

SCHOOL SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN GEORGIA

Ensuring school safety means protecting the physical and mental health of everyone in our schools.¹ This requires teamwork among students, parents, teachers, and law enforcement to prevent violence and support recovery.²

GEORGIA'S GROWING SCHOOL SAFETY CRISIS



Between 2020-2024, there were

41

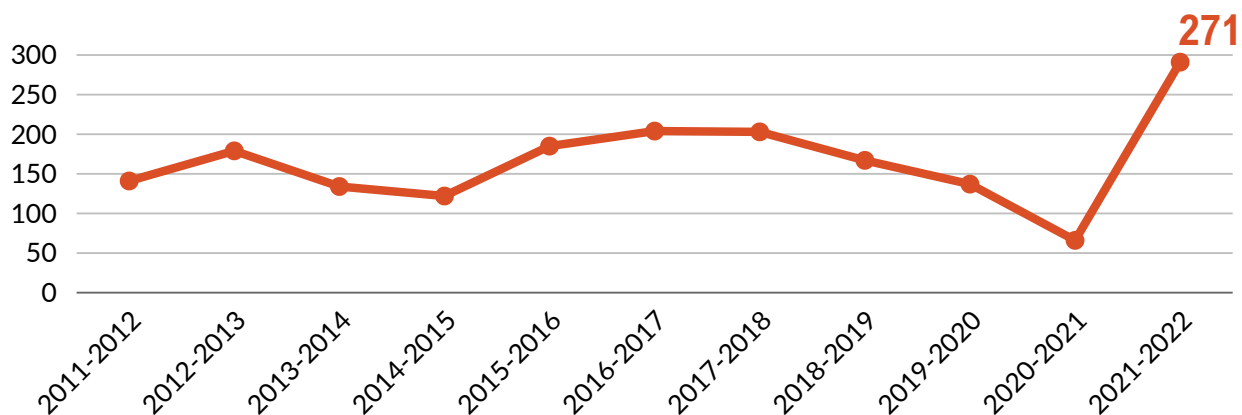


school shooting incidents
in Georgia.³

31 were wounded⁴

8 were killed⁵

The number of students who brought a firearm to school reached a ten-year high in 2021-2022:⁶



WHAT STUDENTS AND PARENTS ARE EXPERIENCING

What Teens Say:⁷

- **54%** say students “fight a lot” at their school
- **85%** feel unsafe at school in the last 30 days
- **20%** say they’ve been bullied or threatened in the last 30 days
- **24%** do not know an adult at school they could talk to if they need help
- **13%** do not know what to do if there is an emergency at school

What Parents Say:⁸

- **60%** believe schools are less safe than they were 10 years ago
- Only **25%** of parents say they aren’t worried about their children’s safety at school
- **One-third** of parents reported their child’s school had gone into lockdown during the 2024-2025 school year

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UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL VIOLENCE

What is it? ⁹



Bullying



Sexual violence



School shootings



Fighting

What causes it?

Research identifies five primary predictors of school violence, ranked by strength and evidence: ¹⁰

1. **Delinquent or antisocial behavior:** Early patterns of rule-breaking, aggression, or antisocial actions appearing before age 12
2. **Behavioral and attention challenges:** Untreated or unrecognized difficulties with focus and self-regulation, which can lead to impulsive or risky behavior
3. **Child maltreatment:** Experiences of abuse or neglect that increase the likelihood of later violent behavior
4. **Peer rejection:** Social isolation and lack of positive peer connections, which can increase vulnerability
5. **Moral disengagement:** Separating one's actions from moral standards, allowing harmful behavior to occur without guilt

Impact on Youth

Youth who experience violence tend to have: ¹¹

- Worse academic and psychosocial outcomes
- Higher rates of behavioral and mental health problems
- Increased likelihood of academic difficulties and future violence
- Higher rates of school absenteeism and dropout

WHAT ISN'T WORKING

Research consistently shows that the following traditional security measures alone have **limited effectiveness** in preventing school violence: ^{12, 13}



Security officers and guards



Excessive security measures that create a prison-like atmosphere



Metal detectors and similar measures



Punitive disciplinary approaches that escalate rather than reduce problems

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COMPREHENSIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES: A BETTER APPROACH

Most school violence is predictable and preventable. Effective prevention requires comprehensive approaches addressing individual, social-contextual, and environmental factors. ^{14, 15}



Individual Interventions

- Mental health screening with appropriate follow-up
- Targeted support for ADHD and behavioral challenges
- Evidence-based programs addressing antisocial behavior
- Social skills & peer integration initiatives
- Moral reasoning and ethical decision-making curriculum



Social-Contextual Interventions

- Family-focused prevention strategies like the Strengthening Families Program
- Peer-based interventions including mediation and bystander training
- Community partnerships with comprehensive violence prevention approaches
- Coordinated care systems between schools and community providers



School Environment Strategies

- Comprehensive school climate assessment and improvement
- Focus on fostering positive student-teacher relationships
- Evidence-based threat assessment protocols
- Safe reporting mechanisms for students
- Alternatives to traditional security measures
- Restorative justice practices that repair harm while maintaining accountability
- Trauma-informed approaches throughout the school



GEORGIA'S CURRENT SCHOOL SAFETY INITIATIVES

Georgia has implemented several school safety initiatives, including: ¹⁶



School Safety Plans: required for all schools to address responses to violence and emergencies



School Safety Hotline: anonymous reporting system for unsafe situations



Center for School Safety: online clearinghouse for resources and training



School Climate Star Rating: 1-5 star rating system to assess school climate



K-12 Student Discipline Dashboard: discipline data tracking system



Georgia Tiered-System of Supports for Students: evidence-based interventions and screenings



School Social Work: professionals trained to address barriers to learning



Georgia School Climate Survey: anonymous survey to identify safety issues

While these initiatives provide a foundation, implementation challenges remain, as evidenced by the 13% of Georgia students who report not knowing what to do during a school emergency. ¹⁷

For a complete list of Georgia's School Safety efforts, see <https://www.gadoe.org/wholechild/Pages/default.aspx>

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

For Policymakers:

- Build support for comprehensive school safety legislation requiring evidence-based components in safety plans
- Expand dedicated school mental health funding streams (including Georgia Apex program, Project AWARE, and Mental Health First Aid Training)
- Develop improved cross-agency information sharing protocols
- Fund adequate staffing levels for school-employed mental health professionals (counselors, psychologists, social workers)
- Develop improved cross-agency information sharing protocols

For School Districts:

- Shift resources from physical security to relationship-based approaches
- Implement evidence-based prevention curricula at all grade levels
- Provide school safety and trauma-informed training for all grade levels
- Ensure appropriate school mental health professional to student ratios
- Utilize school health and discipline data to address school climate and ensure that policies are clear and consistently applied
- Establish school-community violence prevention coalitions
- Create family resource centers in high-need communities

For Community Partners

- Support school-based mental health services expansion to provide access to mental health supports for all students
- Implement/strengthen community-based mentoring program
- Create safe storage campaigns for firearms with free lock distribution
- Develop coordinated care systems between schools and community providers

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

The safety of Georgia's students requires a unified approach that moves beyond reactive security measures to address the root causes of violence. By implementing evidence-based prevention strategies across individual, social, and environmental domains, Georgia can create truly secure schools where students can focus on learning rather than fear.

Our children deserve comprehensive safety approaches that protect both their physical and psychological well-being. The time for action is now.



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