

Memorandum RE: Secure Gun Storage Policy

Providing District 97 students with a learning environment that ensures their emotional and physical safety is core to the District's values and mission. Our ability to provide safe learning spaces is threatened by increasing levels of gun violence in schools and involving children. In response, school districts throughout the country are increasingly adopting policies that commit them to educating parents and guardians about the importance of secure gun storage as an important part of a broader strategy to minimize gun violence in schools and communities.

District 97 has been providing secure storage resources and information to parents and guardians over the recent past through a variety of information channels. This secure gun storage policy will ensure that District efforts continue over the long-term and affirm our commitment to the safety of our students.

Schools and students are significantly impacted by gun violence; gun storage practices play an important role.

Gun violence has plagued US schools for decades and the failure of gun owners to securely store their guns is a significant contributor to this phenomenon. According to recent research, more than half of gun owners do not store all of their guns securely and 4.6 million kids in the U.S. live in a home with an unsecured gun.¹ A 2019 study found that 3 out of 4 school shooters used a weapon found in a parent or close relatives home and nearly half of school shooters used a firearm that was improperly stored.² In addition, most adolescents who die of gun-inflicted suicide each year use a family member's gun.³

Homes and communities are safer when gun owners securely store their guns by keeping them unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition. A 2005 study found a 78 percent lower risk of self-inflicted gun injuries and an 85 percent lower risk of unintentional firearm injuries among children and teens in houses that lock firearms and ammunition when compared to households that lock neither.⁴

Given this relationship between student/school safety and secure storage, school districts throughout the country are increasingly adopting secure storage policies. For example, in Phoenix, Arizona schools are required to send a letter to parents and guardians describing the importance of secure storage in protecting minors from gun violence each year, with the option to include the letter in annual registration materials. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, the second-largest school district in the country, a district policy requires that Integrated Safe School Plans include materials on secure gun storage and that such information be provided in the district's student handbook. Dozens of other districts have similar policies and the state of California recently passed a law, effective July 1, 2023, that requires all school districts to provide secure storage information to parents and guardians.

¹ Matthew Miller and Deborah Azrael, "Firearm Storage in US Households with Children: Findings from the 2021 National Firearm Survey," JAMA Network Open 5, no. 2 (2022): e2148823, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.48823>.

² National Threat Assessment Center et al., "Protecting America's Schools: A US Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence" (US Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security, 2019), <https://bit.ly/2U7vnwa>

³ Renee M. Johnson et al., "Who Are the Owners of Firearms Used in Adolescent Suicides?," Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior 40, no. 6 (2010): 609–11, <https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.2010.40.6>

⁴ David C. Grossman et al., "Gun Storage Practices and Risk of Youth Suicide and Unintentional Firearm Injuries," JAMA 293, no. 6 (2005): 707–14, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.293.6.707>

In 2022, Illinois passed legislation amending the School Code to specify that secure gun storage is one of the topics that public school districts may include in their safety education instruction.⁵ The amendment passed with nearly unanimous support and its sponsors emphasized the importance of secure storage education in our efforts to reduce gun violence.

In July of 2023, the Village of Oak Park passed an ordinance, 27-2-2: Safe Storage of Firearms, that also helps address the risk of gun violence in our community. The ordinance requires that all firearms stored in homes within Oak Park be secured with a lock. It also mandates that the combination or key to such a lock only be available to the person authorized to carry or control the firearm.

District 97's commitment to the social and emotional safety of its students, including by taking steps to address gun violence, is evident in recent actions the District has taken including:

- Strengthening our Social and Emotional Learning supports, which are essential to a positive learning environment, by investing in a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support framework and putting our educational experts in position to identify concerning behaviors;
- Collaborating regularly with the Village of Oak Park, Oak Park Police Department, Oak Park Department of Public Health, and District 200 to implement our intergovernmental agreements effectively and provide for school safety;
- Working with Village staff members who possess expertise in public health and safety to review resources and draft communications about secure gun storage that were shared with our community.

As part of this commitment, District 97 proactively shares information related to secure gun storage through its communication channels - including newsletters, its website, and social media. The District has also created a section in its weekly newsletter, "Community Health and Safety," to share resources and information from local partners and safety experts, and has dedicated a page of the district website for similar resources, including resources on secure gun storage.

A secure storage policy memorializes the District's commitment to student safety and helps ensure that these efforts continue into the future.

⁵ Public Act 102-0971

4:171 Secure Gun Storage

Purpose

Millions of children in the U.S. live in a home with an unsecured gun.⁶ A 2019 study found that 3 out of 4 school shooters used a weapon found in a parent or close relatives home and nearly half of school shooters used a firearm that was improperly stored.⁷ At the same time, children in homes with guns are much safer if those weapons are securely stored than if they are not.

Oak Park Elementary School District 97 is committed to fostering a learning environment in which its students and all community members are emotionally and physically safe. As part of its broader effort to do so, the District is committed to minimizing the risk of gun violence in our schools and in our community. To this end, the District shall do the following:

Gun Safety Awareness

Each school year, the Superintendent shall provide information to parents and guardians describing the importance of safe gun storage for protecting our students and community from the threat of gun violence and informing parents and guardians of their legal obligations related to protecting minors and others from unsecure gun storage. Such information shall be affirmatively provided in the manner or manners that the Superintendent, in her discretion, determines is most likely to be seen and read. Possible vehicles include the Student Handbook, annual registration materials, and other appropriate annual communications.

Information shall be provided in the appropriate language for each household and the Superintendent shall consider whether requiring each parent/guardian to acknowledge in writing or electronically that they have received and read such information will advance the purpose of this policy. In developing and disseminating materials, the district shall consult, as appropriate, with public health experts, gun safety experts, and other stakeholders.

The information sent home shall also be maintained in an easily accessible location on the District's website and the District shall consider providing on its website and in its communications additional materials and resources that can help advance gun safety.

Community Partnerships Around Gun Safety

The District shall partner, as appropriate and feasible, with local public health agencies and experts, law enforcement, school-based PTOs, and other relevant organizations and stakeholders on efforts to ensure that District 97 parents and guardians are aware of the importance of safe gun storage and their legal obligations with respect to safe gun storage.

As part of overall reporting on school safety, the Superintendent shall report annually to the Board on efforts and actions undertaken in furtherance of this policy.

⁶ Matthew Miller and Deborah Azrael, "Firearm Storage in US Households with Children: Findings from the 2021 National Firearm Survey," JAMA Network Open 5, no. 2 (2022): e2148823, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.48823>.

⁷ National Threat Assessment Center et al., "Protecting America's Schools: A US Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence" (US Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security, 2019), <https://bit.ly/2U7vnwa>