



Keeping America's Schools Safe from Gun Violence

April 7, 2017

Current federal law helps ensure that schools remain safe places of learning for students, faculty, and other personnel by limiting the ability of individuals to carry loaded, concealed guns on K-12 school grounds. This law—the Gun-Free School Zones Act, or GFSZA—was enacted with overwhelming bipartisan support more than 20 years ago and should remain in place to help keep our school communities safe from gun violence.

For two decades, the GFSZA has helped ensure that schools remain safe spaces for learning by limiting the ability of individuals to carry guns on school grounds:

- The GFSZA was enacted in 1990 and prohibits the carrying of loaded or unlocked firearms within 1,000 feet of a public, private, or parochial K-12 school.¹
- The law provides an exception for law enforcement officers acting in their official capacity and for concealed carry permit holders in some states.²
- States have also enacted laws to keep guns out of schools. Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia prohibit the possession of guns on school property, even by individuals with a valid concealed carry permit.³

Schools and other locations where guns are prohibited are not at a heightened risk for mass gun violence:

- Of the 111 mass shootings that occurred in the United States from 1966 to 2015 in which six or more people were fatally shot, only 18 occurred in places where it was restricted for civilians to carry guns.⁴
- Mass shootings are actually more likely to occur in the home, rather than in a public place. Between January 2009 and July 2015, 70 percent of mass shootings in the United States in which four or more people were killed occurred in the home, and 57 percent involved an intimate partner or a family member.⁵
- The majority of shootings that have occurred in K-12 schools did not involve a mass shooter targeting a school but rather involved a student bringing a gun to school. In fact, a 2015 analysis revealed that in 56 percent of school shooting incidents in which the age of the shooter was known, minors perpetrated these incidents. In 54 percent of the cases where the source of the firearm could be determined, the student obtained the gun from home.⁶



68 percent

of National Education Association, or NEA, members oppose allowing teachers and school staff to carry guns on school grounds.¹⁵

- Even if schools did pose a higher risk for mass shootings, armed individuals are rarely able to effectively intervene in such incidents. An FBI study of 160 active shooter incidents from 2000 to 2013 found that only one was stopped by an individual with a valid firearm permit. In contrast, 21 incidents were stopped by unarmed citizens.⁷

Allowing individuals to carry concealed, loaded guns in K-12 schools would potentially put the entire school community at risk:

- Standards for allowing individuals to carry guns vary widely from state to state. If the GFSZA is repealed, individuals with violent misdemeanor convictions, individuals with a demonstrated history of drug or alcohol abuse, or individuals who have completed no firearms safety training would be legally entitled to carry guns on school property in many states.⁸
- There have been a number of dangerous incidents involving individuals carrying guns in K-12 schools across the country:
 - In April 2017, the belongings of a kindergarten teacher at a Georgia school were searched after she was found to be intoxicated during the school day. During the search, school administrators found a loaded gun in her purse under the desk in her classroom.⁹
 - In March 2017, during an altercation between two women in a school pickup line, one of the women brandished a gun and used it to threaten the woman with whom she was arguing.¹⁰
 - In November 2016, a high school resource officer in Michigan accidentally discharged his gun and struck a teacher in the neck.¹¹
 - In September 2016, a teacher in Pennsylvania accidentally left her gun in a school bathroom used by children ages 6 to 8, where a student discovered it.¹²
 - In September 2014, a Utah elementary school teacher accidentally shot herself in the school’s bathroom.¹³
 - In January 2013, a security officer hired by a Michigan school accidentally left his firearm in a student restroom.¹⁴

Many voices from the education community oppose allowing guns in schools:

“We’re not trained sharp shooters, we’re not trained first responders. We are caregivers. ... I’m sure every educator out there would say that we want school safety, but arming teachers is not the answer.”

– **Abby Clements, second-grade teacher at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut.**¹⁶

“Guns have no place in our schools. Period. We must do everything we can to reduce the possibility of any gunfire in schools, and concentrate on ways to keep all guns off school property and ensure the safety of children and school employees.”

– **Joint statement by NEA President Dennis Van Roekel and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten.**¹⁷

202 national and state organizations—led by the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Association of School Resource Officers, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the School Social Work Association of America—endorsed a framework for school safety that opposed arming school personnel.¹⁸

Endnotes

- 18 U.S.C. § 922(q)(2). The Gun-Free School Zones Act was originally passed as part of the Crime Control Act of 1990 but was challenged as unconstitutional under the Commerce Clause of the Constitution. In *United States v. Lopez*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the law, as written, was an unconstitutional exercise of congressional authority because it did not regulate commercial or interstate activity. In 1996, Congress re-enacted the GFSZA with the previous statute's violation of the Commerce Clause corrected. The 1996 legislation contains the same prohibitions as the 1990 provision. See Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Federal Law on Guns in Schools," available at <http://smartgunlaws.org/gun-laws/federal-law/firearms-in-public-places/guns-in-schools/> (last accessed March 2017).
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