

Chapter 46

Guns in School: Juveniles and Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines weapon carrying by teachers and students in K-12 schools. Most of the chapter focuses on juveniles, exploring how often juveniles bring weapons to school, the demographic characteristics these juveniles have in common, and why juveniles opt to bring weapons on school grounds. Empirical studies of these topics based on official data, victimization data, and self-report data are reviewed. Additionally, this chapter details the federal and state laws that regulate weapons on school property. Attention is also given to the recent debate over arming K-12 teachers and staff as a prevention measure. Like the discussion of juvenile gun carrying, this chapter highlights the law regulating this issue, arguments for and against such a policy, and the empirical research assessing effects.

INTRODUCTION

On October 24th, 2014, 15-year-old Jaylen Fryberg entered his school cafeteria in Marysville, Washington. After shooting five of his fellow students, killing four, Jaylen turned the gun on himself. The victims were not strangers to Jaylen. Before the shooting, he sent these students a text message asking them to meet him for lunch. Just minutes prior to the shooting, he sent a text message apology to friends and family for the actions he was about to take (Everytown Research, 2015). Not all school shootings are alike, however. On November 10, 2015, for example, another 15-year-old student walked to the front of his English classroom in Lecanto, Florida, and shot himself. Thankfully, he survived the injury (Everytown Research, 2015). While these are the sorts of incidents that frequent the evening news, they are not representative of all school gun violence, all juvenile gun violence, or juveniles who bring guns to school without using them against themselves or others.

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Guns in School

Each year, thousands of juveniles are injured or killed by firearms. Details of these cases are collected by the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS), operated through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They are also counted through the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System – All Injury Program (NEISS-AIP), operated by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. According to these sources (see Table 1), 6,911 juveniles ages 18 and younger were injured by firearms in 2015, a rate of 9.38 per 100,000 juveniles in this age group (Centers for Disease Control, 2017). Nearly a quarter of these cases were unintentional injuries (i.e. accidents); most were caused by the juvenile playing with a gun (Fowler, Dahlberg, Haileyesus, Gutierrez, & Bacon, 2017). In addition to these injuries, 1,458 juveniles were killed by firearms that same year. Approximately 40% of these cases were determined to be suicides (Centers for Disease Control, 2017). As shown in Table 1, firearm suicides among juveniles increased from 2007 to 2014 after a five-year decline (Fowler et al., 2017).

Table 1. Trends in juvenile firearm injuries and deaths, 2003-2015

Year	Juveniles injured by firearms (rate per 100,000 juveniles ages 0 to 17)	Juveniles killed by firearms, all causes (rate per 100,000 juveniles ages 0 to 17)	Juvenile firearm suicides (rate per 100,000 juveniles ages 0 to 17)
2004	6,992 (9.54)	1,385 (1.88)	384 (0.52)
2005	8,729 (11.87)	1,490 (2.02)	412 (0.56)
2006	9,551 (12.95)	1,593 (2.15)	371 (0.50)
2007	7,829 (10.58)	1,520 (2.04)	325 (0.44)
2008	9,714 (13.11)	1,475 (1.98)	361 (0.49)
2009	5,984 (8.07)	1,392 (1.87)	401 (0.54)
2010	7,351 (9.91)	1,337 (1.80)	375 (0.51)
2011	8,314 (11.25)	1,311 (1.77)	448 (0.61)
2012	5,675 (7.70)	1,301 (1.77)	457 (0.62)
2013	6,103 (8.29)	1,258 (1.71)	491 (0.67)
2014	7,537 (10.24)	1,330 (1.81)	532 (0.72)
2015	6,911 (9.38)	1,458 (1.98)	566 (0.77)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017

Incidents of firearm violence or suicide on school grounds, in contrast, are relatively rare. Data on school-based violence are collected through the School-Associated Violent Death Surveillance System (SAVD-SS). Between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014, there were 48 school-associated violent deaths in the United States. Of these, 20 were of school-age juveniles, a rate of 1 per 2.8 million enrolled students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Another source tracking all gun discharges on school grounds found that there were 84 such events at K-12 schools between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2015 (Everytown Research, 2015).

Overall, juveniles are just as likely to experience a serious violent victimization at school as they are outside of school (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2017). Between 2012 and 2015, rates of violent crime in schools were higher than rates of thefts in schools (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2017). However, schools may also serve as a buffer between juveniles and

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