



House Bill 1016

Relating to active shooter drills conducted by public schools.

As Texas builds on the work accomplished by this committee in the 86th legislature, school safety measures need to be balanced with preventing unnecessary and unintended trauma inflicted on our children, teachers, and communities. In response to the school shooting at Santa Fe High School, one strategy implemented was the requirement of at least two lockdown drills per school year, inclusive of active shooter drills.¹ Currently, these drills are conducted without guidelines or best practices provided to schools. As a result, students and teachers may be susceptible to traumatic, realistic simulations that can negatively impact students' and teachers' mental health and well-being.

While providing a plan for unexpected emergencies such as fires, tornados, and even a school shooter can help prepare students and teachers, there is no evidence to support the need for realistic, live simulations. Studies have shown that providing training on drill protocols, followed by practice, helps retain knowledge in the short-term on how to respond when an event occurs.² However, data is lacking demonstrating active shooter drills result in fewer fatalities, increase preparedness, or reduce panic and fear among students.³ On the contrary, there have been significant negative-related outcomes for students. Among the research on active shooter drills, they have been shown to:

- Cause students to feel unsafe, scared, helpless, or sad;⁴
- Increase depression, stress and anxiety, and physiological health problems overall, including in children as young as five years-old up to high schoolers, their parents, and teachers;⁵
- Increase concerns over death by students and families;⁶
- Cause concerns about counterproductive information sharing, as many mass school shooters are current or former students of that school;⁷ and
- Risk inducing trauma.⁸

According to psychologists and behavioral analysts, active shooter drills that are elaborate and a surprise can be harmful.⁹ However, these types of drills are allowed to occur in schools without guidance on how best to protect children and staff from unintended negative psychological and emotional harm. Without guidance or parameters, active school shooter drills have included plastic pellets shot at teachers,¹⁰ children texting their parents goodbye,¹¹ and physical and emotional trauma to teachers resulting in lawsuits.^{12,13} While the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Resource Officers have offered guidance on these drills, they also recognize that "at present, there is no empirical research regarding school-based armed assailant drills."¹⁴

HB 1016 would direct the TEA Commissioner to consult with the Texas School Safety Center and the state fire marshal to adopt rules that outline best practices for conducting school drills and exercises. HB 1016 ensures that students, parents, and school staff are given notice of any exercises by the district and that the content be:

- Age and developmentally appropriate;
- Developed by a team inclusive of mental health professionals;
- Include input from teachers, parents, and students; and
- Designed to support the well-being of students before, during, and after the exercise.

HB 1016 addresses the current lack of uniformity and guidance around active shooter drills in Texas. This legislation can help ensure that when active shooter drills are conducted, there are guidelines and parameters to avoid induced trauma and create a less distressing experience for students and staff. However, the committee substitute of the legislation still allows discretion by schools to include live simulations of active shooter drills. These types of drills have not been researched nor proven to be effective in keeping schools safer. They have however been shown to be traumatic to students, teachers, and communities.

A multitude of organizations, including the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, have called for active shooter drills to be more trauma-

informed and to consider the negative psychological impact of realistic live simulations of active shooters on students, teachers, and communities. While this legislation is a step in the right direction in providing guidance around these drills, there is an opportunity to better protect students, teachers, and communities from unnecessary and traumatic experiences. A strategy to avoid these experiences is to prohibit an active shooter drill from including simulations that mimic or appear to be an actual shooting incident. For fire drills, we don't light fires in the hallway to practice fire drills, so why do we need expose students and staff to traumatic and realistic environments to prepare for an active shooter?

Submitted by: Shannon Hoffman, MSW, LCDC, Policy Program Specialist | shannon.hoffman@austin.utexas.edu

¹ Texas Administration Code, §103.1209 Mandatory School Drills. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter103/ch103cc.html>

² Zhe, E.J. and Nickerson, A.B. (2019). Effects of an intruder crisis drills on children's knowledge, anxiety, and perceptions of school safety. *School Psychology Review*, 36 (3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2007.12087936>

³ Moore-Petinak, N., Waselewski, M., Patterson, B.A., & Chang, T. (2020). Active shooter drills in the United State: A national study of youth experienced and perceptions. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67, 509-513. Retrieved from [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(20\)30320-7/pdf](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(20)30320-7/pdf)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Everytown Research & Policy. (2020). *The impact of active shooter drills in schools*. Retrieved from <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-active-shooter-drills-in-schools/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹

Chatterjee, R. (2019, June 5). *A look at the impact of active shooter drills*. National Public Radio. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/05/730057542/a-look-at-the-impact-of-active-shooter-drills>

¹⁰ Herron, A. (2019, March 21). 'It hurt so bad': Indiana teachers shot with plastic pellets during active shooter training. *IndyStar*. Retrieved from <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/politics/2019/03/21/active-shooter-training-for-schools-teachers-shot-with-plastic-pellets/3231103002/>

¹¹ Williams, M. (2018, December 6). Parents outraged after Lake Brantley High issues active shooter alert without telling students it's a drill. *Orlando Sentinel*. Retrieved from <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/breaking-news/os-ne-lake-brantley-code-red-drill-20181206-story.html>

¹² WFMJ. (2014, April 4). *Teacher injured during Boardman High School drill files negligence suit*. Retrieved from <https://www.wfmj.com/story/25194533/man-injured-during-boardman-high-school-drill-sues-police>

¹³ Denson, B. (2015, April 20). Teacher terrified by surprise 'active shooter' drill in eastern Oregon schoolhouse files federal lawsuit. *Oregon Live*. Retrieved from <https://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/2015/04/teacher-terrified-by-surprise.html>

¹⁴ National Association of School Psychologists. (2018). *Best practice considerations for schools in active shooter and other armed assailant drills*. Retrieved from <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/best-practice-considerations-for-schools-in-active-shooter-and-other-armed-assailant-drills>