

Squad cars raced into the school's parking lot just minutes before dismissal. Handfuls of Hernando County deputies spread out around the campus, and classrooms went into lockdown mode.

For about 30 minutes, even beyond the school's final bell, teachers and students huddled in rooms while parents were forced to await word outside.

Turns out, last week's scare at the Explorer K-8 school in Spring Hill was a false alarm. Someone in a hoodie had been seen scaling a fence, but apparently was just taking a shortcut across campus.

This is the aftermath of the Parkland shooting. Of false bomb calls, and social media threats elsewhere. This is what teacher Melinda Barrett was enduring when she tried to reassure her sixth-grade math students by telling them not to be upset because she would do whatever possible to keep them safe.

"That's when one of my students said it to me. She wasn't crying, but she was dead serious," Barrett said. "She told me, 'You're my favorite teacher. I don't want you to die.' It struck me then that this is what our kids are dealing with.

"This is our reality right now."

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The evidence is in, and the verdict is clear:

The Florida Legislature made a mistake. Well-meaning or not, the recently approved school safety plan is terribly flawed. It needs to be fixed. Or adjusted. Or overhauled.

And if it takes a special session to do it, then the Legislature needs to act quickly.

The centerpiece of the plan was that schools would no longer be gun-free zones. Every campus in the state must have some type of armed staffer, whether they are law enforcement pros or not.

Lawmakers were emphatic on that point.

They were not so clear on who would pay for it.

And thus we have the great state dilemma of 2018. Day after day, it seems, some group or municipality publicly debates how to reconcile the Legislature's deceptive solution to school safety.

The Florida Sheriffs Association urged the Legislature to make funding for school resource officers its highest priority. The Florida Association of School District Superintendents just released a report that said funding for campus police was inadequate. The Florida PTA asked Gov. Rick Scott to veto the portion of the bill that called for putting guns in the hands of school employees.

School boards in the state's largest districts — representing more than half the students in Florida — have expressed great reluctance at the idea of using employees as armed guards.

The chief of police in St. Petersburg says he will have to pull officers off the street, and disband his department's gang unit, to have enough cops on campus to meet the state's criteria.

This is a law to be proud of?

"We, as the state PTA, believe there are some really good ideas in this bill (SB 7026), but it needs to be properly funded," said Angie Gallo, the legislative chair of the Florida PTA. "We believe the only person who should be armed is a school resource officer. There should not be any guns around our children that are not in the hands of a trained, law enforcement officer.

"If the Legislature needs to look at this again in a special session, then let's do that. Because we need meaningful answers that keep everyone safe, and the best way to do that is with proper funding."

This, of course, is where the debate goes off the rails.

The Legislature likes to brag about education funding being at record-high levels, but it's a disingenuous argument. It does not take into account inflation. It does not take into account new state mandates that force schools to spend more money. It does not take into account that Florida's K-12 spending is woefully inadequate when compared to the rest of the nation.

In short, that argument is a load of bull.

Scott's office has even suggested that school districts dip into their reserves to pay for security. And yet Scott doesn't appear interested in offering any of the state's \$3.3 billion in reserves to help them out.

Declaring that schools are no longer gun-free zones is not a solution, it's a campaign slogan.

If a school district likes the idea of the armed marshal program — and some smaller counties are exploring that — then they should be given that freedom.

But the state cannot demand that guns be allowed on campus without providing the resources to do it properly. Government buildings wouldn't do that. Airports wouldn't do that. Banks wouldn't do that.

And yet a place filled with children should?

The state has heard from a lot of the stakeholders in this matter, and the great majority are saying the current plan is dangerous, inadequate and improperly thought out.

If lawmakers were listening, they would acknowledge this. They would fix this.

They would do everything possible to protect your children.

