



June 2019, Number 86-2

*Public Education, Public Safety*

## Texas lawmakers expand school marshal program

*June 7* — As part of a state effort to strengthen school safety in the wake of a shooting last year that left 10 people dead at a high school in Santa Fe, Texas, the Legislature in 2019 considered measures to expand the school marshal program.

The [program](#), established by the 83rd Legislature in 2013, now allows school districts, open-enrollment charter schools, and private schools to appoint qualified employees who are licensed to carry a handgun to serve as school marshals, with the responsibility of protecting students from armed intruders. Marshals are authorized to carry or possess handguns on school premises under certain circumstances, and they must undergo at least 80 hours of training on prevention and mitigation of school shootings.

Lawmakers this year considered measures to expand the program. [HB 1387](#) by Hefner, which was signed by the governor on June 6 and takes effect September 1, removes a cap on the number of marshals in each school. The previous cap for each campus was one school marshal for every 200 students or one for every building, whichever was greater. The bill will apply beginning with the 2019-2020 school year.

Supporters of HB 1387 said allowing schools to increase the number of marshals on campus who were trained to respond to shootings would protect all students by discouraging potential shooters. Opponents said the bill would further a safety strategy that was not evidence-based and that could detract from a positive learning environment.

Lawmakers also considered related measures that did not make it to the governor's desk. [SB 811](#) by Hughes would have provided liability protections for damages resulting from any reasonable action taken by school districts, schools, and school security personnel to maintain school safety, including action related to possession or use of a firearm. After being passed by the Senate, the bill died in the House Calendars Committee. [SB 406](#) by Birdwell would have allowed school districts to decide whether school marshals could carry concealed handguns on their person or keep them in a secure location. The bill was passed by the Senate and died in the House Homeland Security and Public Safety Committee. [HB 1467](#) by Talarico, which died in the House Public Education Committee, would have required a certain ratio of mental health professionals to law enforcement officials in school districts and open-enrollment charter schools.

— *Karen E. Treviño*