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TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE &  
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, RURAL AFFAIRS &  
HOMELAND SECURITY REGARDING STUDENT SAFETY POLICIES

By

Patty Quinzi, Texas AFT legislative counsel  
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of more than 65,000 Texas AFT members who work in more than 800 Texas school districts, community colleges, and universities. Our members have always been concerned about campus safety and security, and their concern is especially acute in light of the recent incidents in Newtown, Connecticut, and right here in Texas at Lone Star College.

Texas AFT is currently conducting a survey of members regarding school security and other safe-schools concerns. We will share our findings with the committees once the analysis is complete. But we can already share with you what we are hearing from many of our members and local leaders.

Teachers are saying:

- They want to focus on their core mission of teaching rather than trying to serve as armed guards against armed assault.
- Public officials should follow the “first, do no harm” principle. Applying that principle, they think proposals to arm teachers in response to the threat of school shootings would hurt rather than help, creating new risks and dangers. Guns, except in the hands of trained officers, do not belong in our schools.
- The state should make sure school districts have real, well-thought-out action plans for dealing with security threats, not just paper plans.
- Teachers and other school employees want to have a voice in working out new policy initiatives to keep schools safe.
- School-safety initiatives should include school-based responses such as increased attention to students’ emotional and social development through enhanced counseling, social work, and health services. In this regard,

Texas AFT's recent surveys of superintendents have shown that the state's education funding cuts enacted in 2011 have reduced school staffing, inflated class sizes, and eroded the capacity of our schools to maintain safety and order and to give students the individual attention they need.

- School-based responses alone are not going to solve all the problems caused as the ills of society are brought into the schoolhouse. Other measures are needed, including measures to restrict access of unstable individuals to weapons and to improve mental-health services in the community at large. The issue is community safety, not just school safety.
- If new resources are to be made available to school districts to address school-safety concerns, those resources should be made available on an equitable basis to all districts, not in a manner that makes school-safety improvements depend on local wealth.

Texas AFT believes that creating safe communities and safe sanctuaries for our children to learn and grow will require a balanced approach, from measures to prevent gun violence to increased mental-health services and resources for schools. We stand ready to assist your committees and our local educational authorities to make sure our schools and communities are safe for all Texans.