

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 7, 2018

Secretary Betsy DeVos
Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

We write today to share the results of a survey of Massachusetts educators, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders on the issue of gun violence in schools. Because the Commonwealth of Massachusetts consistently has the lowest rate of gun violence in the United States, Massachusetts teachers, parents, students, and administrators are uniquely positioned to comment on how policymakers can reduce gun violence in schools. The enclosed report, **Keeping Schools Safe: Perspectives from Massachusetts Educators and Families**, provides detailed information on the views of our constituents. In your role as Chair of the Federal Commission on School Safety, we respectfully request that you share this report with the full Commission.

Every year, more than 30,000 Americans die in gun-related fatalities.¹ Gun-related deaths have surpassed motor vehicle deaths in 21 states,² and the American Medical Association has described gun violence in America as a “public health crisis.”³ In addition to injuries and death associated with gun violence, Boston Children’s Hospital has found that the costs of medical care and missed work associated with gun violence “are in excess of \$14 billion annually.”⁴

The number of “mass public shootings”—or “public attacks in which the shooter and victims were generally unknown to each other and four or more people were killed”—has increased dramatically, nearly tripling since 2011.⁵ As Americans know all too well, schools have also been the targets of mass shootings. Since the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, over 187,000 students from more than 193 primary or secondary schools have experienced a shooting on campus.⁶ These school shootings include the February 2018 tragedy in Parkland,

¹ David E. Stark and Nigam H. Shah, “Funding and Publication of Research on Gun Violence and Other Leading Causes of Death,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* (January 3, 2017) (online at <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2595514>).

² Adrienne LaFrance, “Gun Deaths May Not Eclipse Traffic Fatalities Just Yet,” *The Atlantic* (February 8, 2016) (online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/02/guns-cars/460431/>).

³ American Medical Association, “AMA Calls Gun Violence ‘A Public Health Crisis,’” (June 14, 2016) (online at <https://www.ama-assn.org/ama-calls-gun-violence-public-health-crisis>).

⁴ Boston Children’s Hospital, Letter to Members of the Massachusetts Congressional Delegation, (March 22, 2018).

⁵ Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, “Mass shootings becoming more frequent” (2014) (online at <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/mass-shootings-becoming-more-frequent/>).

⁶ John Woodrow Cox and Steven Rich, “Scarred by school shootings,” *Washington Post* (March 25, 2018) (online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/us-school-shootings-history/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9482ba99d6b0).

Florida, where a former student opened fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, killing 17 students and teachers and injuring an additional 17.⁷

In response to the Parkland tragedy, President Donald Trump established the Federal Commission on School Safety to “address school safety and the culture of violence.” As Chair of the Commission, you are tasked with “develop[ing] a process to evaluate and make recommendations on school safety.”⁸ The President asked the Commission to recommend policy proposals in a number of “areas of focus,” including placing “age restrictions [on] certain firearm purchases,” pursuing “opportunities to improve access to mental health treatment,” and developing “best practices for school buildings and campus security.”⁹

To ensure that the Commission hears the voices of our constituents as it develops these policy proposals, we conducted a survey of Massachusetts teachers, parents, school administrators, and other stakeholders requesting input on how the federal government should reduce gun violence in schools. We offered survey takers the opportunity to comment on the wide variety of gun violence prevention policies proposed in the wake of the Parkland shooting. Our analysis of the 384 survey responses we received reveals that:

- **Massachusetts stakeholders support policies that reduce, rather than expand, access to firearms in schools.** More than two-thirds of survey takers opposed policies that would increase the number of guns in K-12 schools—particularly guns wielded by untrained professionals. Notably, roughly 90 percent of respondents expressed the view that arming teachers would not reduce rates of gun violence in school.
- **Massachusetts stakeholders want federal lawmakers to strengthen existing gun laws and make it harder to access firearms.** Nearly 70 percent of respondents cited firearm access as a primary cause of gun violence in school, and many identified strong gun regulation as a key way to reduce violence.
- **Massachusetts stakeholders believe that increased access to mental health services would make educational institutions safer.** Over 90 percent of survey takers felt that making it easier for students to speak with counselors, therapists, and other emotional support professionals would reduce the risk of gun violence.
- **Massachusetts stakeholders generally support enhancing school building security, but do not consider it a solution to gun violence.** While nearly two-thirds of survey takers generally agreed that improving existing security measures would make schools “more safe,” they expressed substantial concern about the impact of increasing school

⁷ David Smiley, “These cops were first to see the dead and wounded in Parkland. Many later sought counseling.” *Miami Herald* (March 9, 2018) (online at <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/broward/article204428874.html>).

⁸ The White House, “President Donald J. Trump is Taking Immediate Actions to Secure Our Schools” (March 12, 2018) (online at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-taking-immediate-actions-secure-schools/>).

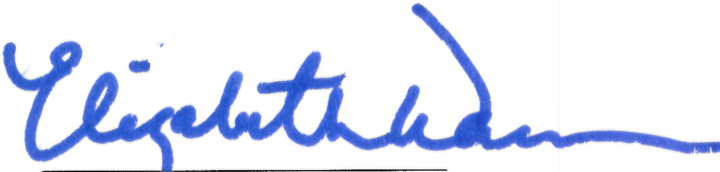
⁹ The White House, “President Donald J. Trump is Taking Immediate Actions to Secure Our Schools” (March 12, 2018) (online at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-taking-immediate-actions-secure-schools/>).

security infrastructure schools on students' access to nurturing, supportive learning environments.

We want to highlight that Massachusetts stakeholders believe that increased access to mental health services would make schools safer, and generally do not consider enhancing school building security as a solution to gun violence. We agree with these findings, and we remain deeply concerned about repeated attempts by our Republican colleagues to fund school security infrastructure at the expense of students' access to mental health services. In 2015, Congress established Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants, which remain the only federal funding stream dedicated to increasing school mental health services nationwide. We firmly oppose recent efforts to reduce or otherwise divert these funds away from mental health in congressional appropriations.

A more detailed analysis of survey responses can be found in the attached report, **Keeping Schools Safe: Perspectives from Massachusetts Educators and Families**. We respectfully request that you share the findings of our report and the views of our constituents with the Commission and take their concerns and recommendations into account while developing the policy proposals requested by President Trump. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Susannah Savage or Josh Delaney of Senator Warren's staff at 202-224-4543 or Geoff Browning of Rep. Clark's staff at 202-225-2836 with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Jeff Sessions, Attorney General of the United States, Department of Justice
The Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
The Honorable Kristjen Nielsen, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security

Keeping Schools Safe:

Perspectives from Massachusetts Educators and Families



Prepared by the Offices of
Senator Elizabeth Warren and
Representative Katherine Clark



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Executive Summary

The American Medical Association has described gun violence in America as a “public health crisis,” with gun-related deaths having surpassed motor vehicle deaths in 21 states. Since 2011, the number of “mass public shootings” that take place each year has nearly tripled. And as Americans know all too well, schools are too often the sites of mass shootings. Since the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, over 187,000 students across more than 193 primary or secondary schools have experienced a shooting on campus.¹

After the February 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, President Trump established a Federal Commission on School Safety. The Commission, chaired by Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, was tasked with “develop[ing] a process to evaluate and make recommendations on school safety” related to gun violence. The Commission announced a series of public listening sessions to solicit input from the American people as it develops recommendations.

Because the Commonwealth of Massachusetts consistently has the lowest rate of gun violence in the United States, Massachusetts teachers and families are uniquely positioned to be a valuable resource in this national conversation about keeping students and teachers safe from gun violence at school.²

To ensure that the Commission hears and considers the valuable perspectives of Massachusetts residents, Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Katherine Clark sent a survey to Massachusetts stakeholders requesting input on actions that the federal government should take to reduce or eliminate gun violence in schools. Working with Massachusetts-based education associations, almost 400 teachers, parents and guardians, students, principals, and other school leaders in Massachusetts responded and presented their views to Senator Warren and Representative Clark.

An analysis of survey responses finds that Massachusetts’ residents are extremely concerned about gun violence in schools, particularly the threat of mass shootings. Specific findings include:

1. **Massachusetts stakeholders support policies that reduce, rather than expand, access to firearms in schools.** More than two-thirds of survey takers opposed policies that would increase the number of guns in K-12 schools—particularly guns wielded by untrained professionals. Instead, they preferred approaches that kept guns out of classrooms. Notably, roughly 90 percent of respondents expressed the view that arming teachers would not reduce rates of gun violence in school.
2. **Massachusetts stakeholders urged federal lawmakers to strengthen existing gun laws and make it harder to access firearms.** Nearly 70 percent of respondents cited firearm access as a primary cause of gun violence in school, and many identified strong gun regulation as a key way to reduce violence.
3. **Massachusetts stakeholders believe that increased access to mental health services would make educational institutions safer.** Over 90 percent of survey takers felt that making it easier for students to speak with counselors, therapists, and other emotional support professionals would reduce the risk of gun violence.
4. **Massachusetts stakeholders generally support enhancing school building security, but do not consider it a solution to gun violence.** While nearly two-thirds of survey takers generally agreed that improving existing security measures would make schools “more safe,” they expressed substantial concern about the impact of increasing school security infrastructure on students’ access to nurturing, supportive learning environments. They appeared to doubt that increasing school security infrastructure would reduce gun violence.

Taken together, the survey responses from Massachusetts educators, families, and students suggest that the federal government should pursue multiple strategies to combat gun violence in schools,

including common-sense gun control policies and increased support for mental health services, while rejecting policies that place more guns in schools.

I. Introduction

Every year, over 30,000 Americans die in gun-related fatalities.³ Not including gun-induced suicides, over 15,500 people were killed and over 31,000 people were injured in gun incidents in 2017—including 3,976 children and teens.⁴ Gun-related deaths have surpassed motor vehicle deaths in 21 states,⁵ and the American Medical Association has described gun violence in America as a “public health crisis.”⁶ In addition to injuries and death associated with gun violence, Boston Children’s Hospital has found that the costs of medical care and missed work associated with gun violence “are in excess of \$14 billion annually.”⁷

The number of “mass public shootings”—or “public attacks in which the shooter and victims were generally unknown to each other and four or more people were killed”—has increased dramatically, nearly tripling since 2011.⁸ In June 2015, a gunman opened fire in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing nine and injuring one. In June 2016, a gunman killed or injured over 100 people in a shooting at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida.⁹ And in October 2017, a lone gunman murdered 58 people and injured 422 others at a music festival in Las Vegas, Nevada.¹⁰ Almost 350 mass shootings occurred in 2017 alone, and over 200 have already occurred in 2018.¹¹ Most recently, a lone gunman killed five people at the Capital Gazette newspaper offices in Annapolis, Maryland.¹²

As Americans know all too well, schools have also been the targets of mass shootings. Since the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, over 187,000 students across more than 193 primary or secondary schools have experienced a shooting on campus.¹³ In recent years, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions have all endured mass shootings. In April 2007, a student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University killed 32 of his fellow students and teachers before taking his own life on the university’s campus.¹⁴ In December 2012, one man killed 28 people—including twenty children and six

teachers—and injured two at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Sandy Hook, Connecticut.¹⁵ In Roseburg, Oregon, a man killed 10 people in a shooting at Umpqua Community College in October 2015.¹⁶ And on February 14, 2018, a former student opened fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, killing 17 students and teachers and injuring an additional 17.¹⁷

In the wake of the Parkland shooting, the American public—with students leading the way—demanded that lawmakers take action to prevent additional mass school shootings.¹⁸ Politicians, students, advocates, teachers, and other policy experts have proposed a number of policy changes, including policies that would expand background checks; improve access to mental health care; fund Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) research on gun violence; reinstate a ban on military-style assault weapons and raise the minimum age of those allowed to purchase them; and regulate devices that transform semi-automatic weapons into fully-automatic ones.¹⁹ In addition, some have suggested major changes to school security systems—including proposals to arm school teachers and pay bonuses to teachers who carry firearms in school.²⁰

In response to the Parkland tragedy, President Donald Trump established a Federal Commission on School Safety to “address school safety and the culture of violence.” The Commission, chaired by Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, was tasked with “develop[ing] a process to evaluate and make recommendations on school safety.”²¹ As part of developing recommendations, the Commission announced a series of public listening sessions and field visits to solicit input from the American people.²²

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has the lowest rate of gun deaths in the nation and can serve as a vital resource for federal policymakers as they contemplate policies to reduce gun violence.²³ To help ensure that Massachusetts voices are heard in Washington, Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Katherine Clark sent a survey to Massachusetts teachers, students, parents, principals, school administrators, and other education experts. The survey requested input on the steps that Congress and the federal government should take to address, prevent,

and reduce gun violence in schools. Senator Warren and Representative Clark informed survey respondents that a summary of their responses would be shared with the Federal Commission on School Safety.

II. Methodology

This report presents the results of a survey distributed by the Offices of Senator Warren and Representative Clark to Massachusetts education organizations. A copy of the survey, along with a list of groups contacted, is included in the Appendix. The survey consisted of a set of multiple choice and open-ended questions, with all responses capped at 500 words. Organizations were asked to voluntarily circulate the survey among their members. Parents who received the survey were offered the option of sharing the survey with their K-12 aged students, though students under the age of 18 were not individually targeted as survey respondents. The survey was open for responses from May 16, 2018, to June 8, 2018.

In total, 384 people submitted responses to the survey, including 125 self-identified teachers, 108 self-identified parents or guardians, 62 self-identified principals and school administrators, 23 self-identified education support professionals (which include individuals working in schools, such as counselors or nurses, who do not identify as teachers, principals, or other administrators), and 21 self-identified superintendents and school district leaders. In addition, 45 individuals did not self-identify as any of these previous groups and are grouped as “other” for analysis purposes. These individuals include students, education policy personnel, and others.

The Offices of Senator Warren and Representative Clark analyzed survey responses, which are presented as Tables 1-3 in the Appendix. The findings of this report reflect the broader themes that emerged from the data analysis. Where necessary, minor edits to open-ended responses have been made for style and consistency. For the sake of clarity, the text of the report interchangeably refers to “parents or guardians” as “parents,” “principals and school administrators” as “principals,” and “superintendents and school district leaders” as “superintendents.”

III. Findings

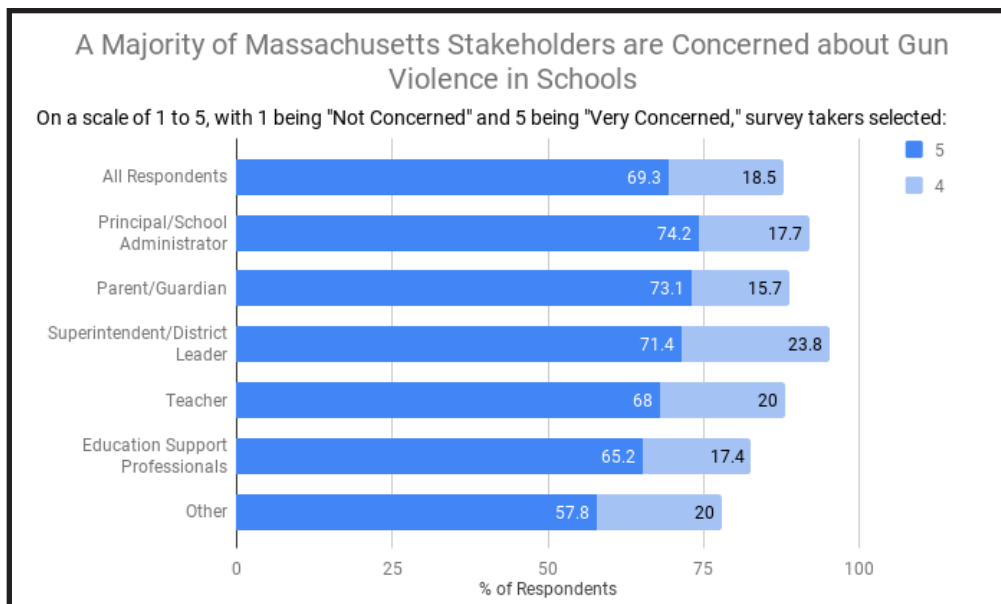
Massachusetts survey takers expressed substantial concern about gun violence in schools. When asked to rate their level of concern with gun violence in schools on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “Not Concerned” and 5 being “Very Concerned,” 337 respondents—or 87.8 percent—rated the issue a “4” or a “5,” while only 16 respondents indicated they were not concerned. Breaking down this response by respondent type showed a majority consistently describing themselves as “Very Concerned” about gun violence in schools: 74.2 percent of principals and school administrators; 73.1 percent of parents and guardians; 71.4 percent of superintendents and school district leaders; 68.0 percent of teachers; and 65.2 percent of education support professionals described themselves as “Very Concerned” about gun violence in schools.

When presented with options regarding fears associated with gun violence, 345 survey takers—or 89.8 percent—selected “Mass shooting incidents in schools.” A substantial number—54.9 percent and 44.8 percent, respectively—also expressed concern about homicides and suicides, identifying “homicide deaths or attempts of students or educators with firearms” and “suicide completions or attempts of students or educators with firearms” as sources of worry. Of the 21 respondents who noted “other” concerns about gun violence, 5 mentioned the dangers of “accidental shootings.”

The survey also gave stakeholders the opportunity to share opinions on a variety of policy proposals designed to reduce gun violence. In assessing these proposals, survey takers expressed opposition to policies that expand access to firearms, both in school and outside of it; broad support for increasing students’ access to mental health and other support services; and mixed reactions as to whether enhancements to school security and disciplinary measures would truly protect students.

1. Massachusetts stakeholders support policies that reduce, rather than expand, access to firearms in schools.

The vast majority of survey takers opposed policies that would increase the number of guns in K-12



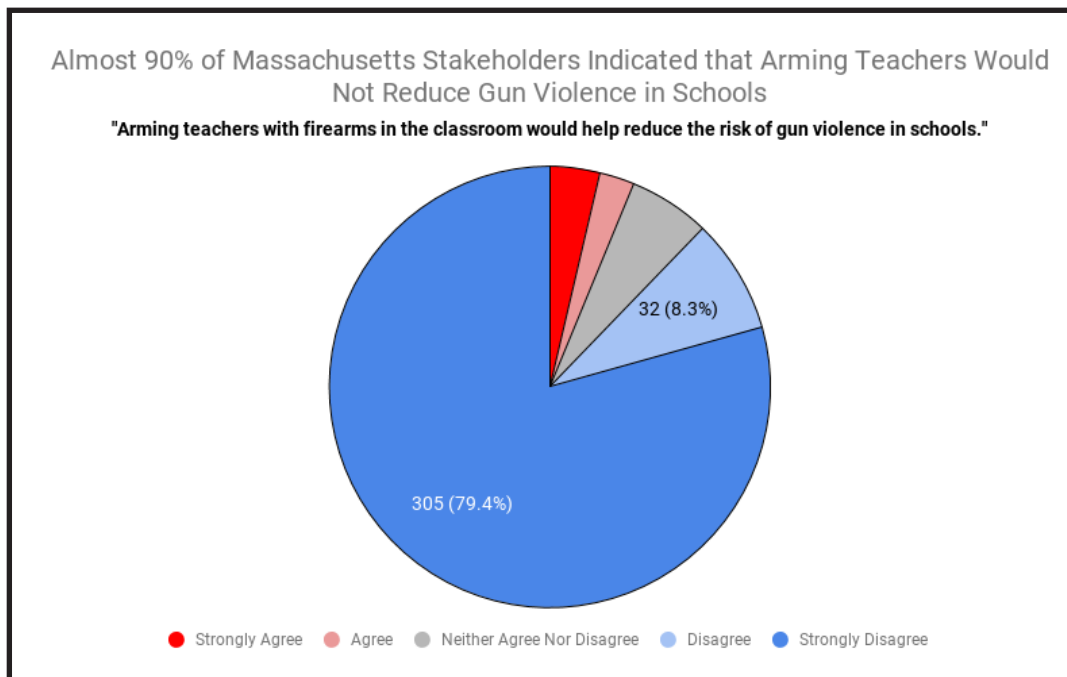
schools—particularly guns wielded by untrained professionals. When asked whether “expanding the number of guns in schools” would make students and teachers “more safe,” “less safe,” or “have no effect on school safety,” 268 respondents—roughly 70 percent—argued that doing so would make students and teachers “less safe.”

One parent commented, **“We cannot establish gun safety by putting more guns in schools.”** Another said, **“Putting more guns in schools makes kids less safe. Too easy access to weapons at all times is very scary. Makes me want to take children out of the school system.”** One teacher was equally blunt: **“I am a teacher and a licensed gun owner. I do not want more guns in schools.”**

The idea of “arm[ing] teachers with firearms in the classroom” was particularly unpopular. One question asked stakeholders to rate the likelihood that policies would “reduce the risk of gun violence in schools” on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly disagree,” and 5 being “strongly agree.” Of the 18 policies proposed, the proposal to “arm teachers with firearms in the classroom” received the lowest average score, a 1.43 out of 5. Overall, 337 respondents—or 87.8 percent—said that they “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that arming teachers would “help reduce the risk of gun violence in schools.” Only 24 respondents—or 6.3 percent—indicated a belief that arming teachers would help reduce the risk of gun violence in schools.

In explaining their opposition to arming teachers, respondents noted that doing so would increase the risk of accidental shootings and create physically and emotionally unsafe environments. One student begged, **“Please don’t arm teachers. If I knew my teacher had a gun I would be scared of my teacher.”** A parent worried that **“arming teachers is more likely to lead to...accidental gun deaths.”** And a school principal made clear that he or she did **“not believe that allowing educators to carry weapons [would] help promote a safer educational environment.”**

Massachusetts teachers expressed the strongest opposition to policies that would arm them in the classroom, with 92 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that doing so would reduce gun violence. One former first grade teacher described the proposal as **“a ridiculous idea.”** Another teacher stated that arming teachers **“puts students at increased risk”**: **“As a Marine, I am aware of the level of responsibility it requires to carry a firearm. The person carrying the firearm needs to be in positive control and aware of the firearm at all times—this simply isn’t possible as a full time educator. Period.”** Another, remarking that **“in the Parkland shooting, a trained armed individual failed to encounter the shooter,”** asked: **“How can anyone expect a teacher who has been trained in educating students to confront and shoot one of their own students?”**



Some teachers suggested they would quit teaching before bringing guns into the classroom. One teacher made clear that he or she **“did not go into teaching to carry weapons,”** while another announced he or she would **“leave the field of education if it comes to teachers being armed.”** One teacher stated that he or she would **“quit before I would ‘pack heat’ in the classroom. My job is to nurture young minds, not pick them off.”** Another teacher agreed: **“Teachers are there to teach, not shoot criminals and protect the school. If I were told I needed to carry a gun that would be the day I leave teaching!”** Even teachers who owned firearms said they would refuse to teach if required to bring them to school: **“As an educator, my primary responsibility is to educate my students and provide them with a safe and nurturing environment. Although I have a license to carry a handgun in Massachusetts, I do not feel that I am qualified to protect my students in an active shooter situation. I am not willing to carry a gun into my classroom.”**

Respondents were split on the idea of “us[ing] federal, state, and local funds to place armed school resource officers and security officials in all K-12 schools”—a proposal that would increase the number of guns in schools, albeit guns carried by trained professionals. Roughly 57 percent of respondents indicated that arming school resource officers and guards would

make students and teachers “more safe.” The idea was most popular among principals and school superintendents, who rated the policy a 3.61 out of 5. Teachers were most likely to oppose the policy, giving it an average rating of 2.98. Overall, the policy received an average rating of 3.23—suggesting respondents neither “agreed nor disagreed” that it would reduce rates of gun violence in school.

2. Massachusetts stakeholders urged federal lawmakers to strengthen existing gun laws and make it harder to access firearms.

In addition to opposing guns in schools, survey takers supported policies that would strengthen federal gun laws, protecting both schools and their surrounding communities from gun violence.

A majority of stakeholders clearly linked students’ and educators’ access to firearms outside of school with their ability to inflict violence within school: 68.8 percent of respondents cited firearm access as a “primary” contributor to gun violence in schools, and many identified better regulation of guns as critical to efforts to reduce gun violence in schools. Survey takers used open-ended responses to push for enhanced federal gun control laws. They indicated that lawmakers should “make it more difficult to get a gun,” “severely limit...access to guns,” and establish “stricter regulations to purchase a firearm.”

When asked to assess policies that would “help reduce the risk of gun violence in schools,” gun control policies were extremely popular among respondents. Of the 18 proposals assessed, four of the most popular five responses related to gun control, including:

- (1) Requiring universal background checks for gun purchases,
- (2) Banning accessories designed to simulate military-grade automatic weapons,
- (3) Implementing “extreme risk protection orders,” and
- (4) Establishing “waiting periods” for gun purchases.

Stakeholders ranked three additional gun control policies in the top 10 proposals, including:

- (5) Banning civilian access to military-style assault weapons,
- (6) Establishing a digitized, searchable database of gun sales, and
- (7) Raising the age of gun purchases from 18-years-old to 21-years-old.

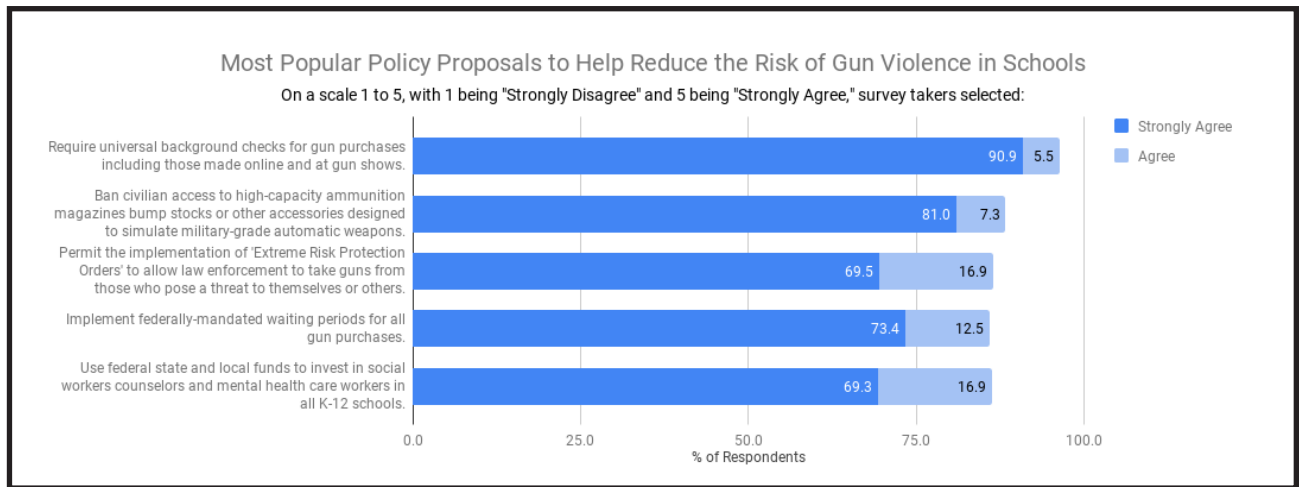
In their open-ended comments, respondents argued that **“no one needs semiautomatic weapons,”** urged lawmakers to **“make sure people who live in concealed carry states cannot carry concealed weapons in stricter states,”** and suggested that police should have **“the ability to take firearms from anyone that lives with someone who makes a threat or who is a threat to themselves or others.”**

Not all Massachusetts stakeholders agreed that reducing access to guns was the best solution to the problem of gun violence in schools. 24 respondents (6.3 percent) suggested that the existence of “gun-free” zones that prohibit students, educators, parents, and visitors from bringing firearms into schools” was a “primary” contributor to school-based gun violence. Some people were concerned that limiting access to guns would make them less safe; one teacher worried about limiting teachers’ ability to carry guns in school and urged policymakers to “protect the 2nd Amendment.”

Others stated that gun violence in schools was caused by societal problems, not guns themselves, and that preventing gun violence was better solved by social interventions rather than gun regulation. According to one parent, **“Banning guns is not the answer. Changing our society [and] social media and how children are raised is the answer.”**

Most Popular Policy Proposals to Help Reduce the Risk of Gun Violence in Schools

Policy Proposal	Respondents Who “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” Proposal Would Reduce Gun Violence	Average Score
Require universal background checks for gun purchases including those made online and at gun shows.	96.4%	4.83
Ban civilian access to high-capacity ammunition magazines bump stocks or other accessories designed to simulate military-grade automatic weapons.	88.3%	4.59
Permit the implementation of ‘Extreme Risk Protection Orders’ to allow law enforcement to take guns from those who pose a threat to themselves or others.	86.5%	4.51
Implement federally-mandated waiting periods for all gun purchases.	85.9%	4.50
Use federal state and local funds to invest in social workers counselors and mental health care workers in all K-12 schools.	86.2%	4.47



These views were in the minority. Massachusetts stakeholders were more likely to agree with this respondent on the best way to stop school-based gun violence: **“It is simple. Make stricter Federal gun control laws.”**

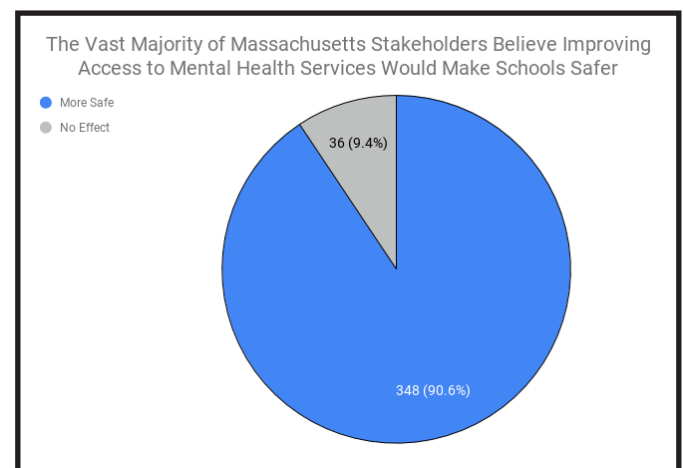
3. Massachusetts stakeholders believe that expanding and improving access to mental health services would make educational institutions safer.

Survey takers almost universally agreed that expanding and improving access to mental health services would prevent gun violence in school. When asked whether “expanding access to social workers, counselors, and other mental health officials in schools” would make students and teachers “more safe” from gun violence, “less safe” from gun violence, or would have “no effect” on gun violence, an overwhelming 348 respondents—or 90.6 percent—stated that doing so would make schools “more safe.” Not a single respondent felt that doing so would make schools “less safe,” and only 36 respondents felt that doing so would have “no effect” on school safety.

Stakeholders were adamant that policymakers should make it easier for students to access the mental health services they need. One parent urged lawmakers to **“implement more school educational programs involving mental health workers teaching kids about mental illness, how to deal with it, and how to seek help.”** One teacher argued, **“We need to serve these young people better and address their mental health needs before it escalates to this extreme violence.”** A superintendent stated that schools should

help **“struggling students...receive the necessary supports to help them through difficult times,”** while another respondent called for **“more resources for mental health, substance abuse, and adjustment counselors.”** Some survey takers linked gun violence in schools with limited insurance coverage of mental health services. An administrator called for **“MORE mental health coverage, because the lack of this type of care has helped to cause the current crisis to some extent,”** while a parent argued that lawmakers should **“consider making mental healthcare more accessible.”**

Respondents frequently portrayed gun control and mental health support as inextricably linked. One principal exemplified the wishes of many respondents by calling on lawmakers to take **“a two-pronged approach. Include both mental health and controlled gun access in the solution.”** Another principal called for “mental health services” and “stricter gun laws.”



4. Massachusetts stakeholders felt that schools should enhance building security, but did not consider it a solution to gun violence.

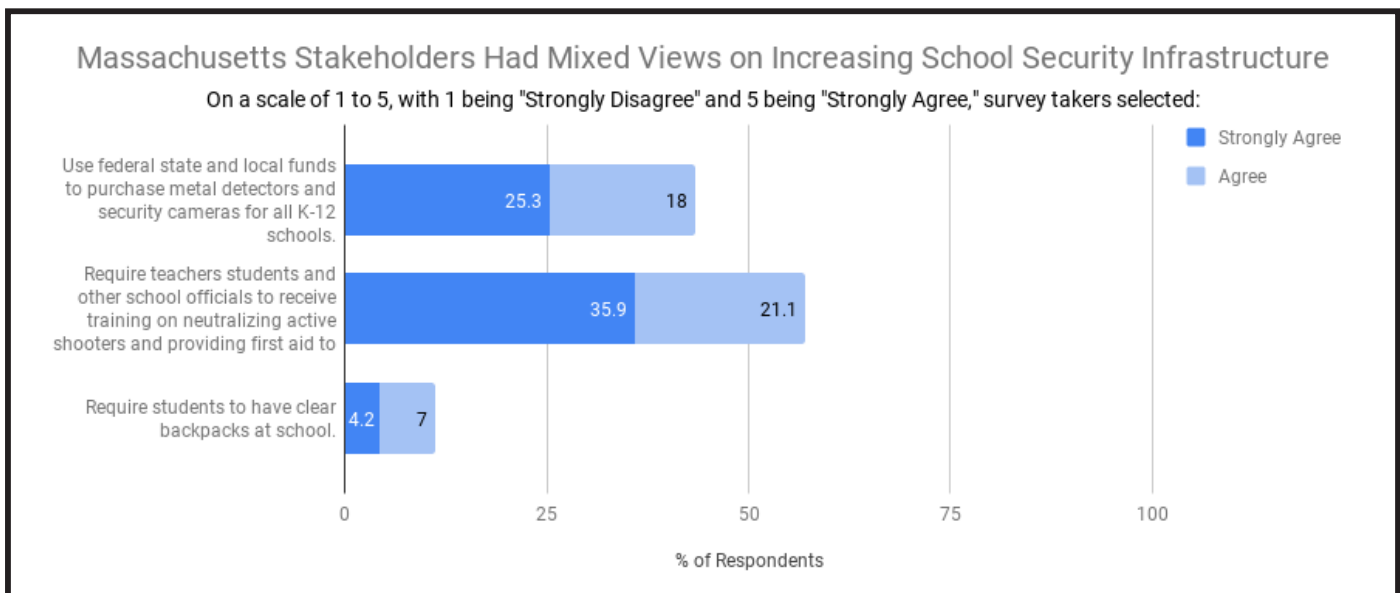
Respondents generally agreed that policies aimed at increasing school security infrastructure would make education institutions safer. These policies include infrastructure and operational changes, such as training school administrators and teachers on neutralizing active shooters, expanding the use of metal detectors and cameras, and expanding the use of suspensions and expulsions for misbehaving students. In fact, nearly two out of three respondents—66.1 percent—agreed that “enhancing building security in schools” would make educational institutions safer, with 2.3% and 31.5% suggesting it would make them less safe or have no effect on school safety, respectively.

Respondents were less convinced about the efficacy of specific policy options. A little over half of stakeholders (57 percent) agreed that “requiring teachers, students, and other school officials receive training on neutralizing active shooters and providing first aid to shooting victims” would reduce the risk of school-based gun violence,” while only 43.2 percent of respondents agreed that using funds to “purchase metal detectors and security cameras” would be effective. Requiring students to have clear backpacks was considered to be the least effective solution for curbing gun violence in schools among this group of policies,

receiving a 2.03 out of 5 average score. Overall, 68.5 percent disagreed that this policy would help reduce gun violence.

Some respondents agreed that school security measures should be enhanced. For instance, one principal argued that “**we should have military in our schools.**”

Other respondents, however, indicated discomfort with increased security measures, expressing the view that they may harm students. As one teacher commented, “**Schools cannot be prisons. They need to feel welcoming while still being safe. Our schools are the place where our children and families go to learn and feel a sense of community. That practice will not continue as schools become more and more prison-like.**” Similarly, a principal explained, “**Making our schools fortresses will not solve the problem. If that was the case a mass shooter could just wait in the parking lot until school dismissal time and open fire on all of the students exiting the building.**” Noting that “**students already sneak items into school,**” an education support professional argued that “**metal detectors and school police are not appropriate for schools.**” Furthermore, a superintendent noted, “**security enhancements might make schools safer,**” but might not be “**appropriate for all schools and all districts.**”

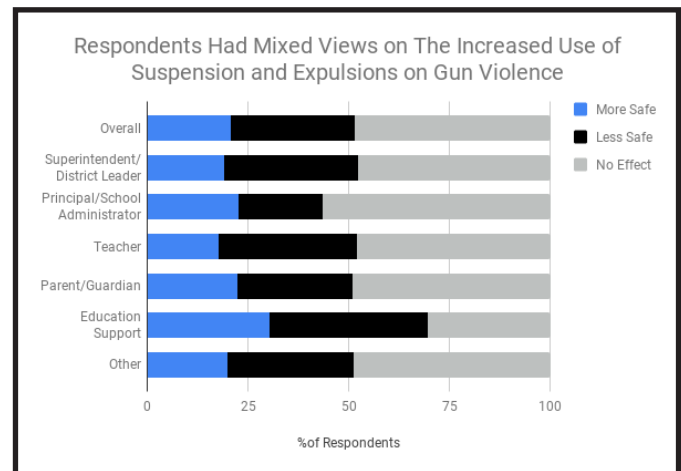


Survey takers' skepticism that enhanced school security measures would be a solution to gun violence appeared to reflect concerns about the impact that increasing school security infrastructure could have on students. Some respondents supported only "passive" measures that they felt were "not intrusive to the learning environment." For example, one teacher argued that he or she did **"not believe in metal detectors because it raises the level of fearfulness in the whole building...which could lead to more mental instability and violence in schools."** Security cameras, however, were a form of **"passive security"** that would not infringe on student learning. A parent similarly argued that the use of metal detectors would **"contribute to the appearance of a police state at school, while free-thinking and education should be open and supported."** Yet the parent supported **"invisible deterrents,"** like **"bullet-proof glass and cameras,"** which they did not think would detract from the school environment.

Respondents were also lukewarm about proposals to increase schools' use of suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary proceedings to deter "bad actors." Such proposals are in conflict with 2014 Obama Administration guidance urging schools to reduce rates of suspensions and expulsions – particularly among students of color – as a means of stemming the "school-to-prison pipeline." Some, including Congressional Republicans, have suggested that that the policy has unintentionally made schools wary of suspending students regardless of cause—a consequence with implications for gun violence prevention.²⁴

In fact, "expanding suspensions and expulsions as disciplinary tools for misbehaving students" as a means to reduce the risk of gun violence in schools was met with slight disagreement by Massachusetts educators and families. When rated on a 1-5 scale, this policy proposal received a 2.76 overall. Only parents and guardians scored the policy above a 3.0, while all other groups gave it a mid- to high-2 on average. Overall 20.8% of respondents believed "increasing suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary proceedings in schools" would make schools safer, 30.5% suggested it would make schools less safe, and almost half – 48.7% - of respondents viewed it as having *no effect* on school safety.

Massachusetts teachers and parents, in particular, felt that increasing school discipline would **"only serve to increase the level of disconnection and anger that leads to acts like school shootings."** As one parent more explained, **"Lawmakers should NOT expand the suspension and disciplinary policies. This only leads to a faster track to the criminal system for them when this could have easily been avoided."**



It's heartbreaking how fast some good hearted kids are suspended and expelled because the schools are so reactionary and don't take the time to TEACH them." Another survey taker worried that enhancing school security and disciplinary procedures would increase the likelihood that **"law enforcement [gets] involved with disciplinary matters that properly fall under the purview of the school administration... contribut[ing] to the school to prison pipeline."**

IV. Conclusion

The Federal Commission on School Safety should take into account the opinions of Massachusetts stakeholders on the best ways to address gun violence in schools. The results of this survey of almost 400 Massachusetts educators, school administrators, and families indicate that to make schools safer, the federal government should adopt common-sense gun control policies, while avoiding policies that place more guns in schools.

In addition, the survey results suggest that the federal government should improve and expand students'

access to mental health services. In 2015, Congress established the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant Program, the only federal program dedicated to increasing students' access to school mental health services nationwide.

In light of survey respondents' support for expanded access to mental health services, Senator Warren and Representative Clark remain deeply concerned about and skeptical of proposals to fund school security infrastructure at the expense of school mental health, and firmly oppose efforts to reduce or otherwise divert Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant mental health funding to this end. Senator Warren and Representative Clark also remain concerned that the Administration continues to propose the elimination of this program in its annual budget submission to Congress.

Finally, as one respondent summarized, **“In Massachusetts, we have very strict laws that could be used as an example for the nation.”**

With some of the strictest gun laws in the nation, Massachusetts can indeed serve as a model for common-sense, effective policies that keep children, educators, and their communities safe from senseless gun violence.



Endnotes

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APPENDIX 1
Copy of Gun Survey

Senator Warren's and Representative Clark's Survey on Gun Violence and Schools

Senator Warren and Congresswoman Clark are committed to reducing rates of gun violence in Massachusetts and across the nation. The insights of Massachusetts teachers, students, parents, and education officials are critical to ensuring that stakeholder views are represented as Congress works to develop policy solutions to address gun violence. Please fill out the questions below and then hit "Submit."

Personal Information

1.) Please select the option that best describes you:

- Teacher (Current or Retired)
- Student
- Parent or Guardian of a K-12 Student
- Principal or School Administrator (Current or Retired)
- Superintendent or School District Leader (Current or Retired)
- Education Support Professionals (Current or Retired)
- Policy Personnel
- Other

2.) Through which organization(s) did you hear about this survey?

- American Federation of Teachers - Massachusetts
- Boston Teachers Union
- Massachusetts Teachers Association
- Massachusetts Parent Teacher Association
- Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents
- Massachusetts School Administrators' Association
- Massachusetts Association of School Committees
- Mass Partners
- Other

Primary Concerns About Gun Violence

3.) On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Not Concerned" and 5 being "Very Concerned", how concerned are you about gun violence in schools?

- 1 2 3 4 5

4.) Which of the following incidents related to gun violence are of primary concern to you? Please select the incident(s) of concern to you from the choices below.

- Suicide completions or attempts (of students or educators) from firearms.
- Homicide deaths or attempts (of students or educators) from firearms.
- Mass shooting incidents in schools
- Other

5.) In your opinion, which of the following primarily contribute to gun violence in schools? Please select the factor(s) of concern to you from the choices below.

- Students' and educators' access to firearms at home or within their communities
- "Gun-free" zones that prohibit students, educators, parents, and visitors from bringing firearms into schools.
- Limited access to social workers, counselors, and other mental health professionals in schools.
- Inadequate security procedures, protocols, and resources at schools.
- Other

6.) (Optional) Please provide any additional commentary on existing policies, or lack of existing policies, that you believe contribute to gun violence in schools. (500 word limit)*

Policies to Address Gun Violence

7.) Below is a list of policies that various politicians, advocates, students, teachers, and public health experts have proposed in recent months to combat gun violence in schools. For each of the policies mentioned below, please assess the statement: **"This policy will help reduce the risk of gun violence in schools,"** on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being *"Strongly Disagree,"* 2 being *"Disagree,"* 3 being *"Neither Agree Nor Disagree,"* 4 being *"Agree,"* and 5 being *"Strongly Agree"*.

a. Ban civilian access to military-style assault weapons.

1 2 3 4 5

b. Arm teachers with firearms in the classroom.

1 2 3 4 5

c. Require universal background checks for gun purchases, including those made online and at gun shows.

1 2 3 4 5

d. Require teachers, students, and other school officials to receive training on neutralizing active shooters and providing first aid to shooting victims.

1 2 3 4 5

e. Raise the age of gun purchases from 18-years-old to 21-years-old.

1 2 3 4 5

f. Ban civilian access to high-capacity ammunition magazines, bump stocks, or other accessories designed to simulate military-grade automatic weapons.

1 2 3 4 5

g. Implement federally-mandated waiting periods for all gun purchases.

1 2 3 4 5

h. Use federal, state, and local funds to purchase metal detectors and security cameras for all K-12 schools.

1 2 3 4 5

i. Require students to have clear backpacks at school.

1 2 3 4 5

j. Improve communication between mental health providers and law enforcement officials.

- 1 2 3 4 5

k. Use federal, state, and local funds to invest in social workers, counselors, and mental health care workers in all K-12 schools.

- 1 2 3 4 5

l. Use federal, state, and local funds to place armed school resource officers and security officials in all K-12 schools.

- 1 2 3 4 5

m. Use federal funding to support gun violence prevention research at the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other federal agencies.

- 1 2 3 4 5

n. Reduce the rates of violence in media commonly consumed by youth, such as through video games, movies, and television.

- 1 2 3 4 5

o. Expand the use of student suspensions and expulsions as disciplinary tools for misbehaving students.

- 1 2 3 4 5

p. Permit the implementation of "Extreme Risk Protection Orders" to allow law enforcement to take guns from those who pose a threat to themselves or others.

- 1 2 3 4 5

q. Expand "concealed carry" and "open carry" laws.

- 1 2 3 4 5

r. Limit "concealed carry" and "open carry" laws.

- 1 2 3 4 5

s. Establish a digitized, searchable database of gun sales.

- 1 2 3 4 5

8.) Do you believe that expanding the number of guns in educational institutions would:

- Make students and teachers more safe
 Make students and teachers less safe
 Have no effect on school safety

9.) Do you believe that increasing the number of suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary proceedings in schools would:

- Make students and teachers more safe from gun violence
- Make students and teachers less safe from gun violence
- Have no effect on school safety

10.) Do you believe that enhancing building security measures in schools, such as bulletproof glass, metal detectors, and cameras, would:

- Make students and teachers more safe from gun violence
- Make students and teachers less safe from gun violence
- Have no effect on school safety

11.) Do you believe that hiring more armed school resource officers and security guards would:

- Make students and teachers more safe from gun violence
- Make students and teachers less safe from gun violence
- Have no effect on school safety

12.) Do you believe that expanding access to social workers, counselors, and other mental health officials in schools would:

- Make students and teachers more safe from gun violence
- Make students and teachers less safe from gun violence
- Have no effect on school safety

13.) (Optional) Please provide any additional commentary regarding policies that you believe federal lawmakers should consider as a way to reduce gun violence. (500 word limit)*

14.) (Optional) Please provide any additional commentary regarding policies that you believe federal lawmakers should not consider as a way to reduce gun violence. (500 word limit)*

SUBMIT

APPENDIX 2

List of Organizations Contacted with the Gun Survey

American Federation of Teachers—Massachusetts
Boston Teachers Union
Massachusetts Teachers Association
Massachusetts Parent Teacher Association
Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents
Massachusetts School Administrators' Association
Massachusetts Association of School Committees
Mass Partners

APPENDIX 3
Survey Analysis

Chart 1: On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Not Concerned" and 5 being "Very Concerned", how concerned are you about gun violence in schools?

	No. of Survey Takers	Level of Concern about Gun Violence in School	% Indicating They were "Concerned" (4) with Gun Violence in Schools	% Indicating they were "Very Concerned" (5) with Gun Violence in Schools
Teacher	125	4.52	20.0%	68.0%
Parent/Guardian	108	4.56	15.7%	73.1%
Principal/School Administrator	62	4.65	17.7%	74.2%
Superintendent/School District Leader	21	4.67	23.8%	71.4%
Education Support Professional	23	4.39	17.4%	65.2%
Other	45	4.22	20.0%	57.8%
Overall	384	4.52	18.5%	69.3%

Chart 2: Below is a list of policies that various politicians, advocates, students, teachers, and public health experts have proposed in recent months to combat gun violence in schools. For each of the policies mentioned below, please assess the statement, “This policy will help reduce the risk of gun violence in schools,” on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “Strongly Disagree,” 2 being “Disagree,” 3 being “Neither Agree Nor Disagree,” 4 being “Agree,” and 5 being “Strongly Agree.”

	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Parent/Guardian</i>	<i>Principal/School Administrator</i>	<i>Superintendent/School District Leader</i>	<i>Education Support Professional</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Ban civilian access to military-style assault weapons.	4.5	4.3	4.7	4.3	4.0	4.1	4.4
Arm teachers with firearms in the classroom.	1.3	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.8	1.5	1.4
Require universal background checks for gun purchases including those made online and at gun shows.	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.6	4.8	4.8
Require teachers, students, and other school officials to receive training on neutralizing active shooters and providing first aid to shooting victims.	3.4	3.8	3.7	3.0	4.1	3.6	3.6
Raise the age of gun purchases from 18-years-old to 21-years-old.	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.1	4.0	4.1	4.2
Ban civilian access to high-capacity ammunition magazines bump stocks or other accessories designed to simulate military-grade automatic weapons.	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.5	4.2	4.3	4.6
Implement federally-mandated waiting periods for all gun purchases.	4.6	4.4	4.6	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.5
Use federal state and local funds to purchase metal detectors and security cameras for all K-12 schools.	3.1	3.4	3.2	2.8	3.7	3.0	3.2
Require students to have clear backpacks at school.	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.0
Improve communication between mental health providers and law enforcement officials.	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.1	4.3	4.4
Use federal state and local funds to invest in social workers counselors and mental health care workers in all K-12 schools.	4.5	4.3	4.6	4.5	4.6	4.4	4.5
Use federal state and local funds to place armed school resource officers and security officials in all K-12 schools.	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.1	3.5	3.0	3.2
Use federal funding to support gun violence prevention research at the National Institutes of Health Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal agencies.	4.3	3.8	4.2	4.4	3.9	3.8	4.1

Chart 2: Below is a list of policies that various politicians, advocates, students, teachers, and public health experts have proposed in recent months to combat gun violence in schools. For each of the policies mentioned below, please assess the statement, “This policy will help reduce the risk of gun violence in schools,” on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “Strongly Disagree,” 2 being “Disagree,” 3 being “Neither Agree Nor Disagree,” 4 being “Agree,” and 5 being “Strongly Agree.”

	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Parent/Guardian</i>	<i>Principal/School Administrator</i>	<i>Superintendent/School District Leader</i>	<i>Education Support Professional</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Reduce the rates of violence in media commonly consumed by youth such as through video games movies and television.	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.4	3.4	3.6
Expand the use of student suspensions and expulsions as disciplinary tools for misbehaving students.	2.6	3.1	2.7	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.8
Permit the implementation of 'Extreme Risk Protection Orders' to allow law enforcement to take guns from those who pose a threat to themselves or others.	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.3	4.5
Expand 'concealed carry' and 'open carry' laws.	2.1	2.3	2.2	2.0	2.8	2.0	2.2
Limit 'concealed carry' and 'open carry' laws.	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.9	3.1	3.7	3.6
Establish a digitized searchable database of gun sales.	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.0	4.1	4.3

Chart 3: Do you believe that the policies below would make students and teachers more safe from gun violence, less safe from gun violence, or have no effect on school safety?

	Expanding the Number of Guns in Schools						Increasing Suspensions, Expulsions, and Disciplinary Proceedings in Schools					
	More Safe		Less Safe		No Effect		More Safe		Less Safe		No Effect	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Teacher	11	8.8%	98	78.4%	16	12.8%	22	17.6%	43	34.4%	60	48.0%
Parent/Guardian	13	12.0%	70	64.8%	25	23.1%	24	22.2%	31	28.7%	53	49.1%
Principal/School Administrator	6	9.7%	41	66.1%	15	24.2%	14	22.6%	13	21.0%	35	56.5%
Superintendent/School District Leader	4	19.0%	15	71.4%	2	9.5%	4	19.0%	7	33.3%	10	47.6%
Education Support Professional	4	17.4%	13	56.5%	6	26.1%	7	30.4%	9	39.1%	7	30.4%
Other	7	15.6%	31	68.9%	7	15.6%	9	20.0%	14	31.1%	22	48.9%
Overall	45	11.7%	268	69.8%	71	18.5%	80	20.8%	117	30.5%	187	48.7%
	Enhancing Building Security in Schools (metal detectors, bulletproof glass, cameras)						Expanding the Hiring of Armed School Resource Officers and Security Guards					
	More Safe		Less Safe		No Effect		More Safe		Less Safe		No Effect	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Teacher	71	56.8%	3	2.4%	51	40.8%	57	45.6%	21	16.8%	47	37.6%
Parent/Guardian	75	69.4%	2	1.9%	31	28.7%	69	63.9%	10	9.3%	29	26.9%
Principal/School Administrator	49	79.0%	0	0.0%	13	21.0%	42	67.7%	1	1.6%	19	30.6%
Superintendent/School District Leader	12	57.1%	0	0.0%	9	42.9%	13	61.9%	1	4.8%	7	33.3%
Education Support Professional	17	73.9%	2	8.7%	4	17.4%	14	60.9%	2	8.7%	7	30.4%
Other	30	66.7%	2	4.4%	13	28.9%	22	48.9%	4	8.9%	19	42.2%
Overall	254	66.1%	9	2.3%	121	31.5%	217	56.5%	39	10.2%	128	33.3%

	Expanding Access to Social Workers, Counselors, and Mental Health Officials					
	More Safe		Less Safe		No Effect	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Teacher	116	92.8%	0	0.0%	9	7.2%
Parent/Guardian	92	85.2%	0	0.0%	16	14.8%
Principal/School Administrator	59	95.2%	0	0.0%	3	4.8%
Superintendent/School District Leader	19	90.5%	0	0.0%	2	9.5%
Education Support Professional	21	91.3%	0	0.0%	2	8.7%
Other	41	91.1%	0	0.0%	4	8.9%
Overall	348	90.6%	0	0.0%	36	9.4%