

As I write this column I'm glancing at today's newspaper headlines about the riots at Fontana and San Bernardino high schools. There were certainly conflicts between students when I attended Redlands High in the mid-1970s, but there were never riots at any of our regional schools like those occurring yesterday -- and certainly never at RHS.

Before I go on I want to be very clear about something. I believe the Redlands Unified School District is one of the safest in the nation. RUSD professionals care for our kids as if they were their own and the School Board is intensely interested in enhancing student safety. If I didn't believe that, my sons would not be attending RUSD schools as I did.

The last several weeks have been witness to another spate of horrifying shootings on school campuses in several different parts of the country. If we thought that the April 20, 1999, Columbine High School nightmare was a one-time aberration -- in which 12 students and a teacher were murdered, and another 24 wounded, by fellow students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold before they committed suicide -- we have been sadly mistaken.

I was at a function in Washington, D.C., when Columbine occurred and will never forget those horrific media images I watched -- with many other people glued to TVs in hotel lobbies and restaurants throughout the Capitol -- of students fleeing their attackers. Poignantly, I was in the Denver area the next day, speaking to regional law enforcement executives about youth violence prevention. Some of these leaders had been at Columbine High during the shootings and I'll not soon forget their emotion-filled accounts of the incident.

And I will be haunted for a long time by the images of the Amish funeral processions for the young girls recently murdered by Charles Carl Roberts IV in their classroom. I'm not sure I could ever be as merciful as the Amish who forgave the obviously sick man who changed their lives forever.

Every day, our schools are entrusted with America's greatest resource -- its children. The future of this great country is predicated on the status of its young people. Their success in life -- and ultimately our country's success -- will in large part be determined by their academic experiences. Children with firm academic foundations are more likely to find success in life via socially acceptable paths. Extensive, nationwide research has shown that young people who experience early academic failure are more likely to engage in problem behaviors such as delinquency, violence, substance abuse and teen pregnancy. They are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system where taxpayers can easily spend more than \$40,000 per year incarcerating them.

I think it's obvious that we all have a stake in the academic success of our youth. School safety plays a large part in ensuring that students have an opportunity to succeed academically and in life. Police officers who work on school campuses are critical linchpins in the continuum of programs and services that ensure schools are as safe as possible. Policing in schools is a specialized area of police work that merges the cultures of education and law enforcement to employ strategies specifically designed for use with students.

The Redlands Police Department has long provided a wide range of campus safety services to the Redlands school faculty, students and their families. These services include the presence of school resource officers (SROs) on campuses, student conflict mediation, enhanced police-youth interactions, student substance abuse and violence prevention and intervention and a focus on removing the “off-campus barriers to learning” many students experience in the form of dysfunctional family environments (i.e. drug use, parental criminal behavior, gang activities, etc.).

Schools are sacred places that should encourage young people to think, learn and have fun in the process. The RPD pursues school-based programs and strategies because we deeply believe that by helping young people succeed at school, we are, in part, controlling crime *before it occurs*. Our involvement with the schools dramatically increases the chances that we can head off a Columbine-like horror before it occurs through the interactions that occur between students and campus police officers they’ve gotten to know and trust. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to prevent armed madmen from attacking schools without turning them into de facto prisons.

Our school-based programs are part of our research-based approach to crime control, which emphasizes prevention, intervention and suppression strategies -- strategies such as our recreation and seniors programming, parenting classes, school resource officers, code enforcement, crime mapping, drug court and parole partnerships, traffic enforcement, neighborhood substations, downtown officers, graffiti abatement and enforcement, gang unit, tremendous personnel commitment on murder investigations and GPS tracking of sex offenders.

Not everyone believes the RPD should be involved in these preventative or interventive programs. Some think our role is simply to “knock heads.” Not on my watch!

The American system of justice demands that local police departments be free of inappropriate influence or intimidation and focus on those things that make communities and our kids safer. Redlands deserves nothing less. As long as I remain Redlands’ Chief of Police I will continue to pursue those strategies I believe make our schools and neighborhoods safer. I will continue to serve this great community to the best of my ability, ensuring the administration of justice is achieved in a just and ethical manner. Doing anything less is an affront to the community that helped my parents raise me, is helping my wife and me raise our sons, and that I love so dearly.

Contact me at chief@redlandspolice.org or at 909.335.4744.