

Union Grove school district to train teachers to carry guns

Written by Administrator

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DALLAS (AP) — A small, mostly rural school district in East Texas will allow some teachers and administrators with training to carry concealed weapons, making it at least the second school system in the state to implement such a policy.

The seven-member board of the Union Grove Independent School District voted unanimously Thursday evening to enact the policy, Superintendent Brian Gray said Friday. Residents asked that faculty and staff be allowed to carry guns after the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in Newtown, Conn., that left 26 dead, including 20 young children.

"We wanted it, our community supported it, and it's a local decision," Gray said.

The district has about 750 students at its two adjoining campuses near Gladewater, about 110 miles east of Dallas.

Officials haven't decided how many faculty and staff members will be trained to carry weapons or whether the district will provide them with guns, Gray said.

Texas law bans guns in schools unless the school has given written authorization. The state doesn't track which schools allow them, said Debbie Graves Ratcliffe, spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency.

The Texas Association of School Boards helps local school boards draft policies. Association spokeswoman Shelley Stoll said at least two Texas districts have policies for concealed weapons, but there could be more.

The Harrold school district, about 160 miles northwest of Dallas, implemented such a policy in 2007. The school board decides which teachers and staff members can carry guns on campus. Those teachers must take additional training on shooting accuracy, hostage situations and how to clear a classroom.

Since the Newtown shootings, dozens of school superintendents, board members, even state lawmakers from around and outside Texas have been calling David Thweatt, superintendent of the single-campus, 110-student Harrold district.

"We spent a lot of time problem-solving and looking at some of the various situations that have come up" in school settings, he said. As for the need for incorporating teachers and staff into the security structure of the school, Thweatt said, "it would seem pretty obvious to me."

Opponents insist that having more people armed at a school, especially teachers or administrators who aren't trained to deal with crime on a daily basis, could lead to more injuries and deaths.

The idea of having guns on campus has been gaining momentum in other states. A rural school district in Ohio plans to arm some of its non-teaching employees with handguns this year — perhaps even janitors. Teachers in a northeastern Indiana county may soon be carrying guns in school if officials accept a proposal from the county sheriff. In Texas, the Plano school district has backed a proposal to hire armed security guards to patrol all 71 campuses in suburban Dallas.