



# GUN VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

AUGUST 2016 - MARCH 2017

On an ordinary morning in September, the sound of gunshots rang out in the hallway of a rural Illinois high school. Teachers piled objects against their classroom doors and prepared to throw whatever was in reach at a shooter. Then police officers converged to assess the teachers' efforts. This wasn't an actual shooting, but a drill to prepare for the real thing.<sup>1</sup>

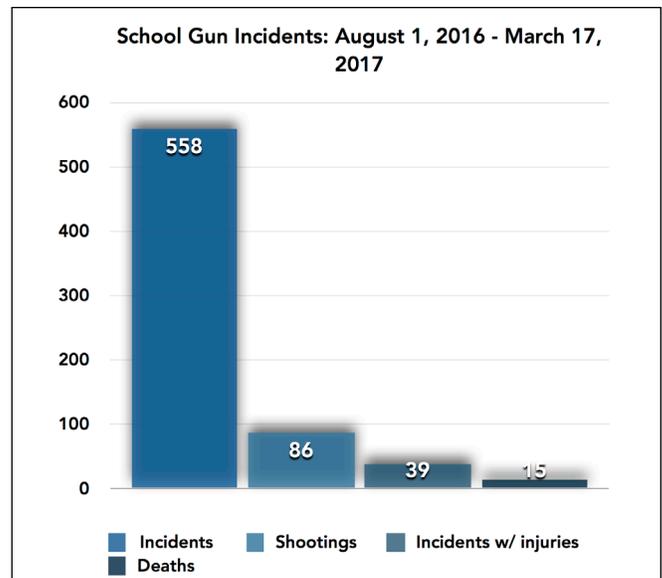
Active shooter drills and other preparation measures are becoming more and more common in American schools. The Associated Press reported that in 2016 two thirds of school districts surveyed in America conduct drills to prepare for school shootings. Even when schools do their best to prepare for the worst, when guns fall into the wrong hands things quickly turn deadly.

### What the data show

Using data compiled by the Gun Violence Archive, the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence identified 558 gun incidents in schools in the first seven and a half months of the 2016-2017 school year – between August 1, 2016 and March 17, 2017.<sup>2</sup> These incidents vary in type and scale, and include (but are not limited to) homicides; suicides; robberies; threats of a firearm or in the presence of a firearm; and shots fired in the vicinity of schools/universities. These incidents took place at K-12 education centers and colleges/universities, including the schools' parking lots, athletic facilities, dormitories and campus housing, school buses, and bus stops. We have been inclusive in this regard to encapsulate all scenarios that may disrupt what should be an environment created for the purpose of learning and growing. This report details our findings.

Fifteen people died in gun-related incidents on school property between August and mid-March. For example:

- On September 23, 2016, an elementary school in Townville, South Carolina held an active shooter drill. Just five days later, a teenager brought a gun to the elementary schoolyard after shooting his father. The teenager then shot a teacher and two students. A six year old boy was killed.<sup>3</sup>
- On October 25, 2016 a 14-year-old boy brought a loaded gun to his Utah school, shooting another student in the head after the two boys got into an altercation.<sup>4</sup>
- And on March 28, 2017 a 16-year-old boy was found shot to death in the parking lot of a Pennsylvania middle school where he often played basketball. Volleyball and track practices were being held nearby, and while students heard shots, there were no known witnesses to the murder, and as of the publishing of this report the perpetrator is still unknown.<sup>5</sup>



Most gun incidents at schools this academic year have not resulted in fatalities, although even the presence of a gun at a school, bus stop, football game, or school parking lot is itself a terrifying prospect for students, educators, and families. A gun does not need to be fired to frighten people, to bully students, or to disrupt the school day. Thirteen separate incidents have resulted in fifteen deaths, and there have been an additional 39 incidents that resulted in an injury. The chart on page one shows incidents of guns at school during the first seven and a half months of the school year.

Several additional incidents have included close calls. For example, a 14-year-old brought a gun to a middle school in Tennessee and planned to shoot fellow students, but a guidance counselor talked him out of it.<sup>6</sup> In another incident, a sixth grader in Alabama was arrested for pulling out a handgun on a school bus and holding it against another student's head.<sup>7</sup>

Out of 86 school shootings, 30 took place at high schools, and 16 occurred at middle or elementary schools. Seven incidents took place on school buses or at bus stops. The remaining 33 occurred on or near college campuses (including academic buildings, athletic facilities, dormitories, and other campus housing).

### **Where do kids get guns for school shootings?**

We don't know the source of every gun used in a school incident. But past research showed 68 percent of guns used in school shootings come from the shooter's home or the home of a relative. The same likely holds true for other incidents involving guns at school.

For example, in early March 2017, when a six-year-old boy came home from school with a gun in his backpack, his grandmother found the weapon and called the boy's school. It took police two weeks to figure out the gun was originally brought to school by another child, who had access to his parent's gun safe. We know that ease of access to firearms in

the home is dangerous for children, including increasing the chances of accidental shootings in the home.

And what we know about the gun incidents so far this school year is consistent with the research that access to a gun in the home makes children less safe:

- The gun from Alabama, where a child held a handgun to a fellow student's head on the school bus, belonged to the child's grandfather;
- The Utah teen who shot a classmate in the head used his mother's gun;
- And the gun brought to school in Tennessee, which a guidance counselor convinced the child to surrender to her, was from his home.<sup>8</sup>

### **Reducing school shootings**

We already know how to reduce school shootings.

Parents should know the facts about the dangers that guns in the home pose, and they should be certain that any guns in their homes -- or in the homes where their children play -- are stored safely. Yet, in the United States, 1.7 million children have access to an unlocked, loaded gun in their home. Tragedies can be avoided if parents take simple steps to ensure these guns are not accessible to their children. Parents who are considering owning a gun should be aware of the dangers of keeping a gun in the home, and review guidelines from the American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) or the Brady Center's Asking Saves Kids (ASK).

Second, we can help our kids identify and report plans by other students to bring guns to schools. In 4 out of 5 school shootings, at least one other person has knowledge of the attackers' plan.<sup>9</sup> Students can safely and anonymously report suspected threats 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-866-SPEAK-UP. The hotline is staffed by trained counselors who handle threat reports and work with local law

enforcement, following a protocol developed in collaboration with leading experts in law enforcement and education.

Active shooter drills appear to be increasingly common, and perhaps necessary, as children are being exposed to violence in yet another place that should be considered safe. We should use tools available to us to prevent guns from falling in the hands of those we all agree shouldn't have them—including unsupervised children and teens who typically obtain their firearms from the home of a loved one.

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1–[http://www.daily-journal.com/news/local/active-shooter-training-has-changed-dramatically-here-s-what-your/article\\_3e-c57e9e-5d38-5a91-91aa-59a19c6b3a68.html](http://www.daily-journal.com/news/local/active-shooter-training-has-changed-dramatically-here-s-what-your/article_3e-c57e9e-5d38-5a91-91aa-59a19c6b3a68.html)

2–Data from <http://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>, August 1, 2016 to March 17, 2017.

3–<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-09-29/townville-elementary-had-practiced-for-active-shooter-days-prior-to-shooting>

4–<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865674971/Boy-who-shot-teen-at-Sandy-school-sentenced-to-juvenile-detention.html>

5– <http://triblive.com/local/pennhills/12129448-74/man-shot-near-linton-middle-school-in-penn-hills>

6–<http://www.wsmv.com/story/33279532/sheriff-14-year-old-planned-to-shoot-students-at-sycamore-middle>

7–<http://www.fox10tv.com/story/33044552/11-year-old-arrested-for-bringing-gun-on-school-bus-and-pointing-it-at-another-student>

8–<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/09/30/a-teen-brought-a-gun-to-his-middle-school-this-counselor-talked-him-out-of-killing-teachers-and-a-cop/>

9–<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>