

**SCHOOL SAFETY**  
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this year, but one middle school in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system had five in one week."

Taylor said five or six schools in the district had installed security cameras.

"Personnel monitor the cameras at all times," he said. "This makes kids and teachers aware of if anything looks unusual."

With only one resource officer at the high school and only 55 to 65 across the entire Charlotte-Mecklenburg system in high schools and middle schools, cameras help to improve safety, Taylor said. "We're just making sure we are seen, and they know we are upping security."

Larry Northe, the safe schools coordinator at Fayetteville's E.E. Smith High School, said this visibility factor was also important in the Cumberland County School District.

"We have teachers visible in all the areas where students are," Northe said. "Kids understand it is their school, and they set the climate. We just monitor it."

Northe said the number of incidents at Smith had decreased from last year as a result of the efforts of faculty to be more in contact with the students as well as conflict resolution programs.

"Most incidents are small arguments - little he said she said things," he said. "Gossip spreads, and they like to confront each other. With these programs, I can give them the option to come see me if they foresee a problem."

Northe and one other SRO are the only two security patrolmen on a large campus of more than 1,200 students. To prevent further security conflicts, most doors to the building are usually locked to incoming traffic. "Students can go out almost any door, but the main entrance into the building at the front is the only one they can come in," he said.

The Guilford County school system has also become more aware of violence prevention efforts in schools since the occurrence at Columbine, SRO Steve Hall said.

"Anytime something like that happens, there is heightened alert for copycat incidents," he said. "Our job entails security for the campus and there was not anything (the people in Columbine) could have done differently - those boys were bound and determined to do what they did."

People are looking to SROs to spearhead the safety program, but the officers alone can not be successful, Hall said.

"If our program is going to be successful, we need help of the students and staff," he said. "You can't take one officer and solve all the problems. For safe schools you need the cooperation of all those sectors."

Guilford County also has a school safety plan for each school to complete, said SRO Stan Dixon at Page High School. "There are six pages of things we go through on-site and make sure we have filled that out and are in compliance," he said.

Monitoring each student's personality was a main violence prevention tactic, Dixon said. "I find out what a problem is, and if a student looks disgruntled or like they're going to get physical, I pull them in my office to talk," he said. "A lot of mediation helps to curve violence."

The incidents at Page have decreased from 125 arrests during three months in 1994 to about 25 to 30 arrests at this time.

Dixon said these reductions were a result of the Governor's Task Force Against School Violence and the programs it had encouraged such as "Teens, Crime and Community."

Dr. Pam Riley, executive director of the Center for Prevention of School Violence, said this program for middle schools and high schools helped students to understand law and help prevent them from being victims.

"We have 130 sites participating in the program that involves three parts," she said. "There is a textbook for classroom use, involvement of outside resources such as judges and police officers and service activities to connect the students back to the community such as cleaning up graffiti."

Riley said since 1993, the possession of firearms on school campuses had decreased from 68 percent.

"The pro-active efforts and Governor Hunt's initiatives are taking us in the right direction," Riley said. "There are no guarantees, but we are reducing the potential."

But violence will forever lurk, no matter how hard the school system or the police works at curbing it, Stephenson said.

"When you talk about the Columbine tragedy, I can't give you an ideal model where that can't happen."

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**LEGISLATION**  
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proposed federal legislation in Congress since last summer.

Most Democrats and Republicans agree that some type of legislation is needed in order to combat school violence, but a consensus has yet to be reached.

President Clinton claims that while new state laws are helpful, national laws should be implemented quickly and are needed in order to cover all states.

Clinton is urging Congress to pass gun control legislation by the one-year anniversary of Columbine, April 20, but the increasingly intense debate makes this unlikely.

**Mandates From the Hill**

In May 1999, the U.S. Senate passed its version of the Juvenile Justice Bill, which included gun control measures in addition to harsher sentencing laws and preventative programs. The bill also called for background checks at gun shows with a maximum waiting period

of 72 hours.

But the bill has yet to come out of a House committee. After the bill's introduction in the House, GOP leaders separated the gun control issues from the rest of the bill.

While this new Juvenile Justice Bill passed, the gun legislation did not. In fact, many Democrats voted against the gun legislation because it lowered the waiting period at gun shows to a 24-hour maximum. Democratic leaders said one day was not enough time to properly conduct a check when problems arose.

Clinton's main initiatives concerning gun legislation include mandatory trigger locks, a 72-hour waiting period for background checks and banning the import of high-capacity ammunition clips. Victoria Valentine, spokeswoman for the president, said Clinton wanted immediate action on gun control.

"If there's legislation that America's asking for, it should be put to the vote in Congress," she said. "Obviously, politics is playing a part."

**The Public Discourse**

But the American public might not

be asking for new legislation. Although membership in gun control advocacy groups has grown since Columbine, so has their opposition.

The NRA said its ranks had swelled in the past year to 3.5 million, while Handgun Control Inc. has about 500,000 members.

Although the two camps have traditionally disagreed on the fundamental aspects of control, the argument now focuses on specific legislation. One of the most controversial points is the 72-hour maximum on background checks.

Most checks are completed instantly unless a problem in the buyer's past is found. But when this occurs, the check takes longer because of the limited amount of electronic information available to dealers.

Also, most gun shows occur on weekends, when information is often temporarily unavailable due to weekend processing.

Federal law does not require checks at these shows. "In most states it's legal for people to sell a gun (at a show) to whoever they want and they don't have to do a background check," said Nancy

Hwa, spokeswoman for Handgun Control. "It's clear that criminals know about this loophole."

But instead of new legislation, the NRA is calling for the enforcement of existing federal laws. "Almost all of the laws aren't being enforced," said Bill Powers, director of public affairs for the NRA. "Clinton says he stopped 5,000 fugitives from buying a gun (but) couldn't point to a single prosecution."

Powers said the NRA was not against background checks in general. "We supported the check," he said.

"We always did"

But Handgun Control argues differently, claiming that expansive NRA lobbying has blocked gun legislation in the past. "This nation's gun laws are weak and full of loopholes," Hwa said. "(This) is due to the NRA. They're being hypocritical. If you listen to the NRA, they're (taking) credit for background checks - they fought background checks for about seven years."

Hwa said she supported the bill, including gun control measures passed by the Senate in May. "It closes up the gun-show loophole," she said.

Powers said new gun control laws were not an appropriate response to the recent rise in school shootings. "Taking a firearm to school couldn't be more illegal than it already is," he said.

But Hwa said that although taking a firearm to school was illegal, at that point it was often too late.

"You have to prevent people from getting the gun in the first place, whether it's children or criminals," she said.

Hwa cited an incident on April 7 when four guns were found in the gym bag of an eighth-grader in Texas. Three of the four guns were loaded.

"We need responsibility on the part of the gun owners," she said.

**State-Level Initiatives**

States are also responding to public pressure by taking matters into their own hands.

On April 3, Massachusetts became the first state to implement legislation applying consumer protection standards to guns, including required childproof locks and tamper-resistant serial numbers.

When added to existing legisla-

tion, the new laws make Massachusetts the state with the strictest firearm laws in the country.

One day later, Maryland passed the bill that included built-in locks.

In North Carolina, Gov. Jim Hunt has supported several school safety initiatives during the past year.

Last June, Hunt signed into law a bill that prohibits students and school employees from carrying a gun on school property or at a school event.

Another bill passed last year would revoke the driver's licenses of high school students charged with certain violent acts or drug offenses on campus.

Also, Hunt's recent Working Against Violence Everywhere program will set up a 24-hour tip line for anyone to report potential violent acts at schools.

The program will also educate students and parents to see early warning signs.

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence in Raleigh works closely with Hunt on school safety issues.

Dr. Pam Riley, director of the Center, said new regulations would go into effect in July requiring every school district to have an "alternative school" for students who are expelled or suspended. "It will allow us to provide structured learning (for these students) and integrate them back into the educational mainstream," she said.

Officials said these initiatives were already proving beneficial.

Riley cited a study indicating that the number of students bringing firearms to school had decreased by 68 percent in the past seven years.

Also, possession of a firearm at school fell 10 percent in the 1998-99 school year from the previous. "What we're doing is working," Riley said.

**Another Alternative**

But for the violence that does occur, many leaders and activists want to hold gun manufacturers at least partly responsible.

This March, gun manufacturer Smith & Wesson agreed to include safety locks with all handguns. In exchange, the federal government will drop all pending lawsuits against the company.

The NRA immediately attacked Smith & Wesson on grounds that the deal was little more than government blackmail. "It was a pure sell-out by a British-owned company," Powers said.

Also in March, Rep. Bill McCollum, R-Florida, introduced a bill called "Project Exile." The bill would provide \$100 million during the next five years as an incentive for states to aggressively prosecute gun crimes and sentence offenders more strictly.

Powers said the NRA was in complete support of McCollum's bill.

"To be honest, the NRA is the reason that's there," Powers said. "We've been talking about it for three years - we're very, very supportive."

But others disagree.

"The NRA is trying to take credit for (Project Exile)," said Hwa, who also supports the program.

Yet Hwa and other gun control advocates insist even more measures are needed than those in the bill. "Project Exile only kicks in once a crime's been committed," Hwa said. "In addition to punishment, you also need preventative laws - the two go hand-in-hand."

Another item on the front-burner is so-called "smart gun" technology, which allows only the authorized user to fire their weapons.

There are several options in producing such guns - fingerprint sensors, on handgun triggers, magnetic rings worn on the hand of revolver users, voice-activated handguns and devices that only respond to a preprogrammed hand pressure.

But critics say that in moments of panic a gun owner might not be able to place his finger in the correct position for identification. Also, a person hiding from an intruder in his own home could easily give away his hiding place if the gun required voice-activation.

With the debate still swirling, it's probably no surprise that Congressional leaders remain locked in a stalemate, and the deadlock continues to frustrate people on both sides of the issue.

"It became obvious last summer that the White House would rather have this as a political issue going into the (2000) elections," Powers said.

Hwa also wanted to see a consensus reached but one for stricter gun control. "Our focus is on bringing some sanity to the gun laws in this country."

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