Read through the article, making notes in the margin as you read. Then answer the questions at the bottom on a separate sheet of paper. Your response needs to be a full page.

"F" Is for Firearm: More Teachers Authorized to Carry Weapons in Classroom

BY KATE MURPHY, NEWS21

LT LAKE CITY -- “Stop. Drop your weapon. Don’t shoot.”
Kasey Hansen yelled as she pointed the barrel of her loaded handgun at a target’s chest at a shooting range outside Salt Lake City.

Hansen, a special needs teacher in Utah, is prepared to take down any armed gunman that barges through the doors of one of her classrooms. Hansen carries her pink handgun “Lucy” with her every day in each of the 14 schools at which she teaches. The 27-year-old teacher works with elementary, middle and high school students with hearing impairments in the Granite School District.

“I want to protect my students,” Hansen said. “I'm going to stand in front of a bullet for any student that is in my protection and so I want another option to defend us.”

Hansen is one of an unknown number of armed teachers across the country. Legally gun-owning adults are now allowed to carry guns in public schools in more than two dozen states, from kindergarten classrooms to high school hallways. Seven of those states specifically allow teachers and other school staff to carry guns in their schools.

A News21 examination of open records laws in those states found that those who do choose to carry their firearm into their classrooms are not required to divulge the information to principals, other teachers, students or parents. Only five of those states have completely open access to concealed carry permit information through public records requests. Some state’s laws completely seal off those records and others are silent on the issue.

That means there is no way of telling how many teachers are taking advantage of the option to be armed. School administrations can decide to gather the information, but it’s more of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” situation. There is no record of who has a gun in any school in any state.

After the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, the threat of an attack by an armed gunman in elementary and high schools prompted five states to give school administrators the authority to arm their teachers. In 2013 more than 80 bills were introduced in at least 33 states related to arming teachers or school staff, but only Alabama, Kansas, South Dakota, Tennessee and Texas enacted laws affecting public schools, according to a report by the Council of State Governments.

Connecticut law, which previously let school officials allow people other than police to carry in schools, was revised after Newtown, so that only officers can carry guns on school grounds. Georgia passed a guns-in-schools bill in 2014. The other states allowing guns in schools already had versions of such laws in place.

In some cases school districts and local school boards can designate school faculty to get specific training in order to carry; and there are a few states, including Hawaii and New Hampshire, that don’t set policy in state law. In Utah and Rhode Island anyone with a concealed carry weapons permit is allowed to bring a firearm onto public school grounds. Schools in some states, including Colorado and Arkansas, use administrators and other staff members as security officers so that they can be armed in the school. And most states allow guns in schools for approved programs and events sanctioned by the school.

In Utah, guns are commonplace in public. The state has issued more than a half million firearm carry permits. Residents with a permit can legally carry almost anywhere, from elementary schools to local restaurants and bars to municipal parks.

The Utah law that allows anyone with a concealed carry permit, including teachers, to carry on school property has been in place for more than a decade. A provision that would have restricted possession on school property was taken out of the bill.
"I never really thought about it before Sandy Hook," said Hansen, who was teaching when she heard about the attack. "It just killed me. It’s something personal when you mess with students or children. …It’s as if you were messing with one of our own."

Teaching at multiple schools a day, Hansen drives around the school district in her white Mazda glamorized with eyelashes on the headlights. All of Hansen’s students have hearing aids or a cochlear implant, which could make an emergency situation particularly chaotic.

"I think every teacher should carry," Hansen said. "We are the first line of defense. Someone is going to call the cops and they are going to be informed, but how long is it going to take for them to get to the school? And in that time how many students are going to be affected by the gunman roaming the halls?"

In the 10 years since teachers have been allowed to carry guns in Utah, no fatal K-12 school shootings have occurred. Some argue that schools aren’t falling victim to attacks because of their unique, additional security measures. Others think guns in classrooms present more risk than potential for reward.

"I don’t deny the fact that a gun could be used to protect students," said Steven H. Gunn, a member of the board of directors of the Gun Violence Prevention Center of Utah and a Holladay city councilman, "but a gun in school is far more likely to lead to the harm of an innocent individual than to the protection of innocent people."

"A teacher could begin returning fire to a person who is attacking the school and in the process, kill children," said Gunn. "It’s just a very unhealthy, unsafe situation and teachers, unless they receive special training, simply wouldn’t know how to handle a crisis situation."

Schools are making efforts to put more stringent security measures in place, including trained law enforcement officers, strict hall access rules with automatic locks on closed doors throughout the school day, and additional emergency drills.

The National Parent Teacher Association has been active in the conversation about guns in schools and gun violence prevention. Although the PTA supports citizens’ rights to bear arms, its position statement on gun safety and violence prevention, which was adopted in 1999, states that the most effective day-to-day school climate is one that is gun-free.

It amended that statement In 2013, after the tragedy in Newtown and the introduction of legislation across the country, “to add that the association defers to local collaborative decision-making to allow for the presence of armed law enforcement only,” Heidi May, a spokeswoman for National PTA, said in an email. “The preference of the association, however, is for schools to be gun-free.”

Groups of teachers from around the country have also weighed in. The National Education Association teacher union is composed of 3 million educators and considers itself the voice of professionals across the country. According to an NEA poll of 800 members conducted in January 2013, educators are opposed to arming school employees. Only 22 percent of NEA members polled favor allowing teachers and other school employees to receive firearms training and allowing them to carry firearms in schools; 61 percent strongly opposed the proposal.

However, members of the Association of American Educators, the largest national, non-union professional teacher association in the United States, expressed mixed feelings on safety and gun issues. The results of a poll conducted in February 2014 found 61 percent of those responding supported a proposed policy in Arkansas that would allow educators access to a locked concealed firearm after a training course.

Despite the majority of AAE members supporting firearms in schools under those circumstances, only 26 percent of surveyed teachers would consider bringing a firearm to school if permitted to do so.

Laws are being passed in an attempt to reduce the recurrence and magnitude of deadly shootings in K-12 schools. Only three and a half years into this decade more people have already died in K-12 school shootings than the total number in any other decade over the last 50 years. Since 2010, 60 children and school faculty members have been shot and killed in elementary, middle and high schools. There have already been more school shootings — 24 since 2010 -- than there were in the previous decade.

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Answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper. The first two questions can be answered in 1-2 sentences. The third question needs a full-page, well thought out response.

1. Who is the intended audience for this article, and how do you know that?
2. What was the author’s purpose for writing this article, and how do you know that?
3. Do you think it is a good idea for these teachers to be able to carry guns at school? EXPLAIN your answer.