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## TSTA SUPPORTS SB 168

*The following are the Texas State Teachers Association's comments in support of Senate Bill 168.*

The Texas State Teachers Association is in full support of Senator Blanco's Senate Bill (SB) 168. As educators, our number one priority is ensuring students' safety and well-being, and TSTA continues to advocate for a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach to keeping schools and students safe. This includes providing a safe and secure learning environment for all students, increasing access to mental health services, and taking meaningful action on gun violence prevention.

TSTA supports readying children for unanticipated emergencies through drills implemented according to best practice, but it is necessary to carefully consider the impact on students' academic and mental wellbeing in determining drill type, frequency and execution. Not only is time for learning lost on drill days, mental health professionals have expressed concern about the traumatizing effect on children of simulated emergencies. Active shooter drills, in particular, can be especially upsetting and may do more harm than good.

While TSTA does not categorically reject active shooter drills, there is little evidence to demonstrate that active shooter drills with children are effective at saving lives in an emergency. If a school elects to use this type of drill, steps must be taken to ensure that they are implemented with guidance from parents, educators, and school-based mental health professionals to ensure the content is age and developmentally appropriate. Families, teachers and students must also be notified in advance of a drill. While TSTA believes there should also be a provision permitting teachers and families to opt out, we support SB 168 as an excellent step towards erecting needed guardrails for mandatory school drills such as active shooter drills in a way that centers the mental health and wellbeing of students. The provision requiring data collection on the impact of active shooter drills is especially critical in order to best inform policymakers moving forward.

The epidemic of gun violence is much broader than school shootings, and for this reason policymakers should prioritize proven measures to first reduce gun access and gun violence outside of schools and fully commit to supporting mental health in schools. The fact remains that if students must use what they have learned in an active shooter drill, then we as a society have already failed.