

# What did Texas do to make students safer this school year?

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**A new law in response to Uvalde requires armed personnel on every public school campus, among other things.**

By [Sonia A. Rao](#)



Over the summer, Gov. Greg Abbott signed into law a new measure that requires armed personnel on every public school campus, among other things.

It's a response to the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde two years nearly ago, which killed 19 children and two teachers. It is the deadliest school shooting that has happened in Texas.

Find out what this law requires and what it means for schools below.

## Why was this law passed?

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State leaders vowed to make schools safer after Uvalde.

Many called for law enforcement officers at all schools to cut down on response time in case of an active shooter or other threat to students.

However, critics of the new requirement note that law enforcement was criticized for the response at Robb. Eighty minutes passed between when 911 was first called and when police confronted the teenage shooter.

## What does the new Texas law on school safety require?

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The most notable requirement is that every public school in Texas have at least one armed staffer on campus.

The preferred option is for each school to have a law enforcement officer, said Kathy Martinez-Prather, director of the Texas School Safety Center.

That means a school resource officer contracted with a local or a district police department. Of about 1,000 school districts in Texas, nearly a third of them — 343 — have their own police departments, according to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement.

If a district has funding or personnel restraints, it can fill the requirement through other means. That could include hiring a security officer from a private company or using a state provision that trains educators to be armed in schools.

## How can Texas teachers carry a gun in school?

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Texas has two pathways for educators to carry guns.

The school marshal program requires staffers to undergo 80 hours of training overseen by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement, as well as a psychological background check.

The guardian program, which is not overseen by a state agency, requires 16 hours of training. Martinez-Prather said Texas has no standard training requirements for guardians.

Texas has 318 school marshals across 77 districts, according to TCOLE data. Gretchen Grigsby, a TCOLE spokeswoman, said the group has seen an uptick in interest for school marshal training this summer, though she wasn't able to provide specific numbers.

Only three locations can train school marshals: Tarrant County College, the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service and the West Central Texas Council of Governments. Grigsby said that number will increase in the next few months.

## What schools are most affected by this new law?

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Most middle and high school campuses in Texas already have officers, Martinez-Prather said. Administrators will need to fill spots in elementary schools.

“Most incidents do occur in middle and high schools, but the flip side of that discussion is our elementary schools are also our most vulnerable populations,” she said. “An 18-year-old senior has more ability to potentially protect themselves in the case of an active threat situation than our kindergarteners could.”

Larger districts will have more campuses to fill.

However, schools may struggle to find enough armed law enforcement officers as the nation grapples with a police shortage.

Districts might be in competition with each other to find armed officers. Dallas ISD Superintendent Stephanie Elizalde previously told *The Dallas Morning News* she would need to find about \$9 million more to staff 140 elementary schools in the district.

## How much more money will Texas schools get for safety?

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Districts will get \$10 per student to use for security needs, marking a 28-cent increase from what they received last year. In addition, each campus will get a \$15,000 allotment.

Many school leaders say that's not enough.

Mark Quinn, director of security at Garland ISD, noted that his district has 71 campuses serving nearly 53,000 students. The additional state funding amounts to a rough estimate of \$1 million.

But adding about 40 armed security positions to meet the law and other related safety positions this school year will cost the district \$1.5 million, he said. That's on top what Garland spends on other measures.

Meanwhile, the state budget provides \$1.1 billion to the Texas Education Agency for school safety grants.

## When is this law expected to be implemented?

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The law goes into effect Sept. 1.

Texas Education Agency Commissioner Mike Morath can appoint a state conservator to oversee districts that do not submit school safety information or address concerns under the new law.

However, this does not apply to districts that do not have an armed officer at each school.

## **What else does the safety bill mandate?**

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It requires mental health training for more school staff and outlines more ways districts can use funding for safety.

TEA and the Texas School Safety Center will work together to assess school campuses' safety every four years. They will set facility standards for the district once every five years.

The TEA commissioner will develop guidelines for districts to notify parents of “violent activity” on school campuses. The Texas School Safety Center will provide parents with resources on how to safely store firearms.

School districts must provide the Texas Department of Public Safety and local emergency responders with maps of school campuses.

## **Can armed educators play the same role as school resource officers?**

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Mo Canady, executive director of the National Association of School Resource Officers, said the organization recommends campuses use school resource officers with law enforcement experience when possible.

SROs usually have an agreement with their districts that outlines their role, he said. Additionally, they have training in mental health crisis intervention, child and adolescent brain development, de-escalation techniques, using limited force and dealing with active shooters.

But not all schools can rely on officers.

“Every state in the country, the entire nation is struggling with law enforcement recruiting,” he said. “It’s a crisis.”

## **Why doesn’t everyone want armed staff in schools?**

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Critics of more guns in schools note that law enforcement had been in the building when some school shootings occurred, such as at Uvalde or the 2018 Parkland shooting.

However, Shawn Bushway, a researcher with the RAND Corp., said that focusing on these few cases does not include times where an officer being in a school did prevent a shooting from taking place.

He said while there is significant research on impacts of SROs in schools, there’s none on arming educators.