-hour helpline, (757) 788-0635, managed by our partners at the Hampton-Newport News Community Services Board. Licensed therapists are available to assist parents and staff with tips for talking with our children, counseling services and resource referrals. I encourage you to use this resource.* What leads a child to bring a gun to school and shoot his teacher? How does that teacher return to school and ever feel safe again?

Many teachers have suffered violence or threats of violence from students. The student often gets a slap on the wrist, and the teacher is told to return to teaching as if nothing ever happened. Where is the support for teachers who get threatened or harmed?

I had a student try and hit me in the face with a literature book. Do y'all know how big a literature book is? Some children grow up in violent homes and see violence as a way to solve problems. Teachers don't get to choose their students. They are added to the roster, and the teacher has to impart the school values to build a safe classroom community. However, it is hard to build a safe community when some children have been raised in dens of violence.

Where does this leave teachers? Where does this leave students who witness this violence?

I wish I had the answers. I wish I didn't have memories that detailed how a student was going to kill me. You don't just get over it. The teacher in Virginia won't quickly get over it, either.

Until we get some real gun reform in this country, we will continue to have these incidents.