Developing Firearm Injury Prevention Education in High Schools: Lessons from a Teacher-Led Public Health Partnership

WSPHA Conference 2026

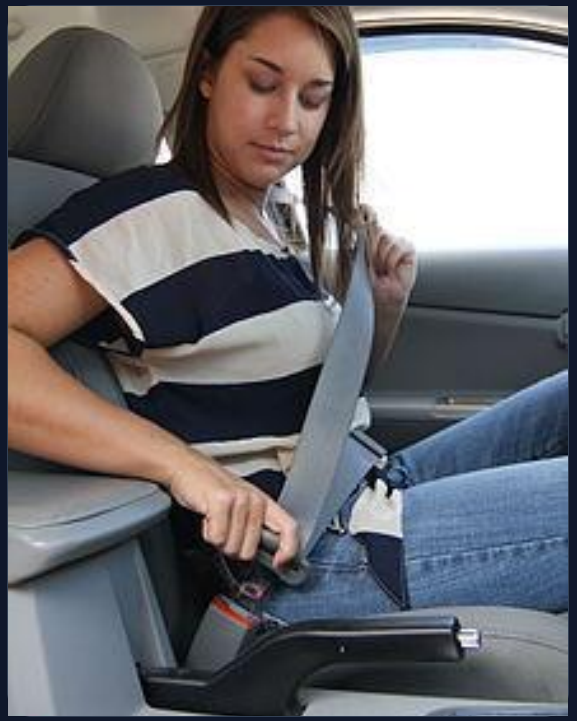
Presenters

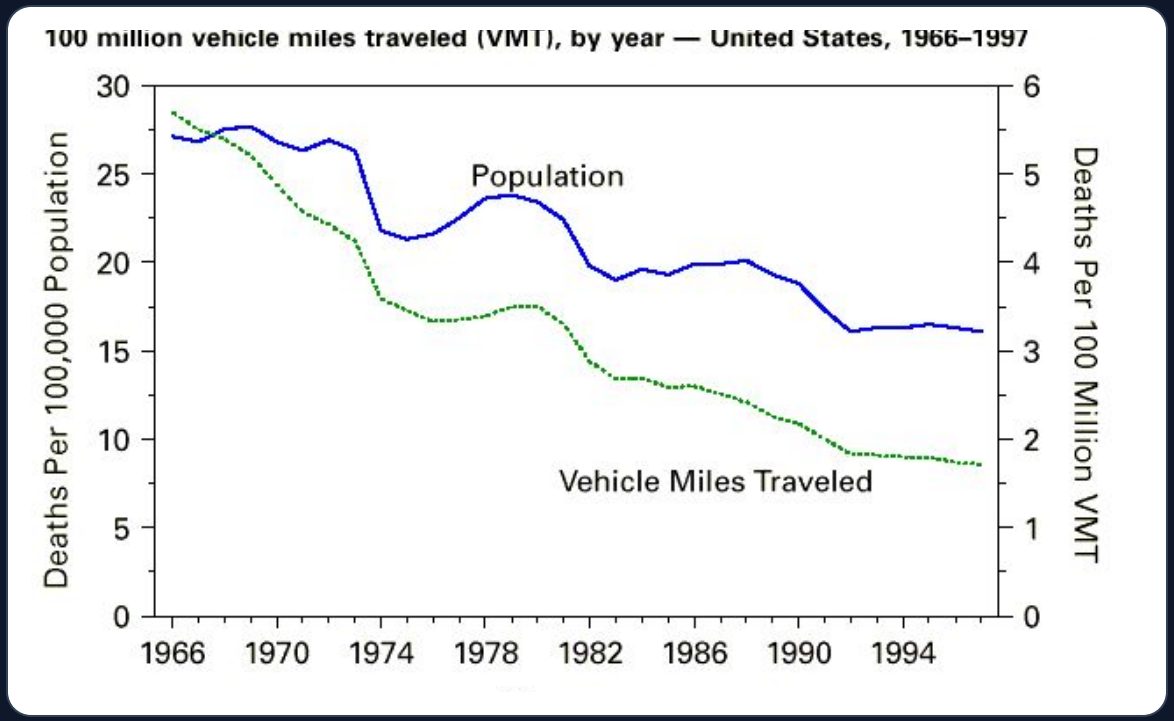
Dr. Greg Schwab — Edmonds School District, Edmonds, WA

Dr. Gregory Engel — Ceasefire NW

Motor-Vehicle-Related Death Rates (1966–1997)

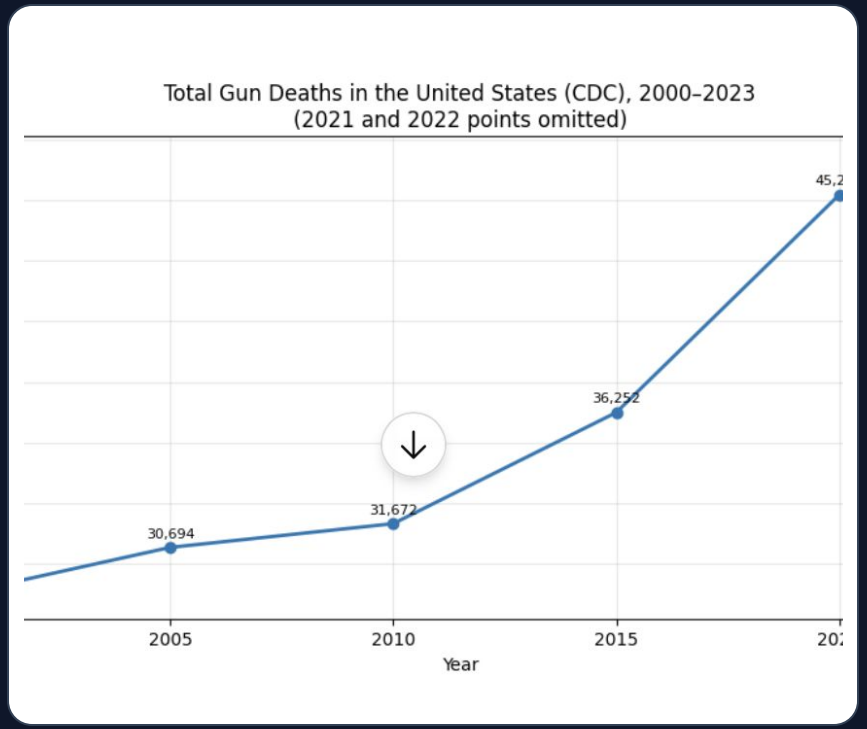
Trends per 100,000 population vs. per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT)

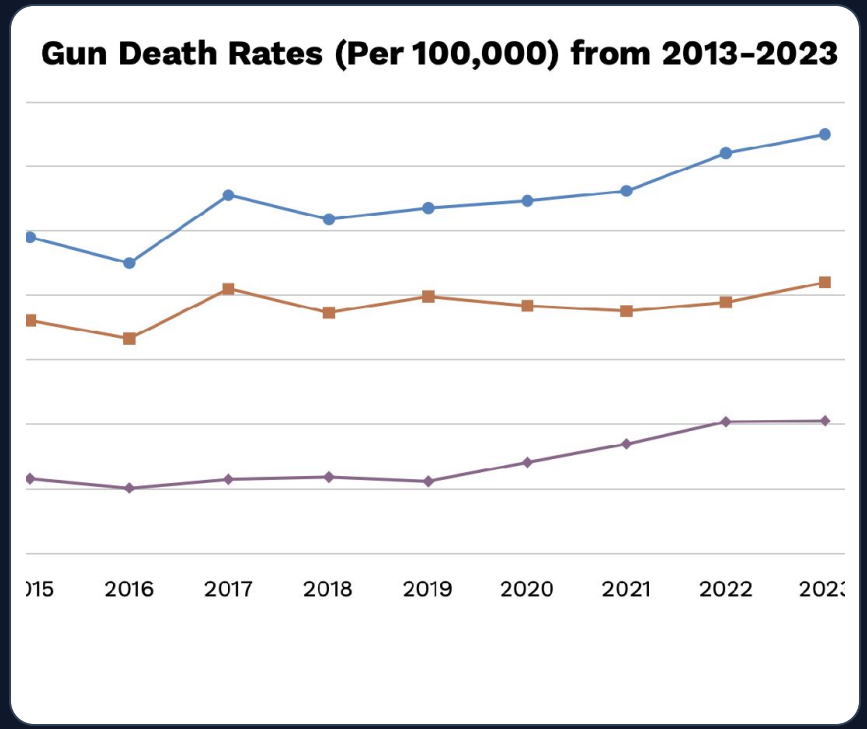




U.S. Gun Mortality Trends & Rates

Comparing total annual firearm deaths (2000–2023) with rate breakdowns per 100,000 population





Education: A Study in Contrast

Comparing public health educational frameworks across prevention domains

Motor Vehicle Injury

- Seatbelt safety & enforcement
- Alcohol & impaired driving awareness
- Distracted driving prevention
- Comprehensive legislative laws
- Driver education programs
- Standardized school curriculum

Firearm Injury

- Role of Media
  - Depiction & image of firearms
  - Public perception of injuries
- Risks vs. benefits analysis
- Public safety messaging
- Fostering a culture of safety
- Legislative laws
- School curriculum integration

History of Firearm Injury Prevention Education

Evaluating traditional educational models and behavioral outcomes in children

Traditional Educational Programs

- Eddie Eagle and similar standardized safety programs
- Designed to instruct children on what to do when encountering an unsecured firearm
- Promotes mnemonic response: **“Stop, don’t touch, leave, tell”**

Efficacy & Behavioral Gaps

- Children frequently recall steps without consistently performing them during actual encounters.
- High disconnect between passive instruction and real-world behavioral compliance.
- Concerns raised regarding whether early programs inadvertently **normalize firearm presence**.



Rethinking Firearm Safety Education

Passive mnemonic instruction vs. active public health education

TRADITIONAL MNEMONIC MODEL



- Relies on passive repetition (**"Stop, Don't Touch"**)
- High mnemonic recall without consistent behavioral compliance
- May inadvertently normalize firearm presence to children

≠

EVIDENCE-BASED PUBLIC HEALTH MODEL



- Interactive classroom & medical student-led instruction
- Comprehensive injury prevention & risk reduction
- Evaluates real-world feasibility, acceptability, & outcomes

Key national organizations and emerging consensus in firearm safety education

Sandy Hook Promise

Leading national youth violence prevention programs empowering students and school communities.

4-H Organization

Integrating structured safety education, responsibility, and leadership across youth programs nationwide.

Project Unloaded

Innovative cultural engagement campaign shifting cultural norms around firearms among teens.

Curriculum Consensus

Building widespread agreement on standardized, evidence-based public health curricula for schools.

A ”Holistic,” School-based Approach

Evaluating student engagement, program feasibility, and implementation reach

Study Cohort Overview

908 Total Students

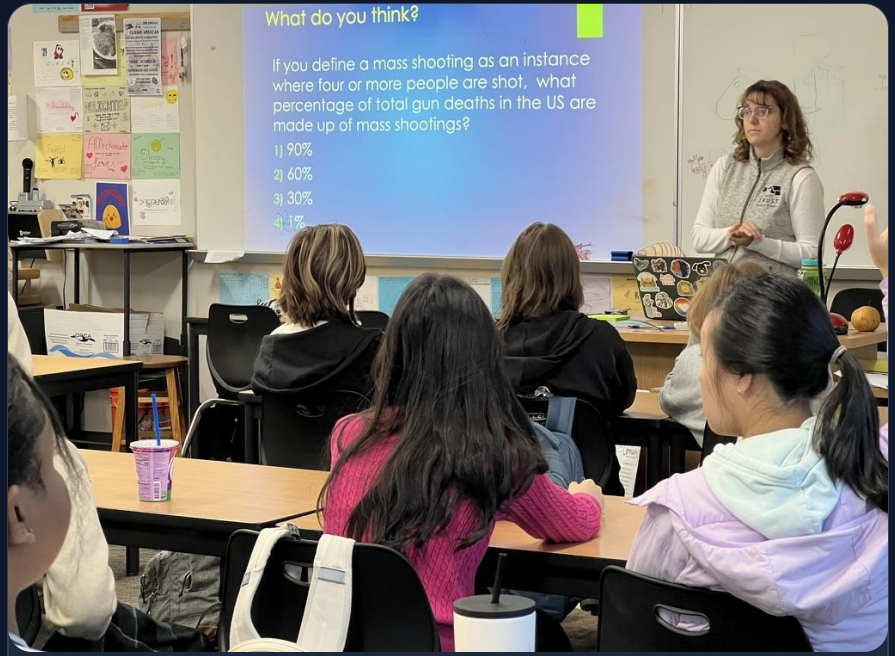
755 Presentation Group

153 Comparison Group

Primary Finding

EDUCATION IS FEASIBLE AND ACCEPTABLE

Demonstrated successful implementation across high school classroom settings with high participant receptivity.



- Interactive public health classroom presentation in progress

A Health Issue or a Civics Issue?

Evaluating educational impact through dual public health and civic lenses

HEALTH ISSUE LENS

Behavior & Outcomes

- Does it change behavior?
- Does it save lives?

CIVICS ISSUE LENS

Knowledge & Community

- Does it change knowledge?
- Does it improve our community?
- Is it important, appropriate, and necessary?

Why Schools?

Beyond Academics

Schools don't just prepare students academically.

Holistic education prepares youth for real-world challenges, fostering safety, awareness, and community responsibility.

This is part of our educational mission.

Our Role

We prepare them to:

- ✔ Make safe decisions
- ✔ Recognize danger
- ✔ Care for themselves
- ✔ Support others
- ✔ Become responsible citizens

Why Edmonds Took Action

SINCE 2022

14 Students

from Edmonds School District have been injured or killed by gun violence.

THE WIDER IMPACT

None of these tragic incidents occurred inside our schools.

Yet, every single one of them affected our students, families, and staff.

Community violence becomes school trauma.

Why a Teacher-Delivered Curriculum?

Key Advantages of Classroom Integration

01

Sustainable

Long-term viability within existing school infrastructure.

02

Scalable

Easily expanded across multiple schools.

03

Integrated Support

Embedded seamlessly into standard health class curricula.

04

Consistent

Ensures standardized delivery for all students.

05

Connected

Bridges the gap to trusted school adults.

★ **High Impact**

Curriculum Overview

Students learn about

Foundations & Law

- Firearm injury epidemiology
- Washington laws
- Risk factors

Prevention & Safety

- Safe storage
- Suicide prevention
- Warning signs

Skills & Support

- Emotional regulation
- Help-seeking
- Peer intervention

The Science Behind Prevention

Topics include

Brain & Development

- Adolescent brain development
- Impulsivity and neurological shifts

Cognitive Control

- Decision-making processes
- Emotional regulation strategies

Support & Systems

- Protective factors
- Connectedness and school bonds

Safe Storage Saves Lives

Discussion Topics

01

Why Storage Matters

Understanding the critical importance of keeping firearms secured at all times.

02

Reducing Shootings

Substantially lowering the risk of accidental discharge and unauthorized youth access.

03

Suicide Prevention

Creating a vital barrier of time and space during critical moments of crisis.

04

Family Talk

Normalizing open, proactive discussions about safety and responsible home storage.

Trusted Adults Save Lives

Students identify: Who can I go to?

01

people

Parents

02

school

Teachers

03

sports_soccer

Coaches

04

psychology

Counselors

05

diversity_3

Family members

Normalize asking for help.

Warning Signs Matter

Students learn to recognize

01

person_off

Isolation

02

bolt

Escalating anger

03

campaign

Threats

04

sentiment_dissatisfied

Hopelessness

05

error_outline

Crisis behaviors

Peer Intervention

Students often know before adults. Teach students:

01

visibility

Notice

02

pan_tool

Pause

03

campaign

Speak Up

04

contact_support

Get Help

Connections to Threat Assessment

Threat assessment is not just responding. It's prevention.

01

campaign

Early Reporting

02

supervisor_account

Adult Intervention

03

groups

Student Connectedness

04

shield

Protective Factors

Implementation Lessons

What worked

01

school

Staff Preparation

02

forum

Clear Communication

03

campaign

Public Health Messaging

04

family_restroom

Parent Outreach

05

handshake

Community Partnerships

Common Questions

Common concerns included

01

psychology

Will this traumatize students?

02

error_outline

Will it encourage violence?

03

balance

Is this political?

04

health_and_safety

Is there room in Health?

How do you answer these questions?

What We Learned

Key takeaways from our implementation

01

school

Students

Engaged thoughtfully in the sessions.

02

menu_book

Teachers

Appreciated structured, ready-to-use resources.

03

family_restroom

Families

Largely supported and trusted the overall approach.

04

shield

Safety Focus

The conversation became less political when framed around safety.

The Challenge for Public Health

Measuring Impact Across Four Key Dimensions

01

psychology

KNOWLEDGE

What do students learn and retain?

02

directions_run

BEHAVIOR

What do people start doing differently?

03

groups

CULTURE

Do community attitudes and norms change?

04

analytics

OUTCOMES

Do injuries and deaths decline over time?

Three Ways You Can Make A Difference

Strategic pillars for sustainable impact

01

fact_check

EVALUATE & LEARN

Build the evidence that will improve education and help us understand its lasting impact.

02

groups

CONNECT

Bring educators, clinicians, researchers, and community members together to strengthen this work.

03

record_voice_over

EMPOWER

Help people become informed, confident and effective advocates for firearm injury prevention education in their own communities.

Thank You

Questions? Reach out to us

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account_circle **Dr. Gregory Engel**

Email: ga_engel@yahoo.com

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Scan QR Code for

- Curriculum resources
- Follow Up Questions