

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

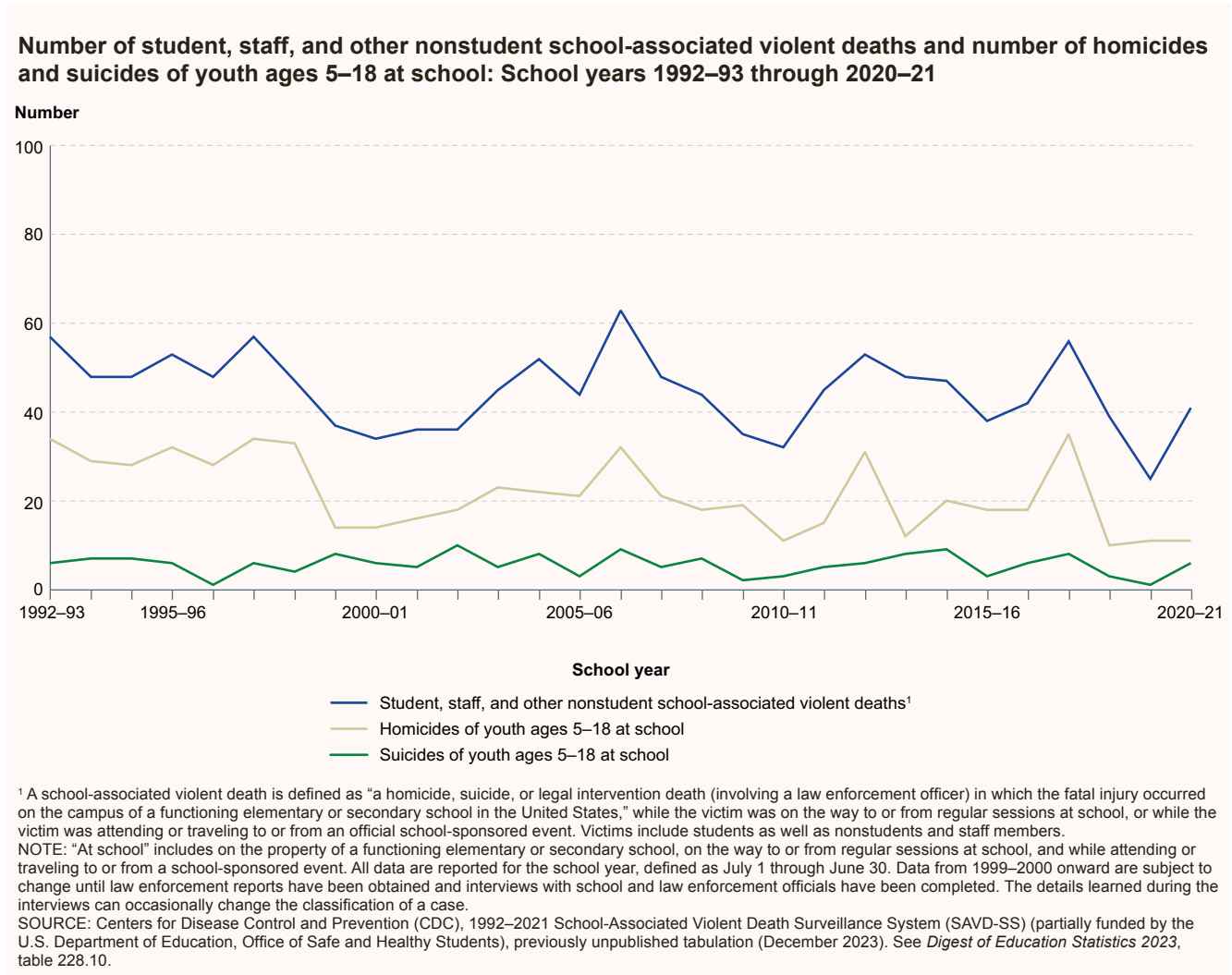
In 2020–21, there were a total of 41 school-associated violent deaths in the United States, which included 20 homicides and 17 suicides. Of these 41 school-associated violent deaths, 11 homicides and 6 suicides were of school-age youth (ages 5–18). From 2000 through 2022, there were 328 casualties (131 killed and 197 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.¹ Caution is advised when evaluating findings and making comparisons throughout this indicator. First, this indicator presents data on school-associated violent deaths from the School-Associated Violent Death Surveillance System (SAVD-SS) and the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) School-Associated Violent Death Module. For context, these data are compared with total homicides and suicides of youth ages 5-18 from the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS). This indicator then examines data on active shooter incidents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Data from SAVD-SS and NVDRS School-Associated Violent Death Module cover elementary and secondary education only, while the FBI active shooter data also cover postsecondary education.

Data from these sources also cover different periods: the most recent data from SAVD-SS and the NVDRS School-Associated Violent Death Module are for 2020-21, and the most recent data from the FBI are for 2022.² 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. 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 (i.e., 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.³ 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.

The most recent data released by the SAVD-SS cover the period from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021, which includes the first full school year of the coronavirus pandemic, when many students were learning remotely.⁴ During this period, a total of 41 school-associated violent deaths were documented in the United States.⁵ Of these 41 deaths, 17 (11 homicides and 6 suicides)⁶ involved school-age youth (in this indicator, “youth” refers to students ages 5-18). Considering all persons, there were 20 homicides, 17 suicides, 3 legal intervention deaths, and 1 undetermined violent death⁷ (not shown in the figure). Between 1992-93 (when data collection began) and 2020-21, the number of school-associated violent deaths of all persons ranged from 25 (in 2019-20) to 63 (in 2006-07). The total number of homicides in 2020-21 (20) was the lowest of any year since data collection began. However, the number of suicides (17) in 2020-21 was higher than all other years except 2013-14 (20) and 2014-15 (17).

Based on NVSS data for the 2020-21 school year, a total of 2,436 youth homicides (that is, homicides where a youth was the victim) and 2,346 youth suicides⁸ were documented, including both those at school and those away from school.⁹ The number of youth homicides in 2020-21 was the highest level recorded since 1996-97 (2,430).

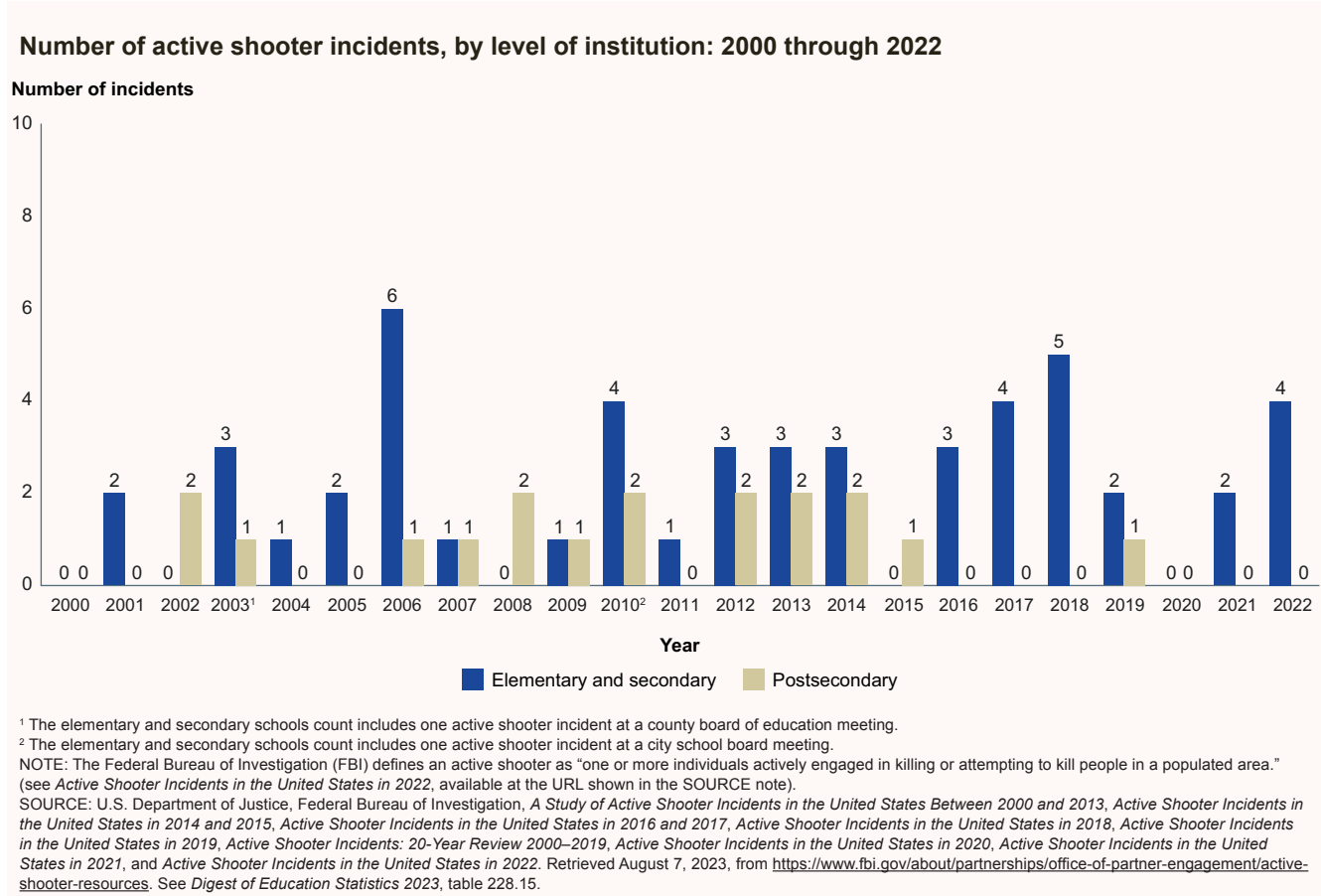
The percentage of youth homicides documented as occurring at school was generally around 1 percent of the total number of youth homicides each year between 1992-93 and 2020-21, even though the number of youth homicides at school varied across the years, ranging from 10 to 35.¹⁰ The percentage of youth homicides being documented in schools was highest in 2012-13 (2.4 percent) and lowest in 2020-21 (0.5 percent). Between 1992-93 and 2020-21, 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.

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 2012.¹¹ These reports cover active shooter incidents in all types of settings, but this indicator focuses on those that were documented as occurring in educational settings. In 2022, educational settings were the third most common location for active shooter incidents to occur, behind open space and commerce settings.¹²

“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. 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 2.



From 2000 through 2022, there were a total of 50 active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools and a total of 18 active shooter incidents at postsecondary institutions.

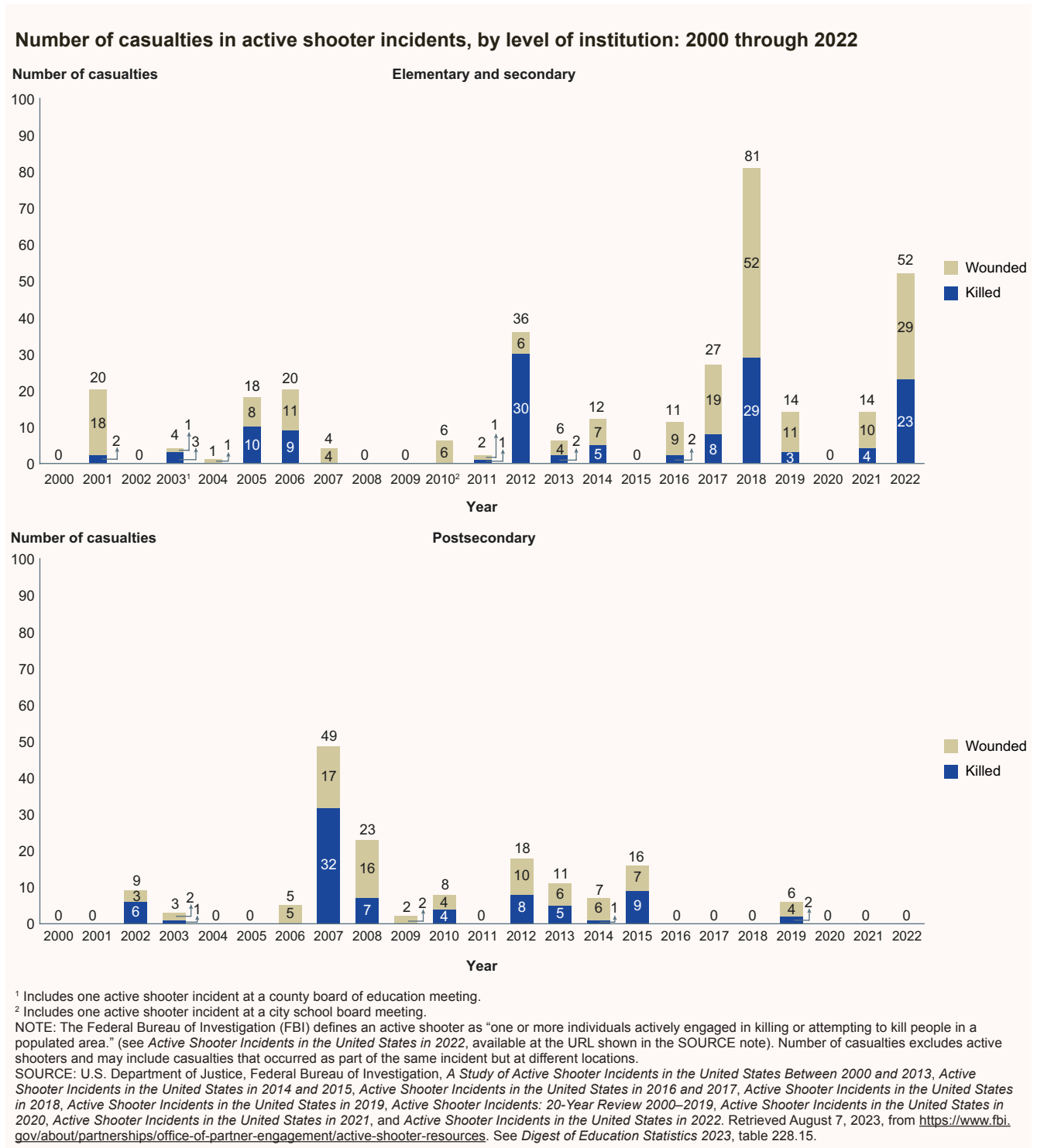
The annual number of active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools per year ranged from 0 to 6 during this time period. There were 4 active shooter incidents documented at elementary and secondary schools in 2022. From 2000 through 2022, there were

- 5 years in which 0 active shooter incidents were documented;
- 8 years in which 1-2 active shooter incidents were documented;
- 8 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 from 2000 through 2022, the annual number of active shooter incidents per year ranged from 0 to 2. There were 0 active shooter incidents documented at postsecondary institutions in 2022. Throughout the period, there were

- 11 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 3.

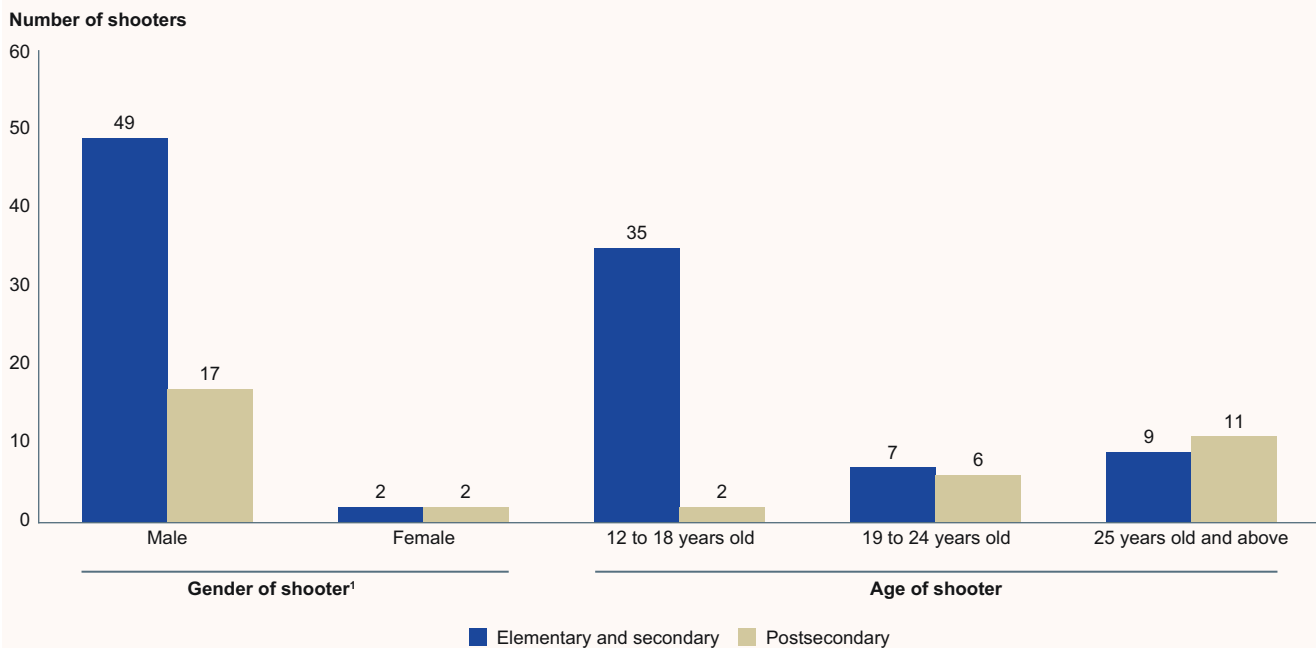


From 2000 through 2022, there were a total of 328 casualties (131 killed and 197 wounded) in active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools.¹³ The number of casualties as a result of active shooter incidents per year ranged from 0 to 81 over this time period. There were 52 casualties from active shooter incidents in elementary and secondary schools in 2022, which was the second highest number in any year, following 2018 (81 casualties). From 2000 through 2022, about half of all casualties during active shooter incidents in elementary and secondary schools have occurred since the beginning of 2018 (161 casualties, or 49 percent), although there was no measurable upward or downward trend in the number of incidents over this period.

From 2000 through 2022, there were a total of 157 casualties (75 killed and 82 wounded) in active shooter incidents at postsecondary institutions. The number of casualties per year ranged from 0 to 49 over this period. The year with the most casualties (49) 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 at postsecondary institutions in 2022. The number of casualties during active shooter incidents showed no consistent trend over this period.

FIGURE 4.

Number of active shooters, by gender, age, and level of institution where the incident was documented: 2000 through 2022



¹ 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." (See *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2022*, available at the URL shown in the SOURCE note.)

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*, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2021*, and *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2022*. Retrieved August 7, 2023, from <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 228.16.

From 2000 through 2022, nearly all active shooters (94 percent) in education settings were male.¹⁴ Specifically,

- 49 of 51 active shooters at elementary and secondary schools were male; and
- 17 of 19 active shooters at postsecondary institutions were male.

From 2000 through 2022, a majority of active shooters in elementary and secondary schools were 12 to 18 years old (69 percent), while a majority of active shooters at postsecondary institutions were 25 years old and above (58 percent). Specifically, of the 51 active shooters at elementary and secondary schools, 35 were 12 to 18 years old, 7 were 19 to 24 years old, and 9 were 25 years old and above. Of the 19 active shooters at postsecondary institutions, 2 were 12 to 18 years old, 6 were 19 to 24 years old, and 11 were 25 years old and above.

Endnotes:

¹ For general technical notes related to data analysis, data interpretation, rounding, and other considerations, please refer to the [Reader's Guide](#).

² Active shooter incidents are reported by calendar year, while other incidents in this indicator are reported by school year (July 1 to June 30).

³ In the SAVD-SS, 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.

⁴ For data on mode of instruction in spring of the 2020-21 school year, especially full-time, in-person public school enrollment, see <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/mss-report/>.

⁵ 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* and *active shooter incident*.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Violent deaths for which the manner was undetermined; that is, the information pointing to one manner of death was no more compelling than the information pointing to one or more other competing manners of death when all available information was considered.

⁸ 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/10.1080/1381110903479011>.

⁹ In this indicator, the term “at school” has the same meaning as “school-associated.”

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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>.

¹² The other locations coded for were government, residence, healthcare, and house of worship. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2022*. Retrieved August 7, 2023, from <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>.

¹³ Number of casualties excludes active shooters.

¹⁴ A shooter's gender is categorized by their gender identity at the time of the attack.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, tables [228.10](#), [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-associated violent death](#); [Secondary school](#); [Suicide](#)