

## Research and Evaluation in Counseling

Mass school shootings, like the one in Parkland, Florida, that took the lives of 14 students and three staff in February 2018, are rare in comparison with other types of gun violence in the United States, but they have encouraged an active policy debate and legislation concerning the role of firearms in ensuring school safety. Recently, for instance, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission (2019) recommended that every middle school and high school in Florida should have an armed school resource officer and that a program allowing for trained teachers to carry concealed weapons should be greatly expanded. A similar recommendation was made in a Federal Commission on School Safety (2018) report. In contrast, some law enforcement officials, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and gun safety advocacy organizations (e.g., Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund) strongly oppose arming teachers (Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, National Education Association, and American Federation of Teachers, 2019).

How Laws Allowing Armed Staff in K-12 Schools Affect Gun Use Outcomes May Increase We found no qualifying studies showing that laws allowing armed staff in K-12 schools increased any of the eight outcomes we investigated. May Decrease We found no qualifying studies showing that laws allowing armed staff in K-12 schools decreased any of the eight outcomes we investigated. Inconclusive Evidence We found no qualifying studies showing inconclusive evidence about laws allowing armed staff in K-12 schools. No Studies Met Our Criteria Defensive Gun Use

Gun Industry Outcomes

Hunting and Recreation

Mass Shootings

Officer-Involved Shootings

Suicide

Unintentional Injuries and Deaths

Violent Crime

As discussed in our analysis of gun-free zones, two federal laws restrict who may carry guns in or around schools offering kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) education: the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990 (18 U.S.C. 922) and the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (20 U.S.C. 7961). These laws do not prohibit all people from carrying guns in schools, however. Law enforcement officers and individuals with valid state-issued concealed-carry permits are exempted from the laws' prohibitions (18 U.S.C. 922(q)(2)(B)(ii)). Furthermore, gun owners can legally keep their firearms in a locked container or a locked firearm rack in a car on school grounds, and schools can allow individuals to carry firearms on campus for use in an approved program or in accordance with a contract entered into between a school and the individual (18 U.S.C. 922(q)(2)(B)(iv)),

(v); 922(q)(3)(B)(ii), (iii)). State and local laws and school district policies often further restrict whether law enforcement officers, properly licensed teachers, or others may carry firearms at primary and secondary schools.

Those who argue in favor of arming either teachers or law enforcement officers<sup>12</sup> often called school resource officers<sup>13</sup> contend that, without guns, teachers or other staff have only limited countermeasures available to them when confronted with a shooter. They can run or hide, but fighting a shooter without a gun can require sacrificing one's own life to protect others. In addition, with more armed adults, effective response might be brought to bear more quickly. At Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, for instance, a school resource officer reached the school building under attack within 99 seconds of the first shot being fired, but 21 people had already been shot by then, nine fatally. The commission investigating this shooting concluded, "This makes clear that seconds matter and that [school resource officers] cannot be relied upon as the only protection for schools. Even if there is a rapid response by an [officer], it is insufficient in and of itself in safeguarding students and teachers." (Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission, 2019, p. 978). Finally, just the knowledge that teachers could be armed may deter some would-be shooters.

Arguments against arming teachers and school resource officers highlight the elevated risk of accidents and negligent use of firearms as more adults in schools are armed. The Associated Press reported, for instance, that there were more than 30 incidents between 2014 and 2018 that involved a firearm brought to a school by a law enforcement officer or that involved a teacher improperly discharging or losing control of a weapon (Penzenstadler, Foley, and Fenn, 2017). This compares with around 20 active-shooter attacks at schools over a comparable period (Cai and Patel, 2019). When even trained police officers have been found to successfully hit their intended targets in just 18 percent of incidents involving an exchange of gunfire (Rostker et al., 2008), critics question whether teachers can be expected to effectively return fire without inadvertently injuring the children they mean to protect (Vince, Wolfe, and Field, 2015). Finally, if teachers are holding guns or engaged in gunfire, it may make the job of law enforcement officers more difficult and dangerous when they arrive at the scene. Officers could mistake the teacher for an active shooter or could themselves be inadvertently shot by the teacher.

Data capturing firearm use on school campuses suggest that rates of violence on K-12 campuses have decreased substantially in the past few decades. Since the introduction of federal regulations related to guns on school property, rates of students carrying weapons in general and to school have decreased. In 1993, 22 percent of students

in grades 9â€"12 carried a weapon, such as a gun or knife, in general; in 2017, about 16 percent of students carried a weapon in general (Musu et al., 2019). The percentage of students carrying weapons to school has also decreased. In 1993, 12 percent of students reported carrying a weapon on school property during the previous 30 days; in 2017, only 4 percent of students reported bringing a weapon to school (Musu et al., 2019).

Although discussions about firearm deaths of children are often dominated by discussions about mass school shootings, these events are relatively rare. Research finds that most students killed with firearms are shot in their own homes, typically because of a domestic dispute, accidental or negligent discharge of a gun, or suicide (Fowler et al., 2017). Deaths that take place on school property make up a small portion of all violent deaths among youth aged 5â€"18. Between 2015 and 2016, 1.2 percent of youth homicides and 0.2 percent of youth suicides took place on school property (Musu et al., 2019). Therefore, even policies that effectively reduce gun violence on Kâ€"12 campuses are likely to produce only a small absolute change in the overall rates of injury and may, therefore, be difficult to reliably detect.

It is unclear how policies increasing the number of authorized guns in schools would affect the gun industry. It is possible that allowing school resource officers, teachers, and other adults to carry weapons on Kâ€"12 campuses could create a new demand for specialized training or practice. However, surveys suggest that most teachers are opposed to bringing guns into schools, so uptake on teacher firearm certification may be low (Brenan, 2018).

Whether arming teachers and school resource officers leads to net harms or benefits is an empirical question that could be addressed with strong scientific research designs. Estimating these impacts with observational designs is complicated by the fact that state statutes often dictate that decisions around carrying a firearm in Kâ€"12 schools are made at the level of the school district or individual school. However, there is no comprehensive accounting of the extent to which school districts allow teachers or school personnel to carry guns, and this can vary widely across states (Lott, 2019; Richmond, 2019). Unlike many state laws for which experimental control over exposure to the effects of the law would never be feasible, states or possibly even school districts could possibly conduct randomized controlled trials to evaluate the effects of some school policies on gun violence, suicides, mass shootings, and accidental injuries. Nevertheless, an important obstacle to the success of such an experiment would be the low base rate of gun violence experienced by schools in the United States. Thus, it may be difficult to detect the effects of these policies unless many schools were included in the experiment over what might be several years of data collection.

State Implementation of Laws Allowing Armed Staff in K-12 Schools

Staff with a Concealed-Carry Permit Are Authorized to Carry Firearms AL

AK

AZ

AR

CA

CO

CT

DE

DC

FL

GA

HI

ID

IL

IN

IA

KS

KY

LA

ME

MD

MA

MI

MN

MS

MO

MT

NE

NV

NH

NJ

NM  
NY  
NC  
ND  
OH  
OK  
OR  
PA  
RI  
SC  
SD  
TN  
TX  
UT  
VT  
VA

WA

WV

WI

WY Data for this figure were drawn from research by the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

State implementation data valid as of January 1, 2020.

As of January 1, 2020, 28 states allow schools to arm teachers or staff in at least some cases or as part of a specific program.[1] In some of these states, such as Arkansas and Colorado, there are no statutes allowing armed school personnel but also no laws explicitly prohibiting it, and state policymakers have decided to allow or encourage the arming of teachers, in sometimes innovative ways. In Arkansas, for example, the carrying of firearms on school grounds is prohibited, but there is an exception for law enforcement officers and "registered commissioned security guards." Some school districts, claiming a lack of resources to hire conventional guards, have "obtained licenses from the Arkansas Board of Private Investigators and Private Security Agencies . . . designating school employees as security guards and allowing them to carry firearms on campus" (Keller, 2014, p. 688).

In contrast, several states, such as Missouri and Montana, have laws that do explicitly authorize teachers or other staff to be armed.[2] The states differ with respect to who can be armed and under what circumstances. Alabama's sentry program, for example, allows administrators in schools without a school resource officer to maintain and use authorized weapons (Ivey, 2018). Texas has a school marshal program, in which the board of trustees of the school district or governing body of a charter school may appoint one marshal for every 200 students or for each building of the campus, subject to various other rules.[3] In distressed rural counties in Tennessee, schools may implement policies allowing the selection of certain employees to carry concealed weapons.[4] Several states, including Colorado, Montana, and Ohio, allow armed teachers if the school district or charter school allows it.[5] Other states, such as Indiana, allow individuals (including teachers) who have been specifically authorized by the school board to carry firearms on school property.[6] Five states allow any individual with a concealed-carry permit to carry a gun into a K&#12 school,[7] and Wyoming allows school employees with such permits to carry a gun on school grounds.[8] Relatedly, some states allow any licensed concealed-carry permit holders who have been authorized by the school

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district or other relevant authority (as in Idaho) or enhanced permit holders performing their official duties (as in Mississippi) to carry weapons onto school property.[9]

## Reference

[Introduction to Statistics and Research Methods: Becoming a Psychological Detective, An](#)

[The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods in Clinical Psychology \(Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology\)](#)