

## Should We Arm School Staff or Just Limit Guns to Law Enforcement?

The idea of teachers packing heat in class may unnerve some parents. Ken Trump, president of National School Safety and Security Services, is not crazy about the idea, either. However, officials in a remote Texas district recently announced that staff can carry pistols. In other states, teachers with concealed weapons permits may want the same right.

**School weapons policies tend to be very clear about possession by students, but they don't always address staff.** "School administrators can better resolve parents' questions and fears when policies encompass everyone on campus", Trump said. The former Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, reauthorized by No Child Left Behind, requires authorities to expel a student for at least a year for having a gun on campus. It's silent about adult gun possession. However, Trump said officials "take on an enormous amount of responsibility and liability when they let staff carry guns at school".

### Federal Law Doesn't Address All Adults

The Gun-Free Zones Act of 1990 bars adults from bringing a gun within 1,000 feet of a school, but has two exceptions. A person can carry a gun if he's crossing campus to reach a hunting area. And unless state law says otherwise, people can bring guns to school.

For example, staff at the Harvard School District in Texas can be armed if they have a state license to carry a concealed handgun. They must also obtain district permission, be trained in managing crisis and hostile situations, and use bullets with the lowest tendency to ricochet.

### Consider Options

Trump advises against school staff carrying handguns on campus. Instead, he said district officials should revise written policy so that only public safety officials can be armed at school. There's a big difference. Trump said, between certified full-time law enforcement officers protecting students, "vs. teachers, custodians, cafeteria workers" and others who may not have law enforcement training.

Trump advised school authorities to weight the following questions:

- Does the district have policies and procedures that govern firearms possession?
- Does policy stipulate under what circumstances staff can use firearms?
- How do rules for staff use of firearms compare to rules for public safety professionals?
- What types of weapons should staff be allowed to carry – or not?
- What type of firearms training would the district provide on a regular, ongoing basis?
- What type of weapons retention training would be provided?
- What steps would reduce the risk of a staff member being disarmed or losing control of a firearm during a student altercation?

- How would the district prevent or manage lost, misplaced or stolen staff firearms?
- How would the district manage an accidental shooting?
- What other options are there for protecting students? Has anyone looked into hiring a trained, school-based law enforcement officer?

### Address Issues in Writing

To keep weapons off campus, Trump suggested you cover the following points in your policy language:

**Who.** State that all employees, parents and visitors, except law enforcement officers, are barred from possessing weapons on campus. Exempt district safety officers who meet local and state guidelines for firearms certification and training.

**What.** Reference the zero-tolerance weapons policy for students and explain any revisions applicable to that policy.

**Where.** State that the policy applies inside buildings, campus, on school buses, and at all school activities. Include anyone entering or departing campus. No one should bring a gun to school in a vehicle except law enforcement officers. Consider whether you want to bar weapons at school bus stops. If so, consult a school attorney to see if you can.

**Penalties.** State that violators will face police investigation and possible criminal charges. Violators employed by the district face dismissal and may be barred from campus if they're considered a threat.

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# Now...BE CAREFUL!

## Consider local factors before changing gun policies

In most school shootings, administrators and staff will likely have to take some action to handle the situation until law enforcement can arrive – even with the quickest response times. Trying to subdue an armed student or intruder is a tall order for unarmed staff. That's especially true in rural areas, where it could take time for first responders to arrive. **That's why the Harrold School District in Texas opted to let staff carry concealed guns at school.** Administrators considering whether staff should carry guns in school need to evaluate all the local factors to determine if that's the most sensible choice.

### Face Rural Issue

"However, the practice of arming staff in rural schools may be more widespread than most people realize", said Mike Dorn, Director of Safe Havens International in Macon, GA. Dorn, who speaks at safety conferences nationwide. He's been told a number of times by officials in rural districts that they're authorized to carry a weapon on campus or have a firearm close at hand in the event of an emergency. While he wouldn't ordinarily suggest that educators have firearms on campus, "I would not absolutely rule out extremely rare circumstances where an educator having a firearm available would not be acceptable," Dorn said. He's worked with small, rural schools "where the school system is far too small to fund a school resource officer and the community has no police services."

### Evaluate practical safeguards

However, Dorn said “administrators need to weigh a number of factors to ensure their weapons policy fits their school”.

### Evaluate local factors

Calculate average law enforcement response times. Dorn said that in rural areas, he’s seen average response times of more than 30 minutes. “even for an emergency.” Therefore, he said, he’s loath to second-guess school officials who feel the need for a policy allowing approved school staff to be armed. For example, Harrold officials calculated that a law enforcement response time could be up to 25 minutes.

### Enforce strict guidelines

Usually school officials only arm staff as a last resort after exhausting alternatives, Dorn said. Then, it’s important to enforce strict guidelines. For example, at Harrold, staff who carry a weapon on campus must first:

- Have a Texas license to carry a concealed handgun.
- Be authorized by the school district to carry a gun.
- Use ammunition designed to minimize the risk of ricocheting bullets.

### Look at educators’ backgrounds

While many teachers tend not to have the weapons training that law enforcement officers get, many educators do have a military or law enforcement backgrounds, Dorn noted. Some staff may have prior training that could be updated.

### Consider special circumstances

Ask whether exigent circumstances may justify certain staff being armed or having a firearm available. In the latter case, a weapon may be locked in storage, but accessible in emergencies. Those could include:

1. **A violent attack.** Armed school staff have been known to end violent attacks without actually firing their weapons. For example, in 1997, an armed vice principal stopped Luke Woodham’s killing spree at Pearl High School in Mississippi. The student killed two classmates and shot seven others. The shooter was attempting to leave the campus in a vehicle as students were running down the road trying to get away from him. Police feared Woodham would injure or kill many more students. The vice principal retrieved his pistol from his truck and confronted the shooter, who surrendered at gunpoint. The administrators turned the gunman over to law enforcement. Woodham is serving three life sentences.
2. **Duties that require personal protection.** In high-crime urban areas, school administrators have carried guns for personal protection when responding to silent alarms.
3. **A community disaster.** Staff has carried weapons after natural disasters when law enforcement officers are too busy to respond to school calls.

Contact Mike Dorn at [schoolsafety@hotmail.com](mailto:schoolsafety@hotmail.com)

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## NATIONAL NEWS!

### **Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom**

Designed for elementary school educators and district-level administrators, this guide offers prevention, implementation, and school wide strategies that can be used to reduce problematic behavior that interferes with the ability of students to attend to and engage fully in instructional activities.

For the full report go to:

[http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/behavior\\_pg\\_092308.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/behavior_pg_092308.pdf)

### **Dropout Prevention**

Geared toward educators, administrators, and policymakers, this guide provides recommendations that focus on reducing high school dropout rates. Strategies presented include identifying and advocating for at-risk students, implementing programs to improve behavior and social skills, and keeping students engaged in the school environment.

For the full report go to:

[http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dp\\_pg\\_090308.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dp_pg_090308.pdf)

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## **Two statistics for thought!?**

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), In 2006, U.S. law enforcement agencies made an estimated 2.2 million arrests of persons under age 18.

In 1994, 1 of 6 alleged murder offenders known to law enforcement was younger than 18.

**In 2006, the ratio was 1 in 11.**

**AND**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has published the report "Lives Saved in 2007 by Restraint Use and Minimum Age Drinking Laws."

According to the report, 21-year-old minimum age drinking age laws **have prevented** an estimated 4,441 drunken driving deaths in the last five years alone!

## Upcoming Events and Trainings

### **Critical Thinking for Law Enforcement**

8 hrs. TCLEOSE Certification  
 December 10, 2008  
 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.; ESC-20  
 Workshop# CA81210-K11  
 Fee: \$35; SDFSC Coop and REMS  
 Consortium: No Cost

### **Creating and Maintaining Safe Schools**

December 11, 2008  
 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.; ESC-20  
 Workshop# CA81211-K11  
 Fee: \$75; REMS Consortium: No Cost

### **Law Enforcement Leadership**

8 hrs. TCLEOSE Certification  
 December 11, 2008  
 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.; ESC-20  
 Workshop# CA81211-K11  
 Fee: \$35; SDFSC Coop and REMS  
 Consortium: No Cost

### **Family Violence & Sexual Assault Part II: Investigative Techniques, Stalking, & Issues in Immigrant Communities**

8 hrs. TCLEOSE Certification  
 January 15, 2009  
 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.; ESC-20  
 Workshop # CF90115-K01  
 Fee: No Cost

### **Parenting and Paternity Awareness Training**

January 20, 2008  
 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.; ESC-20  
 Workshop #: CF90121-K01  
 Fee: No Cost

### **Emergency Preparation for Counseling Recovery Teams**

January 12, 2009  
 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.; ESC-20  
 Workshop# CA90112-K11  
 Fee: \$35; REMS Consortium: No Cost

### **Critical Incident Response Management**

January 13, 2009  
 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.; ESC-20  
 Workshop# CA90113-K11  
 Fee: \$75; REMS Consortium: No Cost

### **Critical Incident Response Management**

January 14, 2009  
 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.; ESC-20  
 Workshop# CA90114-K11  
 Fee: \$75; REMS Consortium: No Cost

**Is My School/District Ready for Traumatic Events?**

January 15, 2009

8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.; ESC-20

Workshop# CA90115-K11

Fee: \$35; REMS Consortium: No Cost

**Critical Response from Beginning to End & Best Practices Using N.O.V.A. (2 Days)**

January 21 &amp; 22, 2009

8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.; ESC-20

Workshop # CC90121-K21

Fee: \$100; REMS Consortium: No Cost

**Family and Community Involvement Symposium**

January 27, 2009

8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.; ESC-20

Workshop # SD90127-D52

Fee: No Cost

**SDFSC Co-op:**

If your school is located within the following district areas, then eligibility is granted unto the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Cooperative for the 2008-2009 school year. Specific course offerings are listed at no cost.

Brackett ISD, Crystal City ISD, Devine ISD, D'Hanis ISD, Dilley ISD, Ft. Sam Houston ISD, Hondo ISD, Ingram ISD, Knippa ISD, Lackland ISD, La Vernia ISD, Lytle ISD, Natalia ISD, Pleasanton ISD, Poth ISD, Randolph Field ISD, Southside ISD, Stockdale ISD, School of Excellence, Guardian Angel Academy, Por Vida Academy, Southwest Preparatory, Gabriel Tafolla, John H. Wood, Jubilee Academy, Positive Solution, George I. Sanchez

**Office of Safe and Drug- Free Schools and Communities  
Education Service Center, Region 20**

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