

Campus violence keeps rearing its disgusting head

Our recent headlines once again remind us that every day young men and women face the possibility of losing their lives to a bullet as they step into a war zone. We salute these brave heroes for their courage and willingness to enter dangerous environments for the sake of exercising their basic rights. Unlike Iraq or Afghanistan, they did not sign up to engage the enemy, they just showed up to school.

Campus violence raised its deadly head again on two college campuses with a Columbine-like shooting spree ripped from the *Basketball Diaries* and a basketball team experiencing the terror of a campus shooter. In Green Bay, Wis., high school students were charged with conspiracy to commit first-degree murder for planning an attack on their classmates. The stories of weapons on campus go on and on, and I'm sickened by it.

In the wake of death and injury, are we startled from the slumber of our apathy? I'm alarmed that the entertaining way television covers these stories makes the current episodes of tragedy seem like the prequels were better. In



LEON QUAN

the post-Littleton, Colo., era, it is amazing that we have not taken control of this subplot in the American story.

The term "bullying" doesn't quite capture the severity of the issue. Every time we hear of another thwarted campus

attack, it involves guns, knives and bombs. The Department of Justice reports that 100,000 students a day come to school with a gun. Each day, 160,000 students are absent for no other reason than fear. That's like the entire population of Tempe calling in for the day.

Doesn't this qualify as terrorism? The dialogue of school safety must evolve into a true picture of this problem.

Since the pivotal events of Sept. 11, we haven't had another terror attack on American soil. We collectively felt the pain of loss, committed to never allow this to happen again and made the culture-changing strides to eradicate terrorism. Yet campus violence has peppered the headlines across the country since Columbine.

Steve Peebles, a Phoenix-based educational trainer, says it best: "If we can feel it, we can heal it." Once al-Qaeda flew planes into our landmarks, the personal threat of falling victim to a terrorist act became a very real possibility. But the reality of school violence still has yet to "hit home."

The threat of our children being harmed at school hasn't been equally internalized. Where is the rhetoric about protecting freedom and fighting evil on all fronts when it comes to the smallest Americans? Why are we spending billions of dollars to protect Iraqi children when our school districts can't afford to provide security guards, student resource officers and empathy training to students and staff?

Students aren't hearing the long political debates and bureaucratic minutiae on school funding. They can't recite the policy improvements designed to curb bullying. They just know that in many cases, they're not safe.

They see that there's only one teacher or administrator acting as a playground attendant and 500 students left to supervise themselves. Students are left to

believe that their learning environment is not our priority, unless it concerns federally mandated test scores. We need to give this issue the whole nine yards in terms of policy, parenting, presence and peace.

A student once wrote, "The community needs to figure out other ways to keep guns out of schools. Students cannot learn very well and be motivated if they know someone in their classroom has a gun with them." Ironically, the encouragement of an ongoing dialogue that floods each level of our community comes from a class report written by Eric Harris, one of the Columbine killers, more than a year before the attack.

As parents, we breathe a collective sigh of relief every time we realize that the headlines are about schools somewhere else. We'll never de-escalate a conflict until we're personally connected to it. Bury it on Page 5 or devote a 20-second evening news sound bite to it, but remember: All bullet clips are local.

Leon Quan is a national motivational youth specialist and author, a Chandler resident and father of two.