



TSTA OPPOSES HOUSE BILL 3

*The following are the Texas State Teachers Association's
comments in opposition to House Bill 3*

Educators' number one priority is ensuring student safety and well-being, and TSTA continues to advocate for a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach to keeping schools and students safe. This includes increasing access to mental health services, providing a safe and secure learning environment for all students, and taking meaningful action on gun violence prevention.

We appreciate that the Legislature is addressing school safety with intentionality and a demonstrated commitment to student well-being. We appreciate the increased coordination that this legislation provides, including the requirement that the commissioner adopt rules from proposals of the Texas School Safety Center regarding multi-hazard emergency operation plans and safety and security audits.

TSTA supports ensuring minimum safety standards and supported many components of the new school safety standards in the 19 TAC Sec. 61.1031. In our public comments, we submitted that we believed that many aspects of the proposed rules would accomplish the goal of establishing minimum safety standards without creating excessively hardened environments.

TSTA opposes HB 3 because our membership does not support increasing the number of guns on campuses as a universally appropriate response.

Current law permits an armed presence on campus, and we believe this decision should remain at the local level and not be mandated by the state. Hardening schools is a response to school shootings that is not rooted in science. There is no empirical evidence that supports the conclusion that programs that arm school staff reduce violence in schools,¹ but there is evidence that increasing guns on campuses introduces new risk.² HB 3 includes school staff in the list of individuals who could satisfy the requirement of armed security, and educators are overwhelmingly opposed to arming teachers.

Key findings from National Education Association national member survey³ show:

- 82 percent of members would refuse to carry a gun in school.
- 61 percent of members who are gun owners oppose arming teachers.
- 64 percent say that would feel less safe if teachers or other educators were armed.

¹ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2776515>

² <https://everytownresearch.org/report/arming-teachers-introduces-new-risks-into-schools/>

³ <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/action-center/our-issues/gun-violence-prevention>

TSTA opposes directing the use of local dollars and sanctioning districts with state takeover for non-compliance.

Our member-led organization opposes arming educators, and we oppose any legislation that would mandate an increase of guns on campuses. However, we recognize that some communities might determine locally that having an armed security guard is in the best interest of their students and schools. TSTA does not oppose local control of this decision, or any decision made collectively by educators and families. We do however oppose any state-level mandate requiring guns in schools, and we oppose strict sanction for non-compliance.

The bill would also force school districts to use bond proceeds to come into compliance with the provisions and the standards established in rule. We oppose requiring local dollars be used to finance any measure that is not the will of the community, especially one that for many makes them feel less safe. Bond elections allow voters to decide what projects should be funded and should remain as such. To the extent the Legislature mandates school safety standards, the Legislature should ensure funding for this purpose.

TSTA supports establishing minimum safety standards for schools, but we disagree that the decision whether to have an armed individual around children is one that should be made at the state level. Different individuals feel passionately both in support of and opposed to this level of security. For this reason, we believe this should remain a local decision. Districts should neither be forced to fund measures with which they philosophically disagree, nor should they lose their right to governance for not adhering to very strict standards that might not be aligned with the will of the community.

Texas is historically known as a state that embraces local control, which is a principle that is supposed to guide policymakers to make policies. HB 3 is another example of legislation that transfers a tremendous amount of authority away from local elected officials and to one appointed individual.