



School Safety: Firearm Safety and Storage

By Angela Asch / May 2023

With the passage of Senate Bill 906 in 2022, California’s local educational agencies will be required to notify families annually about safe gun storage beginning in the 2023–24 school year. This fact sheet offers a quick reference to the rules and regulations of firearm storage in California, statistics about firearms, and strategies to keep students, staff and communities safe.

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- ▶ [Statistics about firearms](#)
- ▶ [An overview of Senate Bill 906 \(2022\)](#)
- ▶ [Steps districts and county offices of education can take to support safe gun storage](#)
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According to the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#) and the [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#), firearms are the leading cause of death among children under the age of 18 in the United States. The U.S. has the highest rate of firearm mortality among all developed nations. In 2022, firearms led to the deaths of 1,679 children and injured 812, according to the [Gun Violence Archive](#). Further, deaths from gun violence jumped 50 percent from 2019 to 2021 among children and teens in the U.S., as reported by [Pew Research Center](#).

And while gun ownership is constitutionally protected in the United States, the [Society for Research in Child Development](#) reports that access to firearms increases the risk of death by suicide among children and adolescents, stating that a third of households in the country own at least one firearm and “nine out of 10 child and adolescent suicides by gun involve firearms from the victim’s own home or that of a relative.” Responsible gun ownership is essential

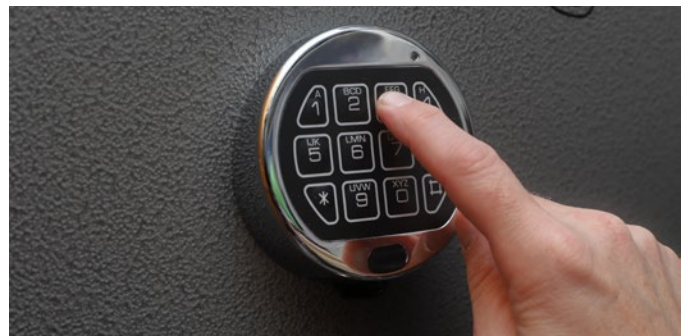
for protecting the lives of students as well as the constitutional rights of those who wish to bear arms.

The RAND Corporation estimates that 4.6 million U.S. children under the age of 18 live in a home with a loaded and unlocked firearm. RAND also [reports](#) that, “in homes with at least one unlocked and loaded firearm, 60 percent of children 13 to 17 years of age reported being able to access a firearm in less than five minutes.”

Prevention measures to keep students and staff safe

School districts and county offices of education should keep their [comprehensive school safety plans](#) and policies up to date, review them annually, and communicate safety protocols with parents, guardians, and their community. This includes regular and accessible communication about safety risks, best practices, and prevention measures that help keep communities safe.

In addition, Project ChildSafe has a list of California law enforcement agencies that offer families free gun safety kits that include a cable-style lock. Districts may want to contact their local law enforcement agency to inquire about the free kit. This information can be shared with their communities in the annual parental notifications.



CALIFORNIA SENATE BILL 906

SB 906 was signed into law on July 21, 2022, and requires the California Department of Education, in consultation with relevant local educational agencies (LEAs), civil rights groups, and the Department of Justice, to develop model content that informs parents or guardians of California's child access prevention laws and laws relating to the safe storage of firearms. This model curriculum must be created and distributed prior to July 1, 2023.

Starting in the 2023–24 school year, California education code requires that all LEAs communicate about safe firearm storage to their students, families, and communities in the required annual parental notifications (Ca. Educ. Code § 49392.).

SB 906 also requires school officials whose duties involve regular contact with middle or high school students in grades 6-12 to immediately report to law enforcement any threat or perceived threat that the official is alerted to or observes.

With the support of the LEA, the local law enforcement agency or school site police must immediately investigate the reported threat and conduct a threat assessment. Additional guidance on SB 906 can be found [here](#) on CSBA's blog.



Relevant rules and regulations for California firearms storage

In California, all firearms in the home must either be kept in a locked container or secured with a locking device that prevents the gun from functioning if a child under the age of 18 is in the home (Pen. Code, § 25100.) Fines may be incurred if adults know or reasonably should know that a child is likely to gain access to the firearm without permission of the child's parent, unless reasonable action is taken to secure the firearm. Other municipal codes may also apply.

Safety measures for families

Children want to explore their environments and are curious about the world around them, thus it is important for parents and guardians to educate children about firearms to protect children from harm. A child as young as 3 years old may be able to pull the trigger of a firearm, resulting in lethal harm. Additionally, young children have difficulty assessing risk, especially when inanimate objects resemble toys.

The most effective strategy for keeping children and communities safe is to keep firearms away from environments where children learn, play, and grow. According to the AAP, the risk of death by suicide using a firearm is five times higher when firearms are in the home than when no firearms are present. Therefore, it is imperative that adults eliminate preventable risks, and hiding firearms is not sufficient. If firearms are present in the home, they must be kept unloaded, locked in a secure lock box or safe, and the ammunition stored in a lock box or safe separate from the firearm. The [Attorney General's Office](#) has a list of safety devices available for purchase and includes device and firearm compatibility.

It is also critical to communicate with children, in age-appropriate ways, that firearms are not toys, that they should tell an adult if they find a firearm, and they are not to touch or pick up found firearms or play with guns. Resources from the AAP on how to communicate with children and other families about firearm safety are listed at the end of this fact sheet.

Many LEAs, like the [San Francisco Unified School District](#), [Los Angeles USD](#), and [Woodland Joint USD](#), already communicate the state requirements of firearm safety and storage regulations, statistics on firearms, and best practices with their communities. Including safety information in multiple languages and making that information accessible on various communication platforms annually will help ensure that all families receive this education.

School safety resources

California school administrators and governance teams play an essential role in creating safe and supportive school environments. The most effective approach to safe and supportive school environments requires a comprehensive, coordinated effort including schoolwide, districtwide, and communitywide strategies. The following resources include how to create safe and supportive school environments and school safety prevention strategies:

- ▶ **Safe and supportive school environments:** CSBA offers governance teams [resources](#) to enhance school safety, including guidance on a range of safety issues, sample board policies and administrative regulations, tips on developing comprehensive school safety plans, communicating during a crisis, and relevant magazine articles, policy briefs, and blogs.
- ▶ **Violence prevention:** The California Department of Education's (CDE) [Violence Prevention webpage](#) includes violence prevention strategies, safe storage of firearms, and school safety planning best practices. The website also has sample templates for the memoranda to parents and guardians in English and Spanish, informing them on the laws in California about the safe storage of firearms.
- ▶ **Youth suicide prevention:** The [CDE](#) provides a list of resources to help school districts address the need for youth suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, including a model youth suicide prevention policy for LEAs.
- ▶ **Firearm safety:** The [California Attorney General's Firearm Safety page](#) offers comprehensive information for parents, guardians, and community members that includes basic gun safety rules, owner responsibilities, rules for kids, childproofing your firearm, and a Firearm Safety Certificate study guide.
- ▶ **Gun safety campaign toolkit:** The [AAP's Ask About Guns](#) media campaign toolkit offers social media posts, informational videos, and articles to educate parents, guardians, and community members to reduce injuries and deaths.
- ▶ **Project ChildSafe:** [Project ChildSafe](#) is committed to providing educators (including firearm instructors and K-12 teachers) and students with the resources they need to spread the message

of firearms safety. Resources include checklists, tips, and videos to help educate students.

- ▶ **Be Smart:** The [Be Smart resources](#) and tools hub offers downloadable and print-friendly handouts on secure gun storage, how to talk to children about guns, maps on unintentional child shootings, and a map tracking gunfire on school grounds since 2013, in English and Spanish. The site also provides a database of law enforcement agencies that participate in providing free gun safety kits to families.
- ▶ **National Center for Education Statistics:** The [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (NCES) is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the U.S. and other nations. NCES is housed within the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences. NCES also publishes fact sheets and reports on school crime and safety, violence prevention, and students' access to firearms.

Relevant CSBA sample policies

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy Plus subscribers have access to sample policies. The following are sample policies relevant to SB 906.

- ▶ BP 0450 – Comprehensive Safety Plan
- ▶ BP 3515 – Campus Security
- ▶ BP 5137 – Positive School Climate
- ▶ BP 5142 – Safety
- ▶ BP 5131.7 – Weapons and Dangerous Instruments
- ▶ BP 5141.5 – Mental Health
- ▶ BP 5145.6 – Parent/Guardian Notifications

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