

Districts address security in wake of school shootings

Mass shootings in the United States have tripled since 2011, according to Harvard University researchers. And as of late October, 29 shootings took place in K12 schools this year.

Since 2013, 156 shootings had rattled nerves, and had injured or killed students and staff members in both K12 schools and colleges, according to the nonprofit Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund. In some cases, a gun was fired but no one was injured, the group reports.

Administrators have turned to school resource officers (SROs), building improvements and technology to keep students safe.

More SROs have been trained and hired since 2012, with an estimated 10,000 to 14,000 working in schools nationwide, says Mo Canady, executive director of the National Association of School Resource Officers.

Metal detectors, surveillance cameras and visitor management systems are popular safety measures in schools. "Those devices are only as good as the personnel you apply to them, and the monitoring that goes on," Canady says. "What we find happening often is that those things kind of fall by the wayside—the machine might still be there but the personnel and policies that need to be in place are not."

For example, many districts use security cameras for

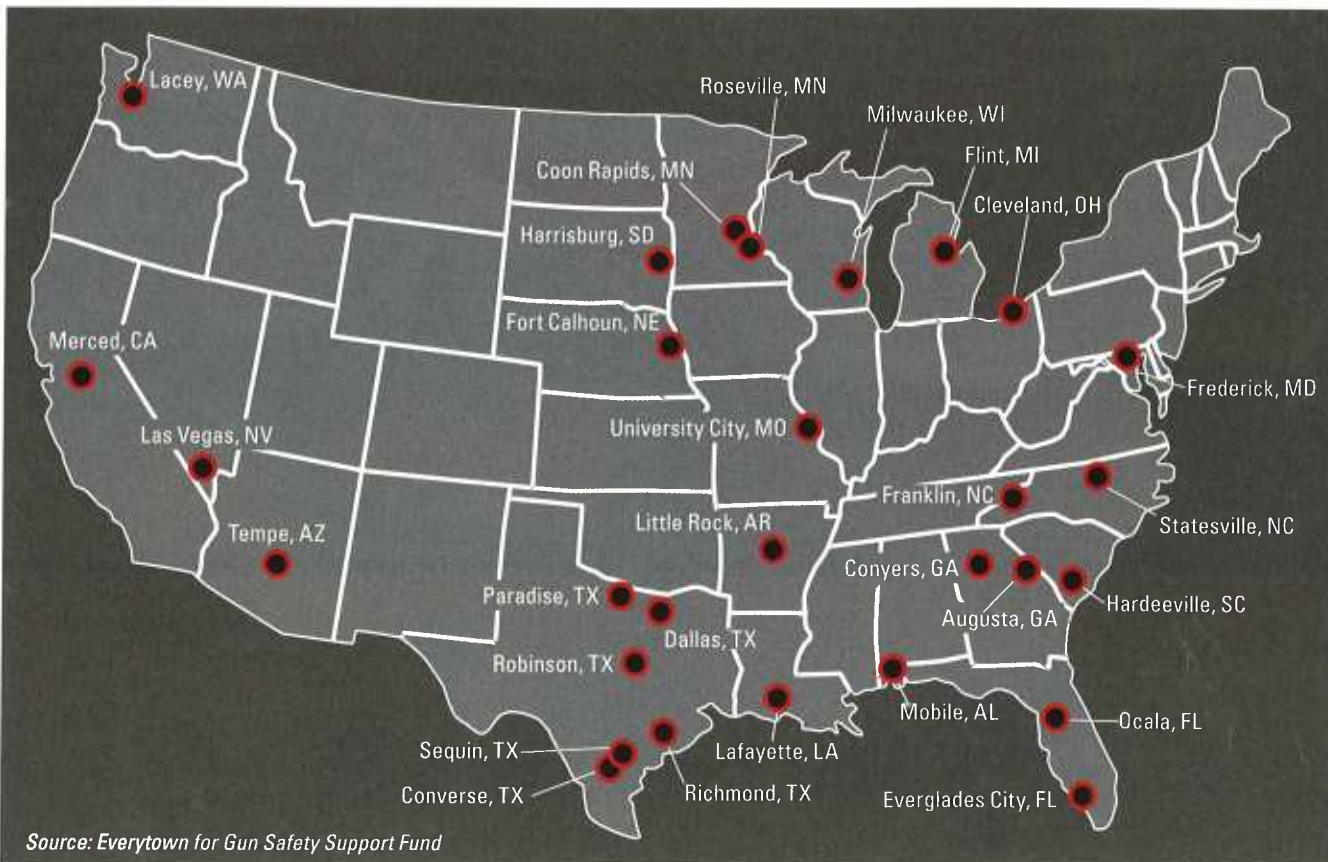
investigations but not as preventive tools monitored throughout the day for signs of suspicious activity.

The Virginia model of threat assessment is another technique that is used to prevent violence in more than 3,000 schools. It emphasizes early attention to bullying, student conflicts and other problems that can escalate into violent behavior. School staff members identify, evaluate and intervene as concerns begin to emerge. Schools also expect staff to take a flexible, problem-solving approach to student misbehavior, rather than responding with zero-tolerance punishment.

Administrators need to focus on the wide variety of safety threats beyond active shooters, says Ken Trump, president of National School Safety and Security Services. Districts need to be prepared for more common security threats such as bullying and non-custodial parents trying to take students out of school.

Trump recommends developing a threat assessment team that is trained in district protocols for a number of security events. Building positive school climates also keeps students safe. "The No. 1 way we find out about weapons at school is not metal detectors or another tech system," he says, "but from building relationships with kids who come forward and tell an adult."

—A.D.



Source: Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund