



# SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURE FIREARM STORAGE

**Bottom Line: School officials can pass resolutions to ensure parents know about how secure gun storage can prevent school shootings. In the vast majority of active shooter incidents in K-12 schools, the shooter or shooters were school-age and were current or former students. They also obtained their guns from their home or the homes of relatives. While millions of responsible gun owners follow recommended storage practices, research shows that more than half of gun owners do not store all of their guns securely.<sup>1</sup> Oftentimes, the guns taken from the home and used by school-age shooters were easily accessible or were not stored securely. By taking proactive steps to promote responsible gun ownership and secure firearm storage, schools can prevent school gun violence and help keep school communities safe.**

## INTRODUCTION

Unauthorized access to firearms is a major source of gun violence among young people in the United States. An estimated 4.6 million children in the US live in households with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm.<sup>2</sup> This exposure increases the risk of gun violence among youth. And there is strong evidence that in school gun violence incidents, shooters are exploiting unsecured and easily accessible firearms. Everytown for Gun Safety, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers have released a comprehensive set of evidence-based solutions to intervene and prevent school gun violence,<sup>3</sup> and secure firearm storage is an essential component to any effective strategy to keep schools safe.

## KEY FINDINGS

**The perpetrators of school gun violence are students or recent graduates.** The New York City Police Department reviewed 57 active shooter incidents in K-12 schools in the United States from 1966 to 2016. The NYPD found that in 75 percent of these incidents, the shooter or shooters were school-age and were current or former students.<sup>4</sup> Research has also shown that in the six mass school shootings and 39 attempted mass school shootings in the US between April 1999 and May 2019, 91 percent were current or former students at the school.<sup>5</sup>

**The overwhelming majority of firearms used in school gun violence incidents are obtained from the shooter's home, the homes of relatives, or the homes of friends.** The US Secret Service studied targeted school violence from 2008 through 2017. The study showed that three in four school shooters used a firearm they took from a parent or close relative's home. In nearly half of these shootings, the firearm was easily accessible or was not stored securely.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cassandra K. Crifasi et al., "Storage Practices of US Gun Owners in 2016," *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 4 (2018): 532–37, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304262>.

<sup>2</sup> Deborah Azrael et al., "Firearm Storage in Gun-Ownning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey," *Journal of Urban Health* 95, no. 3 (June 2018): 295–304, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0261-7>.

<sup>3</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, American Federation of Teachers, and National Education Association, "Keeping Our Schools Safe: A Plan for Preventing Mass Shootings and Ending All Gun Violence in American Schools," February 2020, <https://www.everytownresearch.org/school-safety-plan>.

<sup>4</sup> New York City Police Department, "Active Shooter: Recommendations and Analysis for Risk Mitigation," 2016, <https://on.nyc.gov/2nWHM4Q>.

<sup>5</sup> Jillian Peterson and James Densley, "School Shooters Usually Show These Signs of Distress Long before They Open Fire, Our Database Shows," *The Conversation*, February 8, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2vBTA3j>.

<sup>6</sup> National Threat Assessment Center et al., "Protecting America's Schools: A US Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence" (US Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security, 2019), <https://bit.ly/2U7vnwa>.



### **Access to unsecured firearms also contributes to gun violence among children and teens.**

Every year, nearly 350 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else.<sup>7</sup> That's roughly one unintentional shooting per day.<sup>8</sup> Another 700 children die by gun suicide each year,<sup>9</sup> most often using guns belonging to a family member.<sup>10</sup> Over 80 percent of child firearm suicides take place in a home.<sup>11</sup>

### **Secure firearm storage can help prevent school gun violence and gun violence among children and teens.**

Research shows that secure firearm storage practices are associated with reductions in the risk of self-inflicted and unintentional firearm injuries among children and teens. One study found that households that locked both firearms and ammunition were associated with a 78 percent lower risk of self-inflicted firearm injuries and an 85 percent lower risk of unintentional firearm injuries among children and teens, compared to those that locked neither.<sup>12</sup>

**Policymakers should encourage a culture of secure gun storage by increasing awareness of secure storage practices.** Across the country, lawmakers, community members, and local leaders are working together to implement public awareness campaigns—such as the Be SMART program—that encourage secure gun storage practices and highlight the public safety risks of unsecured guns.<sup>13</sup>

Since 2019, school districts across the country have passed school board resolutions to require that information be sent home with students to educate parents about the importance of securely storing any firearms they own.<sup>14</sup> In some school districts, parents or guardians are required to sign and return a letter acknowledging that they have read the information. This type of action is a simple yet effective step that others can and should take to protect our students. Learn more about the Be SMART program and at [BeSMARTforkids.org](https://besmartforkids.org).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Local school districts should take proactive steps to address the safety of students and the school community by building awareness of the need for secure firearm storage practices.

1. Twenty-two states, DC, and several localities have some form of secure firearm storage law.<sup>15</sup> In these places, schools can notify parents of these laws and the importance of secure gun storage.
2. In localities without a secure firearm storage law, schools can bridge the gap and provide families with information about secure firearm storage and its importance in keeping schools safe.

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<sup>7</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "#NotAnAccident Index," <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/notanaccident/>. Analysis includes incidents that occurred between 2015 and 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "#NotAnAccident Index," <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/notanaccident/>. Analysis includes incidents that occurred between 2015 and 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using five years of most recent available data: 2015 to 2019. Children defined as aged 0 to 17.

<sup>10</sup> Renee M. Johnson et al., "Who Are the Owners of Firearms Used in Adolescent Suicides?," *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior* 40, no. 6 (2010): 609–11, <https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.2010.40.6.609>.

<sup>11</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), Ages 0-17, Five-Year Average: 2013 to 2017.

<sup>12</sup> David C. Grossman et al., "Gun Storage Practices and Risk of Youth Suicide and Unintentional Firearm Injuries," *JAMA* 293, no. 6 (2005): 707–14, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.293.6.707>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://besmartforkids.org/>

<sup>14</sup> Some of the larger school districts that have passed secure storage notification resolutions include the Los Angeles Unified School District, San Diego Unified School District, Clark County School District, Phoenix Union High School District, Tucson Unified School District, and Denver Public Schools and County School District.

<sup>15</sup> CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, IL, IA, HI, MA, MN, MD, NV, NH, NJ, NC, NY, OR, RI, TX, VA, WA, WI. In addition, localities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City have secure firearm storage ordinances.