



A Conservative Approach to Improving School Safety

Policy White Paper

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I. Introduction and background

On May 24, 2022, a mass shooting took place at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, claiming the lives of 21 Texans. Two teachers and 19 students died; a further 17 victims were injured. The horrifying tragedy garnered national attention, sparking an investigation and policy discussions examining how such a horrific incident took place and what measures can be taken to prevent similar tragedies from occurring. Unfortunately, the debate was politicized by gun control advocates who, in keeping with their established tradition, seized upon the tragedy to argue for steps that, if taken, would weaken Second Amendment rights while failing to deter mass shootings in schools.

Gun control proponents frequently call for continuing the policy of gun-free school zones, raising the minimum age to purchase any weapon to 21, and banning “assault-style” weapons. Such proposed policies, however, will do nothing to stop a person determined to carry out a mass shooting; rather, they would amount to no more than policies enacted to give their proponents visceral satisfaction that the country has taken decisive action after a tragedy- that “something has been done.”

Analysis of previous mass shootings- in particular the nine mass shootings at grade schools and high schools that have occurred over the last 24 years and are discussed below- reveal how inadequate gun control proponents’ favored policies are. Each of these crimes occurred in a school that was a gun-free zone. According to an updated 2018 study by John Lott, 96 percent of mass shootings between January 1998 and December 2015 occurred in gun-free zones, indicating that the primary gun control policy utilized at schools does nothing to deter mass shootings.ⁱ Indeed, it is possible that making schools (nominally) gun-free zones actually *increases* the odds of a mass shooting on their premises, because the attackers can have a greater degree of confidence that they will not encounter armed resistance until law enforcement arrives.

Raising the minimum age for firearm purchases to 21 would be similarly ineffective. In the aftermath of the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School by a 19-year old man, a report by the

Federal Commission on School Safety reviewed a number of studies examining school shootings and concluded that, “Existing research does not demonstrate that laws imposing a minimum age for firearms purchases have a measurable impact on reducing homicides, suicides, or unintentional deaths.”ⁱⁱ

A ban on “assault” weapons, which effectively targets all semi-automatic rifles, would not be effective either; only four of the nine K-12 mass shooters discussed below utilized a semi-automatic weapon in their respective crimes. Furthermore, of those four, two carried a secondary weapon, such as a shotgun or handgun. This suggests that if an “assault-style” weapon ban had been in place at the time of these shootings, it would not have deterred the offenders; rather, they would simply have selected another weapon. In fact, seven of the nine shooters utilized a handgun in the commission of their crime, and six of the nine used illegally obtained firearms in their respective crimes.

Even one K-12 mass shooting is too many, and policies must be enacted to prevent future instances. It is important to realize, however, that such events are exceedingly rare. Since the Columbine High School Shooting in 1999, only eight such incidents have occurred in the United States. It is critically important to distinguish these horrific K-12 mass shootings from the incidents that gun control advocates group under the umbrella term “school shooting.” The latter category includes, for example, an instance in which “a 21-year-old man [who] was shot and injured in the parking lot after a school basketball game.”ⁱⁱⁱ All reasonable people recognize that such an occurrence is cause for concern, but gun control advocates intentionally conflate such incidents with K-12 mass shootings that take a terrible emotional and psychological toll on all of society. Counting these “school shootings” is necessary to make claims such as, “there were 51 school shootings in 2022 that resulted in injuries or deaths.”^{iv} What gun control proponents do not say is that these shootings include those which occurred near a school, accidental discharges during law enforcement vocational training, shootings associated with drug deals, and drive-by shootings.

While these other incidents are tragic, attempting to mislead the public into thinking that 51 shootings similar to that of Uvalde occurred in a single year, for the purpose of advancing a political goal, is deeply troubling. Similar claims, such as “355 mass shootings this year [2015]” or that the U.S. averaged “more than one mass shooting per day [in 2015]” are based on wildly inflated statistics, a practice which Mark Follman of *Mother Jones* acknowledges “isn’t just misleading the public—it’s stirring undue fear and may be encouraging bad policies.”^v

Given this manipulation of the facts, it is important to define what a K-12 mass shooting is and then analyze specific cases to systematically target the problem with policy solutions. In its compilation of mass shootings in the U.S. since 1982, *Mother Jones* follows the definition of “mass public shooting” as defined by the Congressional Research Service:

... [A] multiple homicide incident in which four or more victims are murdered with firearms—not including the offender(s)—within one event, and at least some of the murders occurred in a public location or locations in close geographical proximity (e.g., a workplace, school, restaurant, or other public settings), and the murders are not

attributable to any other underlying criminal activity or commonplace circumstance (armed robbery, criminal competition, insurance fraud, argument, or romantic triangle).^{vi}

A K-12 mass shooting is simply a mass shooting that takes places at a K-12 school facility. The table below lists K-12 mass shootings in the United States since 1999 (including the Columbine incident in 1999).

<i>Incident</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Fatalities</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Total Victims</i>
<i>Robb Elementary School Shooting</i>	Uvalde, Texas	May 2022	21	17	38
<i>Oxford High School Shooting</i>	Oxford, Michigan	Nov. 2021	4	7	11
<i>Santa Fe High School Shooting</i>	Santa Fe, Texas	May 2018	10	13	23
<i>Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting</i>	Parkland, Florida	Feb. 2018	17	17	34
<i>Marysville-Pilchuck High School Shooting</i>	Marysville, Washington	Oct. 2014	5	3	8
<i>Sandy Hook Elementary Shooting</i>	Newtown, Connecticut	Dec. 2012	27	2	29
<i>West Nickel Mines Amish School Shooting</i>	Lancaster County, Pennsylvania	Oct. 2006	5	5	10
<i>Red Lake Senior High School shooting</i>	Red Lake, Minnesota	March 2005	7	7	14
<i>Columbine High School shooting</i>	Littleton, Colorado	April 1999	13	24	37
Total			109	95	204

The above shootings have scarred the American psyche, to the extent that most can be cited by name and recognized by most Americans. These shootings differ dramatically from “school shootings” as gun control proponents loosely define the phrase. Although the nine incidents in the above table differ in important ways, when viewed as a whole they offer some hints of policies that are likely to be effective at deterring and responding to K-12 mass shootings.

Policymakers in Texas and across the nation should dismiss proposals that infringe upon the Second Amendment, such as banning semi-automatic rifles and prohibiting adults under a certain age from purchasing firearms. It would be vastly more productive to instead acknowledge the reality that angry and/or mentally disturbed people may gain access to a firearms, and focus on how K-12 schools can best be protected from such people. None of the following steps is a stand-alone solution to the problem, but taken together, they have great potential to protect school children.

- 1) Subject every K-12 school campus in Texas to a risk assessment, and repeat this periodically;
- 2) Make physical changes to schools to offer better security, sometimes referred to as “target hardening.”
- 3) Maximize the ability of school personnel to quickly notify law enforcement and medical emergency personnel of a shooting;
- 4) Improve training for law enforcement, teachers, and school districts; and
- 5) Utilize emerging technology to increase the situational awareness of law enforcement and medical emergency personnel responding to a K-12 mass shooting.

II. Subject every K-12 school campus in Texas to a risk assessment, and repeat this periodically

A useful first step for a K-12 school in responding to the threat of mass shooting is to identify its specific vulnerabilities. Vulnerabilities can come in countless forms and vary in their degree of seriousness: a broken lock, an entry or exit not covered by a security camera, lack of an armed school marshal, and confusion among staff regarding the steps to follow in case of a mass shooting are just a few examples.

Following the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting in Connecticut, Florida created a program called the Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT), codified as Chapter 1006, Section 1493 of the Florida Statutes. The program was implemented in 2014 and bolstered following the 2018 Stoneman Douglass shooting, after which it required every school in the state to undergo an annual risk assessment.

The purpose of the FSSAT is to “help school officials identify threats, vulnerabilities, and appropriate safety controls for the schools that they supervise.”^{vii} The relevant statute provides that, at a minimum, the FSSAT for a school must address:

- School emergency and crisis preparedness planning;
- Security, crime, and violence prevention policies and strategies;
- Physical security measures;
- Any need for professional development training;
- An examination of support service roles in school safety, security, and emergency planning;
- School security and school police staffing, operational practices, and related services;
- School and community collaboration on school safety; and
- A return-on-investment analysis of the recommended physical security controls.^{viii}

The statute directs the applicable state agency “to contract with a security consulting firm that specializes in the development of risk assessment software solutions and has experience in conducting security assessments of public facilities” for the development of the FSSAT program. The firm that is hired must provide school officials with training regarding FSSAT. Every year, the Florida Department of

Education is required to submit a report to state officials detailing schools' compliance with the FSSAT mandate.

A FSSAT-style program would advance the cause of school safety in Texas by educating a school district on the specific steps it needs to take given its unique circumstances. Such an assessment is necessary before any type of action can be taken to target harden schools. In addition, because every school campus is unique, an assessment of basic data about the school (e.g., where classrooms are located) must be done before using technology to improve situational awareness of first responders to that school campus.

A FSSAT-style risk assessment is conceptually similar to what the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) terms a “tabletop” exercise, defined as:

A facilitated analysis of an emergency situation in an informal, stress-free environment. There is minimal attempt at simulation in a tabletop exercise. Equipment is not used, resources are not deployed, and time pressures are not introduced. Tabletops are designed to elicit constructive discussion as participants examine and resolve problems based on existing operational plans and identify where those plans need to be refined.”^{ix}

Policy Recommendation: Implement a Texas safe schools assessment tool, with risk assessments conducted annually.

The Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT) provides a template for how Texas can ensure that every school has been inspected for vulnerability to a mass shooting. School districts could of course be given the freedom to take additional steps, but a FSSAT would implement a baseline. A risk assessment is necessary before discussing physical improvements to a school campus to deter attackers and before identifying technology to improve the situational awareness of first responders. A FSSAT-type tool could also create healthy local discussions involving third parties, such as medical emergency personnel. Furthermore, this program has been in place in Florida for a number of years, allowing Texas to benefit from the best practices with respect to FSSAT that Florida has discovered through trial and error.

III. Target-harden all school campuses

Enhanced physical security measures are a frequently suggested response to the threat of K-12 mass shootings. Examples of these measures include having a single-entry point and a single-exit point for all students and visitors, using metal detectors, and employing an armed security guard(s). As a 1987 paper stated, the rationale for target hardening is that “would-be crime victims can control crime by so modifying their environments and behaviors that the opportunities for criminals to victimize them are reduced.”^x

Target hardening stands in contrast to “overarching protections,” which “refer to any type of protection that protects multiple assets essentially simultaneously.”^{xi} Enhanced border security, for example, is an overarching protection; it can protect against drug smugglers, human trafficking, and terrorists, each of whom poses threats to different parts of the population. In the context of K-12 mass shootings, an example of an overarching protection might be improved mental health programs and faster police response times. Overarching protections are a solution that can work in conjunction with, or as an alternative to, target hardening.

One analysis of the trade-offs between target hardening and overarching protection utilizing game theory has concluded “that target hardening tends to be more desirable when the variability of target valuations is large, so that there are relatively few high-valued targets” and “when target valuations are quite similar, [the study’s authors] would expect overarching protection to be more desirable than target hardening, especially when there are a large numbers of targets to protect.”^{xii} Unsurprisingly, cost is the key reason overarching protections are preferred when there are a large number of potential targets to protect. As the number of targets increase, so do the costs associated with hardening all targets. Essentially, target hardening is more effective, but it is simply more costly to provide for a given target.

There are only a few examples of potential targets- perhaps courthouses, airports, and facilities storing nuclear weapons- that are as worthy of target-hardening as K-12 schools are. These schools have a large population of children, many of whom are young enough to be absolutely powerless to outrun or overpower an adult, much less an armed adult. Mass shootings at K-12 schools are well-documented; an angry and/or mentally disturbed individual will be aware of past school shootings and may target schools if he or she decides to lash out against society by killing. And as touched upon above, nothing traumatizes society more than a mass shooting that leaves many children dead.

Two objections are often voiced against calls to target-harden K-12 schools. First, some people worry about the psychological effects on children- they fear that it will “create a prison-like feeling among students.”^{xiii} The response to this claim should be that improved security measures may reassure children, many of whom are undoubtedly aware of past mass K-12 shootings. But even if measures such as metal detectors were shown to cause some psychological discomfort in some children, the focus should be on whether that is outweighed by the benefit of increased security. Moreover, the target-hardening solutions that are typically proposed for schools are those already employed by many other government institutions and banks statewide.

Second, there are concerns about the costs of target hardening schools. A May 2022 article by the *Texas Tribune* reported that “a security vestibule, which is basically a secure lobby to the school, can be a huge expense for school districts already tight on money. In 2019, the Waller Independent School District estimated that the addition of two of these entrances to the junior high school would cost \$345,000.”^{xiv} If the cost of installing a single security vestibule is assumed to be approximately \$175,000, and Texas has almost 9,000 public school and charter school campuses,^{xv} then the cost of installing a security vestibule at every school would be approximately \$1.6 billion. While an expenditure of that size is

significant, it is worth noting that the Comptroller projects that Texas will end the 2022-23 biennium with an almost \$33 billion budget surplus. In addition, school districts have the ability to fund capital improvement projects by issuing bonds that are paid back over years. Furthermore- less drastic but still meaningful security improvements- such as installing single-entry points, would likely carry a significantly smaller price tag.

Notably, the data from mass K-12 shootings suggests that the presence of onsite armed security can mitigate the damage done by shooters. When armed personnel are onsite, intervention that stops the shooter is more likely to occur. As illustrated by the table below, when armed personnel are not onsite, the incident has historically ended in suicide, meaning the shooter dictated when the incident ended and not law enforcement.

<i>Incident</i>	Armed Personnel Onsite	Intervention	Fatalities	Injuries	Means of Incident End
<i>Robb Elementary School Shooting</i>	Yes	Yes	21	17	Death by LEO
<i>Oxford High School Shooting</i>	Yes	Yes	4	7	Surrender
<i>Santa Fe High School Shooting</i>	Yes	Yes	10	13	Surrender
<i>Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting</i>	Yes	No	17	17	Suspect Flees (later Surrender)
<i>Marysville-Pilchuck High School Shooting</i>	Yes	Yes	5	3	Suicide
<i>Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting</i>	No	No	27	2	Suicide
<i>West Nicle Mines Amish school Shooting</i>	No	No	5	5	Suicide
<i>Red Lake Senior High School Shooting</i>	No	Yes	7	7	Suicide
<i>Columbine High School Shooting</i>	No	No	13	24	Suicide
Average (Armed Personnel)			11	11	Surrender
Average (No Armed Personnel)			13	10	Suicide

Not only are the outcomes of these events mitigated when armed personnel are on campus, but “the public overwhelmingly support armed SROs at schools.”^{xvi} In light of data suggesting the ability of onsite security to mitigate outcomes in K-12 mass shootings, the state should consider requiring a school resource officer (SRO) to be on every campus on every school day.

Policy Recommendation: Enact a target-hardening program for all K-12 schools statewide.

Although more data is needed on the cost of security enhancements, the state should strive to target harden all K-12 campuses. Specific measures that can be taken include implementing a single entry point and single exit point for all students and visitors, installing metal detectors, and ensuring an SRO is onsite at all times.

IV. Maximize the ability of school personnel to quickly notify law enforcement and medical emergency personnel

If a K-12 school diligently conducts a risk assessment and target hardens its premises to minimize its vulnerability, but a person intent on committing a mass shooting still gains entry to the school, it is imperative that an alert be sounded immediately. Typically, when K-12 schools are targeted by a mass shooter, local 911 is alerted. While this is the “common sense” step to take for those in that position, it has its limitations. On this point, the 2018 report by the Federal Commission School Safety is worth quoting at length:

Sheriff Tim Troyer told the Commission that calls to 911 typically occur two to three minutes after the start of an attack. As was the case in Parkland, 911 calls are often indirect calls (e.g., made by parents of students who had called their parents rather than law enforcement). In order to reduce this delay in notification, Troyer recommended that schools implement mechanically simple means of notification that contact the 911 center directly. One school in Indiana accomplishes this by having teachers wear an emergency fob around their neck that they can press in the event of an active shooter incident, immediately triggering a school-wide alarm and notifying law enforcement.

Schools should consider establishing, maintaining, testing, and training on communication technology and protocols (e.g., emergency alerts, mass notifications, intercom announcements) that can alert both staff and students, as well as parents and the broader local community, of an active shooter situation. Within schools, it is best if alerts are both audible and visual, and can be seen and heard throughout the entire school grounds.^{xvii}

To state the obvious, time is of the essence in a mass shooting. The quicker the alarm is raised, the more time students and staff have to flee or to barricade themselves, and the more time law enforcement has to respond. As the sheriff in the above quote noted, policymakers should aim for alert systems that not only notify law enforcement immediately, but also people on the campus. This alert system could come in many forms. As noted above, school staff having emergency fobs around their neck is an option worth exploring. Other options, such as equipping all classrooms with a panic button, could also be explored.

Policy Recommendation: Implement an alert system that allows school staff to immediately alert 911 and the entire campus at the outset of an active shooter incident.

This recommendation is straightforward. In a mass shooting incident, just a few additional seconds can save lives.

V. Improve training for law enforcement, teachers, and school districts

Law enforcement personnel must be prepared for a worst-case scenario at any K-12 campus. Unfortunately, Americans have seen responses by law enforcement to K-12 mass shootings that are less than optimal. In the Robb Elementary School Shooting in Uvalde, scores of officers arrived at the scene but delayed confronting the shooter in the classroom in which he had barricaded himself, which possibly led to some injured victims in that room bleeding to death. In the Marjory Stoneman Douglas (Parkland) High School Shooting, an armed SRO failed to engage the shooter, opting instead to take cover outside of the building in which the shooter was active.

An analysis of K-12 mass shootings highlights the importance of law enforcement finding a way to “stop the killing.” Although response times averaged nine minutes, in four of the nine events, responding agencies did not intervene during the killing. In two of the remaining five incidents, intervention took 30 minutes or more. In only three of the shootings did law enforcement personnel intervene within 10 minutes of the incident beginning.

<i>Incident</i>	<i>Response Time (Mins)</i>	<i>Intervention Time (Mins)</i>	<i>Time To Incident End (Mins)</i>	<i>Means of Incident End</i>
<i>Robb Elementary School Shooting</i>	3	78	78	Death by LEO
<i>Oxford High School Shooting</i>	1	4	4	Surrender
<i>Santa Fe High School Shooting</i>	13	30	30	Surrender
<i>Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting</i>	11	No Intervention	7	Suspect Flees (later Surrender)
<i>Marysville-Pilchuck High School Shooting</i>	2	4	4	Suicide
<i>Sandy Hook Elementary Shooting</i>	5	No Intervention	11	Suicide

West Nickel Mines Amish school Shooting	30	No Intervention	60	Suicide
Red Lake Shooting	7	7	12	Suicide
Columbine High School Shooting	9	No Intervention	53	Suicide
Average	9	N/A	29	Suicide

1. *Mandated school shooter training for law enforcement*

The Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERTT) Center at Texas State University is the leading training and research organization on active shooter response. Founded in 2002, ALERTT offers classes designed to teach law enforcement, first responders, and the general public how to respond to an active shooting. The full list of courses offered through the ALERTT Center are listed in the appendix to this paper.

These courses are informed by a research division that collects and analyses active shooter data to improve tactics. ALERTT also offers “train-the-trainers” programs, which enables local institutions to send only a few employees to obtain knowledge that can then be transmitted to their entire organization. In a 2009 study, 99 percent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that ALERTT teaches skills that benefit law enforcement officers.^{xviii}

Moreover, thanks to generous state and federal grants to the ALERTT Center, most ALERTT classes are offered at no charge, although there are of course associated travel, food, and lodging costs.^{xix} It is possible that, due to staffing demands and these associated costs, it is not feasible to put every peace officer through each course in the ALERTT catalog; however, a minimum standard of training is a necessary to protect students.

Fortunately, a suitable template for such training already exists as a result of House Bill 2195 (Bohac, 2019) from the 86th Legislative Session.^{xx} That bill as codified requires the generation of “an active shooter response training program approved by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (CLE).”^{xxi} The program utilizes ALERTT as a framework while also incorporating lessons from other organizations. However, the bill’s provisions apply only to school district peace officers and SROs. This would be adequate if those were the only individuals who are tasked with responding to a K-12 mass shooting. But all peace officers could potentially face that crisis. Thus, the bill’s provisions should be extended to apply to all CLE-certified peace officers.

2. *The need for better coordination and leadership of responses to mass shooting threats*

Well-devised plans for responding to a K-12 mass shooting threat are of little value if coordination of the response is poorly organized. Unfortunately, there have been numerous examples of active shooter scenarios in the United States where this poor organization was evident. In Uvalde, the failure to establish “both an overall incident commander and someone clearly in charge of coordinating the emergency medical response” led to a delay not only in confronting the shooter, but also in the provision of emergency medical services to the injured after the shooter was killed.^{xxii xxiii} The ALERRT Center’s Uvalde After Action Report found that, “it [did] not appear that effective incident command was established during this event. The lack of effective command likely impaired both the Stop the Killing and Stop the Dying parts of the response.”^{xxiv} Similarly, reviews of the responses to the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando and the 2012 Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting found that responders’ delays in setting up unified command, or the total failure to do so, led to an uncoordinated response and a delay in providing medical care to the wounded.^{xxv}

To be prepared to respond to a K-12 mass shooting threat, two concepts must be emphasized: incident command system (ICS) and unified command (UC). FEMA, an agency that specializes in emergency response, defines ICS as “A management system designed to enable effective and efficient domestic incident management by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure.”^{xxvi}

In speaking of UC, FEMA states that:

In incidents involving multiple jurisdictions, a single jurisdiction with multiagency involvement, or multiple jurisdictions with multiagency involvement, unified command allows agencies with different legal, geographic, and functional authorities and responsibilities to work together effectively without affecting individual agency authority, responsibility, or accountability.^{xxvii}

UC and ICS work together to produce a well-informed operational group that is better able to communicate and perform in high-stress environments where every minute matters.

Some police departments appear to have considerable difficulty in establishing UC and ICS, perhaps due to the relative rarity of K-12 mass shootings and being forced to work with different entities with which they may not be familiar. Better training for law enforcement in general is needed in the context of K-12 active shooter scenarios, but training law enforcement leadership on best practices regarding UC and ICS is imperative.

The state should ensure that there are minimum training standards in place regarding ICS and UC. Courses on these subjects are provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and through the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service (TEEX).

3. *Offer training for teachers*

Training should not stop at law enforcement personnel; they are only part of the equation. As discussed above, in a K-12 mass shooting, there is on average a 9-minute window in which K-12 personnel must act to ensure their students' and their own safety before law enforcement arrives (although well-trained SROs might shorten that window). The state should make clear to all teachers that they can take two steps that can increase their safety when facing a mass shooting threat: carrying a firearm on school premises and taking ALERRT civilian classes.

School districts can grant written permission for anyone, including designated employees, to carry firearms on campus.^{xxviii} Many teachers, just like other Texans, choose to carry a firearm in their daily lives. While that is consistent with the Second Amendment, the general public is divided on armed educators.^{xxix} Law enforcement also appears to be uncertain, although a 2022 study found that law enforcement supported teachers being armed on the condition that they were trained. Although the nature of that training was not specified, civilian ALERRT classes would be an excellent choice. Not all interested teachers could attend ALERRT classes, but people who were ALERRT-trained could be designated to provide training to interested teachers in every part of the state.

The state should also make available to teachers a firearm proficiency course similar to that of a course formerly needed to carry a concealed handgun. While such training should not be required for a teacher to carry a firearm, it is helpful in gaining confidence and proficiency with a weapon- presumably the traits law enforcement is looking for in an armed teacher.

Carrying firearms should not be compulsory; some teachers may be uncomfortable with handling them. But teachers who are comfortable with firearms, or interested in becoming so, should have that option. The state could provide funding to compensate teachers who take such training or ALERRT classes for civilians.

4. *Standardize training for local entities' exercises and drills*

In the aftermath of the Robb Elementary School Shooting at Uvalde, some cities and school districts began planning for school shootings and creating exercises to identify strengths, weaknesses, and potential complications in their emergency response efforts. These exercises are often orchestrated by local entities such as school districts or police departments, with little to no input from state officials. This is concerning because, as in the Uvalde shooting, state agencies may be involved in responding to a K-12 mass shooting. In such cases, coordination between agencies is essential. As FEMA notes:

A full-scale [exercise] simulates a real event as closely as possible. It is multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional, multi-discipline exercise designed to evaluate the operational capability of emergency management systems in a highly stressful environment that simulates actual response conditions. To accomplish this realism, it requires the mobilization and actual movement of emergency personnel, equipment, and resources. Ideally, the full-scale exercise should test and evaluate most functions of your damage assessment plan on a regular basis.^{xxx}

Exercises or drills undertaken by local entities may overlook this point. These exercises can vary from extensive affairs to training programs that are closed off to the public. For instance, in June 2022, the Lubbock school district and the Lubbock police department practiced responding to three different types of active shooter drills, a practice which they conduct every three years. The simulation involved over 700 volunteers, some acting as role-players to make the situations as realistic as possible.^{xxxii}

Although “participating in an exercise increases perceived knowledge among professional and volunteer personnel,” this perception can be inaccurate if the exercise is poorly designed.^{xxxii} It is possible that bad training could be more detrimental than no training whatsoever, as local officials may conclude that they are far more prepared than they truly are. Additionally, these exercises often do not involve teachers, who are instrumental in a K-12 school emergency, as they direct the students. Although emergency response may not be a part of their official job description, teachers are of crucial importance in any school crisis. Accordingly, they should be included in exercises and invited to trainings and exercises just as police, fire, and emergency management personnel are.

Local entities may not have the expertise to design their own exercises. Alternatively, they may be deterred by the cost of training exercises; carrying out high-quality, full-scale exercises is often costly, given the personnel and materials required to create a beneficial learning experience. Thus, many local entities do not hold any.

Creating a baseline design for training exercises and training and setting minimum standards can help ensure that first responders can effectively respond to K-12 mass shooting events. The Texas Division of Emergency Management and/or the Department of Public Safety could be tasked with helping local jurisdictions ensure that their exercises and drills meet minimum standards. One reason for the overall poor response by law enforcement response to the Uvalde mass shooting was the lack of ballistic shields that could offer protection against the shooter’s AR-15 rifle. Only one of the four shields that were (eventually) present onsite offered such protection.^{xxxiii} Better exercises and training would have addressed this shortcoming.

State grants would allow smaller jurisdictions to participate in training geared towards defense against active shooter scenarios, such as those provided by ALERRT. This training would help address the challenges faced by smaller school districts and police departments with fewer resources than their larger counterparts.

Policy Recommendation: Mandate that all CLE-certified officers take “Course #2195: Active Shooter for School-Based Law Enforcement”

All law enforcement officers could potentially face a school-based active shooting. Requiring only SROs to undergo school shooting training is therefore short-sighted. Policymakers should amend Section 37.0812 of the Education Code to provide that all CLE-certified officers take the same training.

Policy Recommendation: In training for active shooter scenarios, the fundamental concepts of incident command system (ICS) and unified command (UC) must be addressed. The state should enact minimum standards relating to these concepts.

Law enforcement responses to mass shootings in the United States have too often been plagued by poor coordination that leads to confusion among responders. Better training for responding to a K-12 mass shooting threat will require a focus on the concepts of UC and ICS.

Policy Recommendation: Educate teachers on the training options available to them, and provide the necessary funding.

Teachers who are well-trained to respond to a mass shooting can save many lives. The state should provide funding to pay for teachers who wish to take a firearm proficiency class and/or civilian ALERRT classes, and educate them about this benefit.

Policy Recommendation: The state should set minimum standards for trainings and exercises for school districts and police departments conducting active shooter and K-12 mass shooting scenarios, and provide grant funding and assistance from appropriate state agencies as needed.

Conducting exercises that simulate K-12 mass shootings is a sound practice by school districts and local police departments. To ensure that these exercises are as beneficial as possible and do not instill a false sense of confidence, the state should use its resources to promulgate standards for such exercises.

VI. Utilize emerging technology to increase the situational awareness of first responders to a K-12 mass shooting

First responders to an active shooter event face uncertainty as they strive to gain situational awareness (SA), which can be thought of as “the collection, analysis, and sharing of actionable information across a

complex landscape.^{xxxiv} This need will be particularly pronounced if certain variables are present- when the school campus in question is a large area, when there are many victims, when there are multiple shooters (as in the Columbine shooting), and when multiple agencies respond to the threat. But with all active shooter threats, responders are limited by time and resources, and must make decisions in a rapidly evolving environment.

For first responders to respond effectively to a K-12 mass shooting, it is essential to develop a situational awareness program (SAP). A web-based SAP can monitor streaming data feeds from external and internal systems to provide real-time awareness for the people responding to the incident. Such a system automates what would otherwise take a team of individuals to accomplish, freeing those individuals to focus on other critical tasks. Web-based SAPs allow for a central medium to generate what emergency planners term a “common operational picture” (COP), which is a continuously updated overview of an incident compiled throughout an incident's life cycle from integration communications.^{xxxv} In the context of K-12 mass shootings, web-based SAPs can provide first responders with the critical information they need to establish a command center and mount an efficient response.

Every K-12 school shooting is different, and there is no guarantee that SAP-related technology will be pivotal in a given case. But such technology has the potential to be useful in many such shootings. Law enforcement agencies might be able to immediately grasp key facts, such as what other agencies are on site, where peace officers have entered the building, the areas they have cleared, where an alarm or panic button was activated, and/or what school security cameras are showing in real time.

As software becomes more and more powerful, the capabilities of web-based SAPs will grow. A good example of the potential for law enforcement to use web-based SAPs in response to K-12 mass shooter threats is illustrated by the technology offered by Haystax Technology (“Haystax”), the security consulting firm that was retained by the state of Florida to develop the FSSAT program. In February 2023, first responders were called to a Houston school to respond to an emergency posed by a suspect. Fortunately, no one was harmed, and the suspect was taken into custody. First responders were able to respond effectively due in part to maps of the school facility that were provided to them through Haystax technology.^{xxxvi}

A number of other software companies develop products for law enforcement in such situations, including Mutualink and ReadyOp. Determining the exact capabilities of products currently available through such companies should be a high priority for Texas policymakers. The Legislature could make a grant to a Texas university or law enforcement agency to study the issue and to test various products.

Using new technology to address responses to K-12 school shooting threats can be part of an overall preparedness plan. The exact potential of this technology is unclear, but it is evident that a current problem with responses to school shootings is that first responders lack situational awareness. Software products for law enforcement that are on the market today should be able to address that problem to at least some extent.

Policy Recommendation: The state should appoint an appropriate body to review all currently available software that is intended to increase the situational awareness of first responders to an active shooter scenario.

The state should identify an agency or a university with the capability to study software options for law enforcement in a crisis, and provide the necessary funding for a report by that agency or university that makes specific product recommendations.

Appendix

Courses Offered by the ALERRT Center at Texas State University

(All course descriptions are quoted from the ALERRT catalog^{xxxvii})

i. Level I

This dynamic course of instruction is designed to prepare the first responder to isolate, distract, and neutralize an active shooter. This course will cover shooting and moving, threshold evaluation, concepts and principles of team movement, setting up for and room entry techniques, approach and breaching the crisis site, secondary responder tactics, improvised explosive devices, and post engagement priorities of work. The course will culminate with dynamic force-on-force scenarios.

ii. Active Attack Integrated Response Course (AAIR)

The Active Attack Integrated Response Train-the-Trainer Course (AAIR) is a performance level course designed to improve integration between law enforcement, fire, telecommunicator and emergency medical services (EMS) in active attack / shooter events. The course provides law enforcement officers with key medical skills based on tactical emergency casualty care (TECC) guidelines, which can be used at the point of injury (POI) to increase survivability of victims. The course also provides a model framework for law enforcement, fire, and EMS to integrate responses during an active attack / shooter event through the rescue task force concept. This course has been designed to improve the safety and survivability of victims of active attack / shooter events and increase the effectiveness, coordination, and resource integration between law enforcement, fire, tele-communications and EMS when responding to these events.

iii. Active Shooter Incident Management (ASIM)

This course provides participants an overview of the Incident Command System and its specific application to integrate and manage the law enforcement, fire, and EMS response to Active Shooter Events. The course prepares responders to manage the first hour of response to Active Shooter Events ranging from Basic Complexity to Complex Simultaneous Coordinated Attacks. Hands-on exercises simulate unpredictable Active Shooter Events in real time scenarios that enable learning and practice while improving effectiveness and officer safety as part of the VALOR officer safety initiative.

iv. Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE)

Law enforcement officers and agencies are frequently requested by schools, businesses, and community members for direction and presentations on what they should do if confronted with an active shooter event. The Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE) course, designed and built on the Avoid, Deny Defend (ADD) strategy developed by ALERRT in 2004, provides strategies, guidance and a proven plan for surviving an active shooter event. Topics include the history and prevalence of active shooter events, civilian response options, medical issues, and considerations for conducting drills. Participants in this four (4) hour Train-the-Trainer course will receive a manual and PowerPoint presentation suitable for use in their own presentations.

v. Civilian Response and Casualty Care (CRCC)

First responder agencies are frequently requested by schools, businesses, and community members for direction and presentations on what they should do if confronted with an active attacker event. The Civilian Response and Casualty Care (CRCC) course, designed and built on the Avoid, Deny, Defend (ADD) strategy developed by ALERRT in 2004, provides strategies, guidance and a proven plan for surviving an active shooter event. This course combines the civilian response with the Stop the Bleed Campaign, which empowers civilians to provide life-saving medical aid before first responders ever arrive. Topics include the history and prevalence of active shooter events, civilian response options, medical issues, and considerations for conducting drills. Participants in this two-day Train-the-Trainer course will receive a manual and PowerPoint presentation suitable for use in their own presentations.

vi. First Responder Breaching (FRB)

This hands-on, dynamic course is designed to aid the first responder in approaching and breaching into a crisis site using traditional and non-traditional methods. The course covers the use of both manual and ballistic breaching tools to gain entry into a structure under extreme exigent circumstances that demand immediate entry to save and protect innocent lives.

vii. Exterior Response to Active Shooter Events (ERASE)

This course is designed to prepare first responders for an open-air active shooter encounter. It addresses a wide range of tactics and techniques when addressing an exterior armed aggressor. This hands-on course will cover equipment selection, vehicle ambushes, medical emergencies, vehicle and dismounted officer/citizen down rescue, individual/ team movement techniques, and emergency vehicle crisis response. Some

participants attending this course have found it to be physically challenging. Officers attending this course should be able to walk moderate distances, jog, kneel, crawl, and lift moderate weight. This is an outside class and is routinely conducted during inclement weather conditions.

viii. First Responder Medical (FRM)

This train-the-trainer course includes the complete delivery of the Tactical Medical for Patrol Officers course of study as well as instructional techniques and methodology for delivering the course, scenario development, safety protocols and procedures, graded participant teach-backs, graded skills assessments, remediation, course critiques, and evaluations. Participants are provided with all lesson plans, PowerPoint presentations, student manuals, and related courseware so that they are immediately prepared to deliver the Tactical Medical for Patrol Officers course at their home agency.

ix. Medical Advanced Skills Course (MASC)

ALERRT introduced a new 8-hour Medical Advanced Skills Course (MASC) in 2018/2019 intended to provide medical first responders with best practices for the management of traumatic injured patients to enhance survivability and combat potentially preventable death specifically from active attacker events. Topics will include Pre-Hospital Damage Control Resuscitation (DCR), Compressible and Non-Compressible Bleeding Management, Hypotensive Resuscitation, Hemostatic Resuscitation, Airway Management, Tension Pneumothorax Management, Hypothermia Prevention and Management.

x. Solo Officer Rapid Deployment (SORD)

This dynamic course of instruction is designed to provide the solo officer (off-duty/plain clothes /uniform) with the knowledge, physical skills, and mind set on how to isolate, distract, or neutralize an armed threat like an active shooter. This course will cover reasons to carry for off-duty and plain clothes officers, levels of intervention, deadly force policies and case studies, ergonomic considerations for plain clothes carry, options for mitigating the occurrence of blue-on-blue shootings, concepts and principles of solo officer movement, threshold evaluation, setting up for and room entry techniques, post engagement priorities of work, and incident management. Day one includes live fire training and day two culminates with dynamic force-on-force scenarios.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁱⁱ <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/school-safety/school-safety-report.pdf> (p. 85).
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-this-year-how-many-and-where/2022/01>
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- ^v <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/12/no-there-were-not-355-mass-shootings-this-year/>
- ^{vi} <https://www.theviolenceproject.org/methodology/>
- ^{vii} http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1006/1006.html
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- ^{ix} https://emilms.fema.gov/is_0559/groups/155.html
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- ^{xii} <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=90d091b7448f761c822bfc23cc03c8e18d029a3a>
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- ^{xvi} <https://alerrt.org/r/27>
- ^{xvii} <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/school-safety/school-safety-report.pdf> (pp. 144-145).
- ^{xviii} <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/handle/10877/9694>
- ^{xix} [https://alerrt.org/FAQ#:~:text=How%20much%20does%20it%20cost,federal%20grant%20funding%20\(5.2016\).](https://alerrt.org/FAQ#:~:text=How%20much%20does%20it%20cost,federal%20grant%20funding%20(5.2016).)
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- ^{xxi} <https://www.tcole.texas.gov/sites/default/files/CourseCMU/Active Shooter - SBLE 2195 course Final 1-30-20.docx>
- ^{xxii} <https://www.propublica.org/article/uvalde-emt-medical-response>
- ^{xxiii} <https://www.firehouse.com/operations-training/video/21290992/many-issues-led-to-delayed-ems-response-to-uvalde-shooting>
- ^{xxiv} <https://alerrt.org/r/31>
- ^{xxv} Id.
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- ^{xxviii} <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/texas-teachers-guns-at-school/>
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- ^{xxx} Id.
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- ^{xxxii} https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227601876_Disaster_Exercise_Outcomes_for_Professional_Emergency_Personnel_and_Citizen_Volunteers
- ^{xxxiii} <https://house.texas.gov/media/pdf/committees/reports/87interim/Robb-Elementary-Investigative-Committee-Report.pdf> (p. 60).
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^{xxxvii} <https://alerrt.org/Course-Catalog>