

## Violent Deaths at School and Away From School, School Shootings, and Active Shooter Incidents

*In 2019–20, there were a total of 25 school-associated violent deaths in the United States, which included 23 homicides and 1 suicide. Of these 25 school-associated violent deaths, 11 homicides and 1 suicide were of school-age youth (ages 5–18). From 2000 to 2021, there were 276 casualties (108 killed and 168 wounded) in active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools and 157 casualties (75 killed and 82 wounded) in active shooter incidents at postsecondary institutions.*

Violent deaths and shootings at schools are tragic events with potentially far-reaching effects on the school population and surrounding community. This indicator presents data from multiple sources, each of which collects information based on different definitions of the incidents of interest and highlights different dimensions of school safety. First, this indicator presents data on school-associated violent deaths from the School-Associated Violent Death Surveillance System (SAVD-SS). For context, these data are compared with total homicides and suicides of youth ages 5-18 from the National Vital Statistics System. Next, this indicator turns its focus to shooting incidents. It examines data on school shootings, broadly defined, from the School Shooting Safety Compendium (SSSC) from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS) before turning to a narrower measure of active shooter incidents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Data from SAVD-SS and the SSSC cover elementary and secondary education only, while the FBI active shooter data also cover postsecondary education.

Data for each of these three sources on school-associated violent deaths and shootings rely, at least in part, on open-source data, such as media reporting. As a result, the completeness of these data is subject to the comprehensiveness of these public sources, which may vary over time or by type of incident. For instance, media reporting may be more extensive for incidents that are more deadly or unusual or otherwise perceived

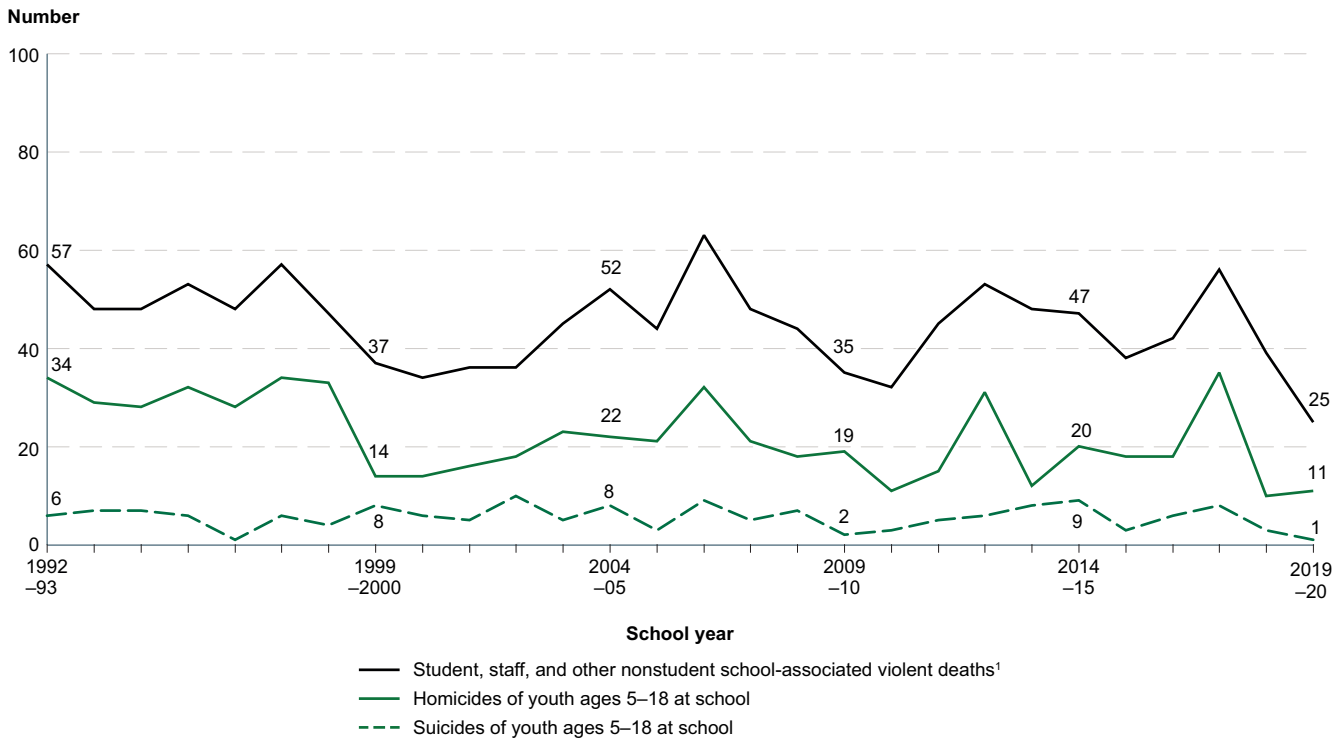
to be of greater public interest. However, this variance is unknown. Readers should bear this in mind when evaluating findings and making comparisons throughout this indicator.

Data from these sources also cover different periods: the most recent data from SAVD-SS are for 2019-20, the most recent data from the SSSC are for 2020-21, and the most recent data from the FBI are for 2021.<sup>1</sup> Beginning around 2000, these data show no consistent trend in the number of school-associated violent deaths or in the number of FBI active shooter incidents in educational environments. However, the SSSC data show an increase in the number of school shootings. Details are discussed below.

### **School-Associated Violent Deaths**

The SAVD-SS defines a school-associated violent death as “a homicide, suicide, or legal intervention death (involving a law enforcement officer) in which the fatal injury occurred on the campus of a functioning elementary or secondary school in the United States.”<sup>2</sup> School-associated violent deaths also include those that were documented to have occurred while the victim was on the way to or from regular sessions at school or while the victim was attending or traveling to or from an official school-sponsored event. School-associated violent deaths include not only students and staff members but also others at school, such as students’ parents and community members.

**Figure 1. Number of student, staff, and other nonstudent school-associated violent deaths and number of homicides and suicides of youth ages 5–18 at school: School years 1992–93 through 2019–20**



<sup>1</sup> A school-associated violent death is defined as “a homicide, suicide, or legal intervention death (involving a law enforcement officer) in which the fatal injury occurred on the campus of a functioning elementary or secondary school in the United States,” while the victim was on the way to or from regular sessions at school, or while the victim was attending or traveling to or from an official school-sponsored event. Victims include students as well as nonstudents and staff members.

NOTE: “At school” includes on the property of a functioning elementary or secondary school, on the way to or from regular sessions at school, and while attending or traveling to or from a school-sponsored event. The term “at school” is comparable in meaning to the term “school-associated.” All data are reported for the school year, defined as July 1 through June 30. Data from 1999–2000 onward are subject to change until law enforcement reports have been obtained and interviews with school and law enforcement officials have been completed. The details learned during the interviews can occasionally change the classification of a case.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1992–2020 School-Associated Violent Death Surveillance System (SAVD-SS) (partially funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students), previously unpublished tabulation (December 2022). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 228.10.

The most recent data released by the SAVD-SS cover the period from July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2020, which includes the first spring of the coronavirus pandemic, when many students were learning remotely.<sup>3</sup> During this period, a total of 25 school-associated violent deaths were documented in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Of these 25 deaths, 12 (11 homicides and 1 suicide)<sup>5</sup> involved school-age youth (in this indicator, “youth” refers to students ages 5-18). Considering all persons, there were 23 homicides, 1 suicide, and 1 legal intervention death (not shown in the figure). Between 1992-93 (when data collection began) and 2019-20, the number of school-associated violent deaths of all persons ranged from 25 (in 2019-20) to 63 (in 2006-07).

During the 2019-20 school year,<sup>6</sup> a total of 1,855 youth homicides (that is, homicides where a youth was the victim) and 2,047 youth suicides<sup>7</sup> were documented, including both those at school and those away from school.<sup>8</sup>

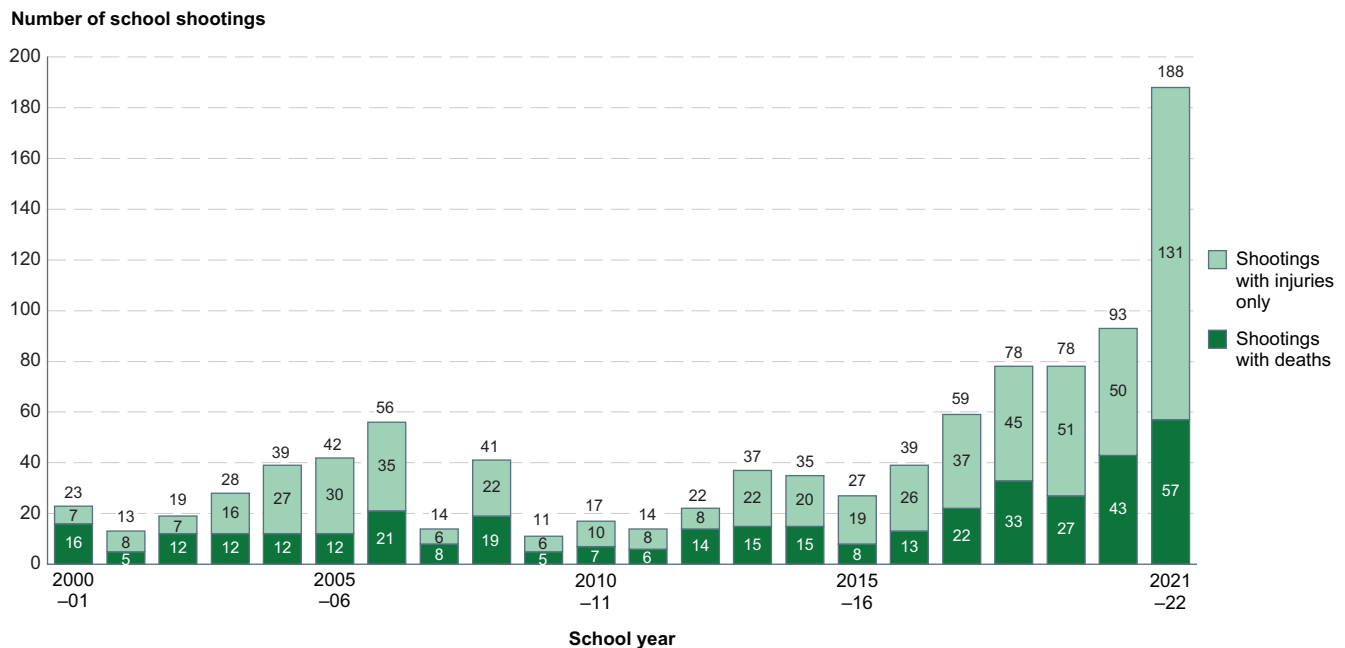
The percentage of youth homicides documented as occurring at school was generally around 1 percent of the total number of youth homicides each year between 1992-93 and 2019-20, even though the number of youth homicides at school varied across the years, ranging from 10 to 35.<sup>9</sup> The percentage of youth homicides being documented in schools was highest in 2011-12 (2.4 percent). Between 1992-93 and 2019-20, the number of youth who died by suicide at school each year ranged from 1 to 10. The percentage of youth suicides documented as occurring at school remained at less than 1 percent of the total number of youth suicides each year during this period. In the 2019-20 school year—during which in-person schooling was disrupted by the pandemic—the percentages of youth homicides and youth suicides that were documented as occurring at school were lower than in any other year throughout the period.

### School Shootings

The SSSC aims to compile information on elementary/secondary school shootings from publicly available sources into a single comprehensive database. The SSSC defines “school shootings” as incidents in which “a gun

is brandished, is fired, or a bullet hits school property for any reason, regardless of the number of victims, time of day, or day of week.” During the coronavirus pandemic, this definition includes shootings that happen on school property during remote instruction.

**Figure 2. Number of school shootings with casualties at public and private elementary and secondary schools: School years 2000–01 through 2021–22**



NOTE: “School shootings” include all incidents in which a gun is brandished or fired or a bullet hits school property for any reason, regardless of the number of victims (including zero), time, day of the week, or reason (e.g., planned attack, accidental, domestic violence, gang-related). All data are reported for the school year, defined as July 1 through June 30. Data in this figure were generated using a database that aims to compile information on school shootings from publicly available sources into a single comprehensive resource. For information on database methodology, see *K–12 School Shooting Database: Research Methodology* (<https://www.chds.us/sssc/resources/uploads/2020/09/CHDS-K12-SSDB-Research-Methods-Sept-2020.pdf>). Due to adjustments made to the learning mode (in-person, remote, or hybrid) during the coronavirus pandemic, caution should be used when comparing data since 2019–20 with those from earlier years. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Defense, Naval Postgraduate School, Center for Homeland Defense and Security, School Shooting Safety Compendium, internal data files. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 228.12.

In 2021-22, a total of 327 documented school shootings occurred at public and private elementary and secondary schools, including

- 188 school shootings with casualties; and
- 139 school shootings without casualties (not shown in the figure).

Between 2000-01 and 2020-21, the number of school shootings with casualties ranged from 11 to 93 per year. On average, the number of shootings with casualties in a given year differed from the prior year by about 47 percent in either direction, with no consistent trend throughout the period. In 2021-22, the number of school shootings with casualties (188) was more than twice as high as the

next highest number of documented shootings (93), which was documented the year before in 2020-21.<sup>10</sup> The same was true of shootings without casualties (not shown in the figure): more than twice as many were documented in 2021-22 (139) than in 2020-21, the year of the next highest number of documented shootings (53). Because the numbers of school shootings in 2021-22 are outliers, compared to prior years, readers should interpret these data with caution.

In 2021-22, of the 188 school shootings with casualties, there were

- 57 school shootings with deaths; and
- 131 school shootings with injuries only.

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Data are also available on the type of situation associated with school shootings (including those with and without casualties). In 2021-22, the most commonly known situations associated with school shootings included the following:<sup>11</sup>

- escalation of dispute (92 incidents, 28 percent of all school shootings)<sup>12</sup>
- drive-by (39 incidents, 12 percent)<sup>13</sup>
- illegal activity (30 incidents, 9 percent)<sup>14</sup>
- accidental firing of a weapon (17 incidents, 5 percent)<sup>15</sup>
- intentional property damage (16 incidents, 5 percent)<sup>16</sup>

For about one-third (33 percent) of school shootings in 2021-22 (107 incidents), the situation associated with the shooting was unknown.

### ***Active Shooter Incidents in Educational Settings***

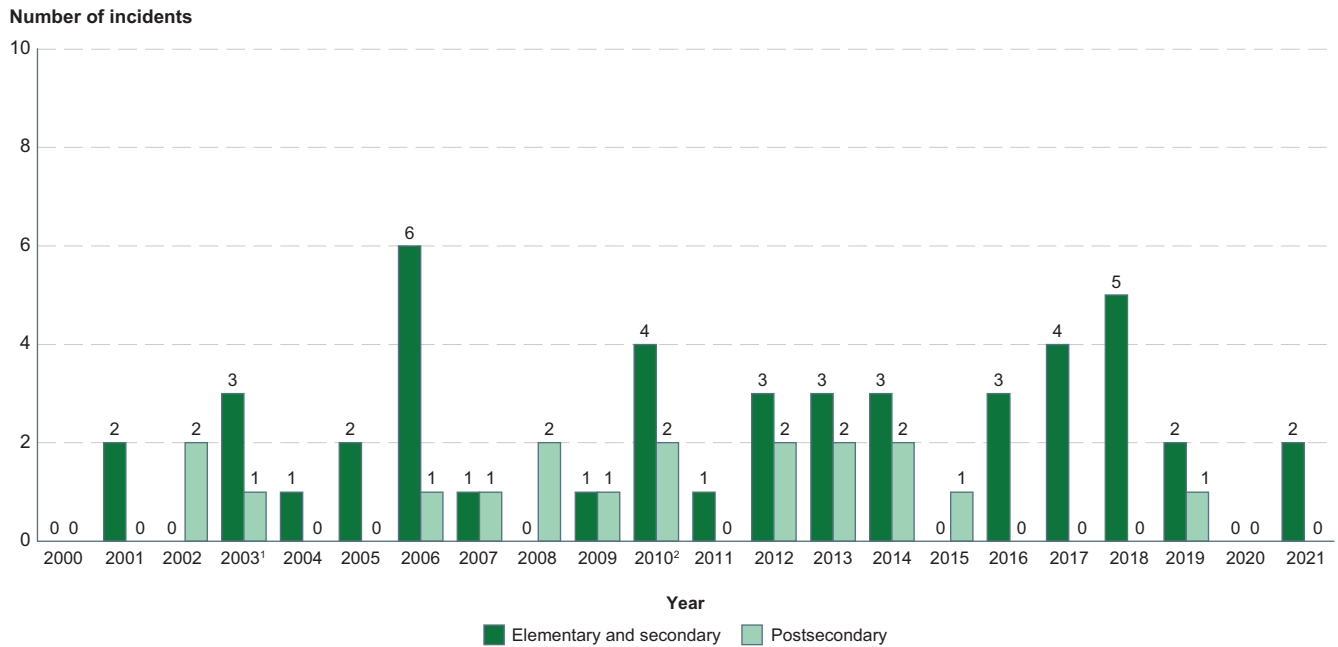
In 2014, the FBI released the first in a series of reports that cover active shooter incidents in the United States, following the signing of the Investigative Assistance for Violent Crimes Act of 2012.<sup>17</sup> These reports cover active

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shooter incidents in all types of settings, but this indicator focuses on those that were documented as occurring in educational settings. Educational settings were the second most common location for active shooter incidents to occur, behind commerce settings.<sup>18,19</sup>

“Active shooter” is a law enforcement term describing a shooting in progress. The FBI defines an active shooter as “one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.” Because the situation is active, law enforcement and citizens involved in the incident have the potential to affect the outcome. This definition is narrower than the definition of “school shootings” used by the SSSC; for instance, gang violence, drug violence, and accidental weapons discharges are not included.<sup>20</sup> The FBI’s active shooter resources include shootings that were documented as occurring in educational environments at both the elementary/secondary and the postsecondary level.

**Figure 3. Number of active shooter incidents, by level of institution: 2000 through 2021**



<sup>1</sup> The elementary and secondary schools count includes one active shooter incident at a county board of education meeting.

<sup>2</sup> The elementary and secondary schools count includes one active shooter incident at a city school board meeting.

NOTE: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines an active shooter as “one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.” Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2014 and 2015*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2016 and 2017*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2018*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2019*, *Active Shooter Incidents: 20-Year Review 2000–2019*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2020*, and *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2021*. Retrieved January 26, 2023, from <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 228.15.

From 2000 to 2021, there were a total of 46 active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools and a total of 18 active shooter incidents at postsecondary institutions.

The annual number of active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools per year ranged from 0 to 6 during this time span. There were 2 active shooter incidents documented at elementary and secondary schools in 2021. From 2000 to 2021, there were

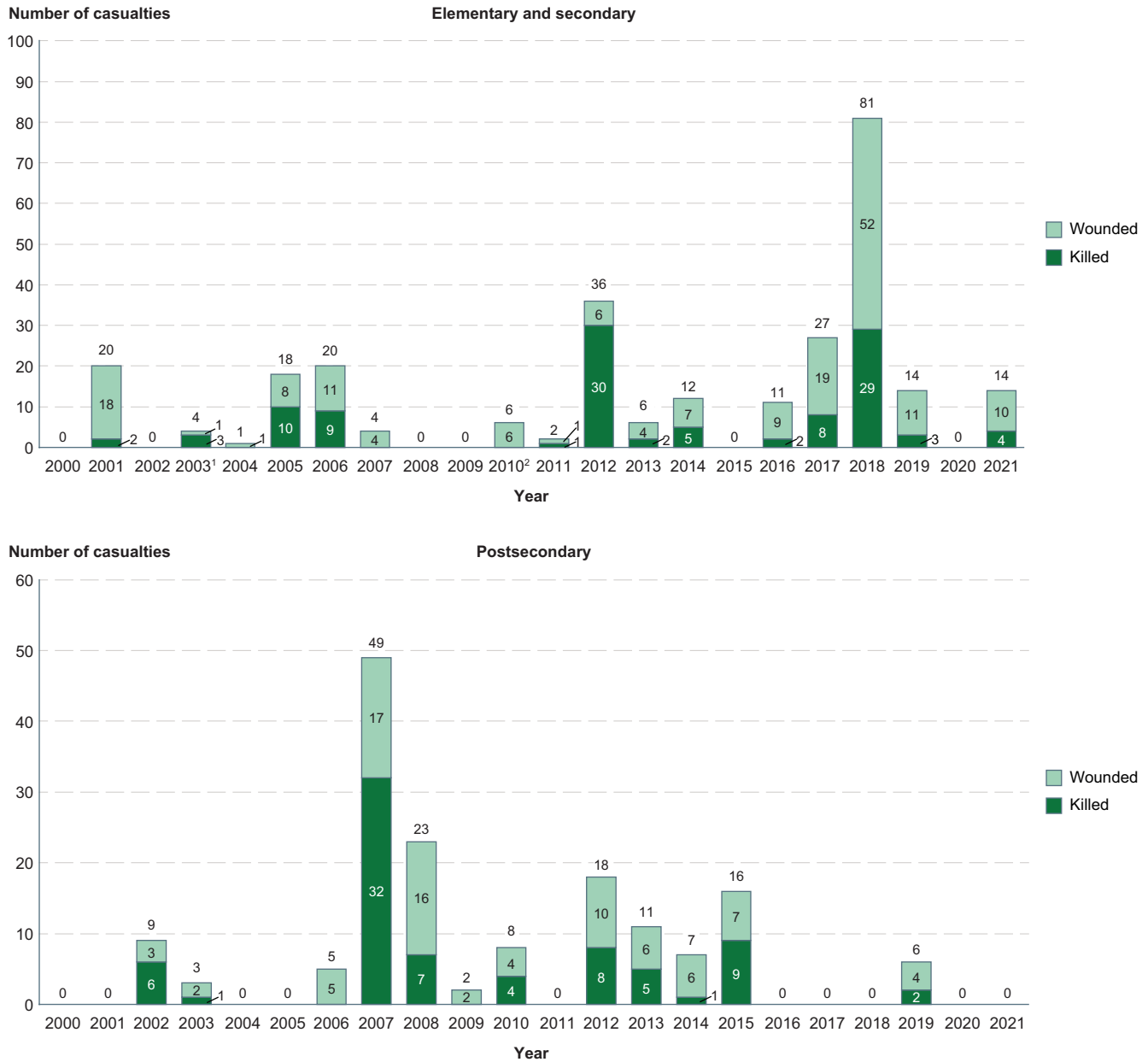
- 5 years in which 0 active shooter incidents were documented;
- 8 years in which 1-2 active shooter incidents were documented;
- 7 years in which 3-4 active shooter incidents were documented; and
- 2 years in which 5-6 active shooter incidents were documented.

At postsecondary institutions, the annual number of active shooter incidents per year ranged from 0 to 2 from 2000 to 2021. There were 0 active shooter incidents documented at postsecondary institutions in 2021.

Throughout the period, there were

- 10 years during this time span in which 0 active shooter incidents were documented; and
- 12 years in which 1-2 active shooter incidents were documented.

**Figure 4. Number of casualties in active shooter incidents, by level of institution: 2000 through 2021**



<sup>1</sup> Includes one active shooter incident at a county board of education meeting.

<sup>2</sup> Includes one active shooter incident at a city school board meeting.

NOTE: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines an active shooter as “one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.” Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2014 and 2015*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2016 and 2017*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2018*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2019*, *Active Shooter Incidents: 20-Year Review 2000–2019*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2020*, and *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2021*. Retrieved January 26, 2023, from <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 228.15.

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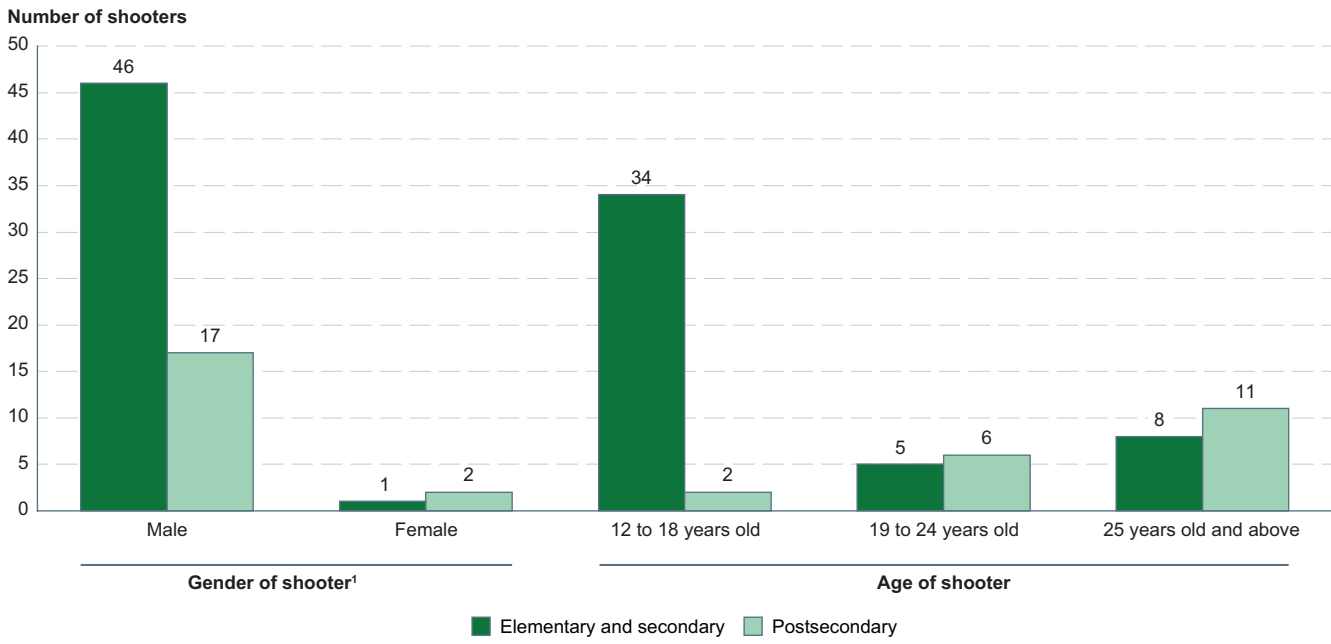
From 2000 to 2021, there were a total of 276 casualties (108 killed and 168 wounded) in active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools and a total of 157 casualties (75 killed and 82 wounded) in active shooter incidents at postsecondary institutions.<sup>21</sup> At the elementary and secondary level, the number of casualties as a result of active shooter incidents per year ranged from 0 to 81 over this time period. The year with the most casualties was 2018, which had more than twice as many casualties as the next highest year, 2012, when there were 36 casualties. There were 14 casualties from active shooter incidents in elementary and secondary schools in 2021.

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The number of casualties per year at the postsecondary level ranged from 0 to 49 over this time period. The year with the most casualties was 2007, which had more than twice as many casualties as the next highest year, 2008, when there were 23 casualties. There were 0 casualties from active shooter incidents in postsecondary institutions in 2021.

The number of wounded and the number killed during active shooter incidents showed no consistent trend over the period at the elementary and secondary level or at the postsecondary level. At both levels, in years with casualties, there are more years where the number wounded was higher than the number killed.

**Figure 5. Number of active shooters, by gender, age, and level of institution where an incident was documented: 2000 through 2021**



<sup>1</sup> A shooter’s gender is categorized by their gender identity at the time of the attack.

NOTE: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines an active shooter as “one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.” Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013, Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2014 and 2015, Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2016 and 2017, Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2018, Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2019, Active Shooter Incidents: 20-Year Review 2000–2019, Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2020, and Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2021*. Retrieved January 26, 2023, from <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 228.16.

From 2000 to 2021, nearly all active shooters (95 percent) in education settings were male. Specifically,

- 46 of 47 active shooters at elementary and secondary schools were male; and
- 17 of 19 active shooters at postsecondary institutions were male.

From 2000 to 2021, a majority of active shooters in elementary and secondary schools were 12 to 18 years

old, while a majority of active shooters at postsecondary institutions were 25 years old and above. Specifically, of the 47 active shooters at elementary and secondary schools, 34 of the shooters were 12 to 18 years old, 5 were 19 to 24 years old, and 8 were 25 years old and above. At the postsecondary level, 2 shooters were 12 to 18 years old, 6 were 19 to 24 years old, and 11 were 25 years old and above.



**Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Active shooter incidents are reported by calendar year, while other incidents in this indicator are reported by school year (July 1 to June 30).
- <sup>2</sup> A legal intervention death is defined as a death caused by a law enforcement agent in the course of arresting or attempting to arrest a lawbreaker, suppressing a disturbance, maintaining order, or engaging in another legal action.
- <sup>3</sup> Education Week. (2020, March 6). *Map: Coronavirus and School Closures in 2019-2020*. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/map-coronavirus-and-school-closures-in-2019-2020/2020/03>.
- <sup>4</sup> The recorded number of deaths differs across data sources presented in this indicator due to differences in the definitions of incidents included in each source. For definitions of these incidents, see the glossary entries for school-associated violent death, school shootings (School Shooting Safety Compendium), and active shooter incident.
- <sup>5</sup> Data are subject to change until interviews with school and law enforcement officials have been completed. The details learned during the interviews can occasionally change the classification of a case.
- <sup>6</sup> Also defined as July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2020.
- <sup>7</sup> Total youth suicides exclude self-inflicted deaths among 5- to 9-year-olds. Total youth suicides include only persons ages 10 and over because determining suicidal intent in younger children can be difficult. For more information, see Crepeau-Hobson, F. (2010). The Psychological Autopsy and Determination of Child Suicides: A Survey of Medical Examiners. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 14(1): 24-34. Retrieved December 7, 2022, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13811110903479011>.
- <sup>8</sup> In this indicator, the term “at school” is comparable in meaning to the term “school-associated.”
- <sup>9</sup> Single incidents occurring at school with a large number of school-age victims could result in large variations in the number of youth homicides at school between two years. Please use caution when making comparisons over time.
- <sup>10</sup> Due to school closures caused by the coronavirus pandemic, caution should be used when comparing 2019-20 and 2020-21 data with data from other years.

- <sup>11</sup> Other known situations include “Indiscriminate shooting” (12 incidents, 4 percent), “Suicide or attempted suicide” (7 incidents, 2 percent), “Hostage standoff” (2 incidents, 1 percent), and “Psychosis” (1 incident, less than 1 percent).
- <sup>12</sup> Indicates that an argument or fight occurred between the shooter and victim prior to the shooting.
- <sup>13</sup> Indicates that shots were fired by a person in a vehicle at people or another vehicle on school property.
- <sup>14</sup> Indicates that shots were fired during a robbery, sale or exchange of illegal drugs, trespassing, theft of property, or exchange of stolen property.
- <sup>15</sup> Indicates that there was no intent to fire the weapon (e.g., showing off gun and it went off; gun in backpack went off).
- <sup>16</sup> Indicates that shots were fired to cause damage to the school building or vehicles on school property without intent to cause injury.
- <sup>17</sup> Blair, J.P., and Schweit, K.W. (2014). *A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*. Texas State University and U.S. Department of Justice. Washington DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation. Retrieved February 2023, from <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1.pdf/view>.
- <sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Active Shooter Incidents 20-Year Review, 2000-2019*. Retrieved May 16, 2023, from <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>.
- <sup>19</sup> The other locations coded for were government, open space, residence, healthcare, and house of worship.
- <sup>20</sup> For information on the definition of “school shootings” used by the SSSC, see *K-12 School Shooting Database: Research Methodology*. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from <https://www.chds.us/sssc/resources/uploads/2020/09/CHDS-K12-SSDB-Research-Methods-Sept-2020.pdf>.
- <sup>21</sup> Number of casualties excludes active shooters.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 228.10, 228.12, 228.15, and 228.16

**Related indicators and resources:** N/A

**Glossary:** Active shooter incident; At school; Elementary school; Homicide; Legal intervention death; Private school; Public school or institution; School shootings (School Shooting Safety Compendium); School-associated violent death; Secondary school; Suicide