

— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Kate Queram](#)

My kids will start kindergarten next fall by virtue of their birthday, which is exactly nine weeks past the cutoff to start this year. This is partially annoying ([cash money](#)), but mostly it is fine, because public schools are, at this moment, *extremely exhausting*. The turmoil has nothing to do with educators or administrators — who are, in my opinion, among the most unsung heroes of all time — and entirely the fault of idiotic politics and the idiotic politicians who politick them. Everything does not, actually, have to be political. But no matter — it's all political anyway.

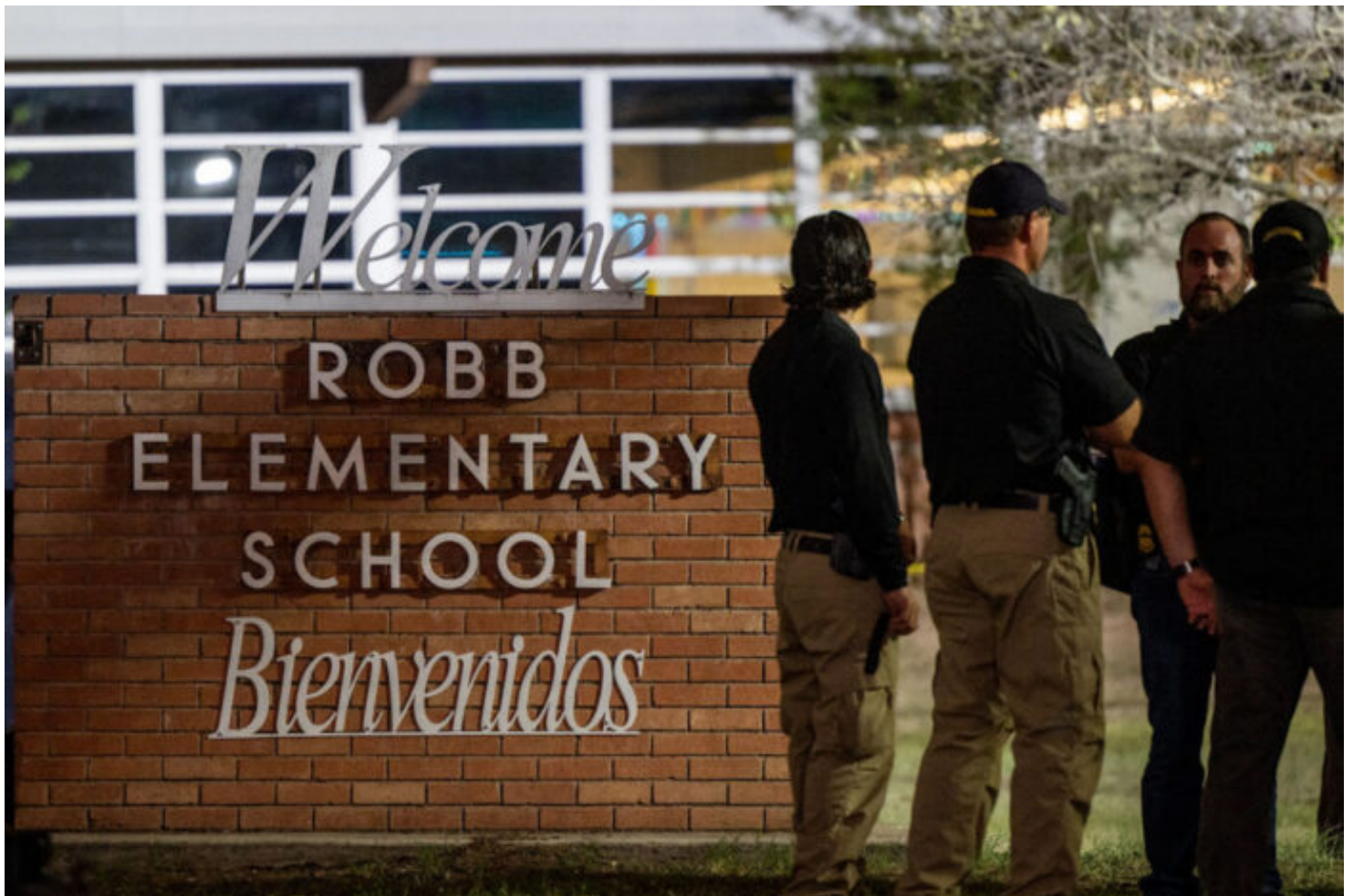


The Big Takeaway

Take, for example, our national epidemic of gun violence. Firearms are [the leading cause of death](#) for American children and teenagers. That rate has [worsened dramatically](#) in recent years, jumping from 1,732 gun deaths in 2019 to 2,590 in 2021 — a 50% increase. School shootings have risen concurrently, more than doubling from [2019](#) (24) to [2022](#) (51). [Since 1999](#), more than [366,000 children](#) have experienced gun violence at school.

This is, objectively, bad. And when the problem is stripped to the facts and the data, it's difficult to comprehend how that reality ever became anything *but* objective. But guns have long been political, for a lot of reasons. (Namely: The NRA, Republicans, Republicans and the NRA, and a constitutional amendment that was written when the weapon of choice was [a one-round musket](#).) Alone, that doesn't affect our ability to find substantive solutions — the problem [is the guns](#); the answer is [restricting access to the guns](#) — but it does make it hard to [agree on them](#). And until someone ([...Republicans](#)) decides to actually deal with the guns, our tragic and wholly

preventable epidemic will march on, unfettered.



Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, where 19 children and two teachers were shot to death in part because police were terrified of facing a gunman with an AR-15.

(Photo by Brandon Bell/Getty Images)

All of which leaves schools struggling to enact even the most basic of precautions. In Oklahoma, a superintendent asked state officials to establish baseline security precautions at athletic events after a 16-year-old was [shot and killed](#) at a high school football game in August. The board of directors for the Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association discussed the request Wednesday, but ultimately declined to enact any changes after dozens of other districts opposed the idea, [the Oklahoma Voice reported](#).

“They felt like we have minimum standards by just requiring that a district address crowd control and other things,” said David Jackson, the association’s executive director. “They were not in favor of OSSAA giving specific guidelines on how to manage security.”

He’s sort of right, in that OSSAA’s policies do, in fact, establish the very bare minimum of standards. Under [those guidelines](#), schools are required to have administrators present at every

event and to provide “adequate security,” a blanket term that school districts are free to interpret as they wish. The association itself has no direct control over event security until playoff games.



There was an attempt.

(Photo by Sweeann/Adobe Stock)

Some board members said “local control” was the best way to ensure appropriate protocols for both rural and urban districts, which may have different security needs. But others said that variation was precisely why baseline standards are needed. One superintendent said that districts sometimes beef up police presence at games when teams from Black-majority schools visit for away games. Most of those officers are placed on the visiting sidelines, particularly during basketball games, she added.

“I am just worried that if we don’t have a minimum then some communities will get over-policed,” she said during the meeting.

David Cobb, the superintendent who originally requested the change, felt similarly. He’s comfortable with the safety precautions in his own district, he said. It’s other districts he’s not sure about.

“They’re right in saying that we already have some minimums in place, but I think it’s worth having a conversation about whether the minimums should be adjusted,” Cobb said after Wednesday’s board meeting. “As a superintendent, I’m looking to know that my kids are secure whether we’re at home or on the road.”



Also not a political statement!

(Photo by Getty Images)

The security of (some) students is of little concern at Hurricane High School in West Virginia, where administrators ordered teachers to remove from their classrooms pride flags and other signs of support for the LGBTQ+ community after determining that the materials violated a district policy banning political activity on school grounds. The interpretation echoes a similar decree in [a different county](#) and a [nationwide right-wing push](#) to enforce “parental rights” and “protect the [\[straight and cisgender\]](#) children,” [per West Virginia Watch](#).

[Per the policy](#), schools in Putnam County are banned from displaying materials that “advocate” for political candidates or campaigns, “issues or a particular point of view.” The policy isn’t new, but the interpretation is. A spokesman for the district said the enforcement of the rule was not “limited to” pride flags and LGBTQ+ signage, but did not respond to questions about exactly what

candidate, issue or point said signage was “advocating.” Their removal, though, was “not directed at any particular issue or point of view,” he said.

He has no explanation, in other words, which is fine because there is no explanation. Being gay, or transgender, or nonbinary is not a political stance or an “issue” or a “point of view” — it just *is*, exactly like being straight and cisgender. The signage simply demonstrates acceptance of that fact, students and allies told the Putnam County school board at a meeting on Tuesday.

“I don’t understand why my existence and [that of] other kids like me is political,” said Brook Brown, a sophomore. “Being gay is not a choice — that’s not up for discussion. It’s a fact. Why can’t I feel safe in an environment I have to be at every day? You guys are taking away the one thing that provides that sense of safety.”

Those in favor of the policy — seven people, out of 21 who signed up to speak — had no real argument, other than their personal belief that a school lesson was an inappropriate venue for students to discuss sexual orientation or gender identity. The problem with that, of course, is that displaying a flag has nothing to do with curriculum (unless maybe you’re a social studies teacher, and the flag is American or British or whatever). Also, I don’t want to alarm anyone, but *kids are already having those discussions in schools*, regardless of what’s on the wall in their classrooms.



Take a moment to absorb it! You'll be OK!

(Photo by cunaplus/Adobe Stock)

The school board didn't take action on the policy on Tuesday, but students and allies are on watch. Similar rules in other states have not fared particularly well in court, according to Billy Wolfe, a spokesperson for the ACLU of West Virginia.

"The existence of LGBTQ+ people is not a partisan political matter, period. The removal of inclusive symbols from Putnam County schools is a violation of teachers' free speech rights and creates a potentially hostile learning environment for students," Wolfe said. "School boards in other states have attempted similar moves and lost in court. We urge officials to reconsider their position, and we are keeping all options on the table going forward."

U.S. Sen. Mike Braun (R-Ind.) has his eyes on a different sort of protection — or, I guess, a lack thereof. Amid a COVID-19 surge, Braun and other Republican lawmakers are hoping to ban federal mask mandates on domestic flights, public transit systems and in schools, [the Indiana Capital Chronicle reported](#).

Braun is joined in his effort by such luminaries as [thoughtful-author-turned-MAGA](#) U.S. Sen. J.D.

Vance (R-Ohio) and U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican best known for [saluting Jan. 6 rioters](#) (and then [running away from them](#)). (I had forgotten about that until right now and I am [fully not OK](#).) The super serious “[Freedom to Breathe Act](#)” (ironic as I cannot, at this moment, [breathe](#)) is intended as a pushback on mask mandates at both the local and federal levels, even though it only specifically addresses federal mandates, of which there are exactly zero.

“We’re not going to go back to the top-down government overreach we saw during COVID,” Braun said Wednesday in a statement about his overreaching bill. “Congress needs to say forcefully that these ineffective, unscientific mask mandates are not coming back in any way, shape, or form.”



The hero we need, but not the one we deserve, so instead we get Mike Braun.

(Photo by Nedrofly/Adobe Stock)

Asked what, specifically, is fueling his “concern,” Braun’s office referred to various news articles about mask mandates at [individual schools](#) and a warning from one (1) health official in New York City, who told the [Daily Mail](#), a British tabloid, it would probably be a “good idea” to mask in crowded indoor places amid a surge in the Ba.2.86 COVID variant. This, according to Braun’s office, is proof that “the trend is on the rise.”

Vance concurred in a [separate statement](#), claiming that “multiple entities within our government” (which? No one knows) and “within the public health bureaucracy” (what? No one knows) are imposing mask mandates again, like right this very second oh my god!

“This is coming back unless we stop it from happening,” he warned.



NOOOOO J.D. VANCE DON'T LET IT GET ME

(Photo by David Martínez Aparicio/Wirestock via Adobe Stock)

Vance forced the bill for Senate floor consideration on Thursday, with the warning that any objection would constitute a “clear admission that Democrats intend to reimpose mask mandates in the near term” and not just evidence that, you know, Democrats would rather spend their time doing actual work on things like, I don’t know, funding the federal government [so that it doesn’t shut down](#)? But that was of little concern to Vance! It was but a mere speedbump in his quest to force Democrats “to decide whether they support mask mandates or individual freedom!”

...A quest that will, I guess, continue another day, because it — much like the bill forbidding a

thing that is not happening — [did not really do much of anything](#). Sorry, America. Your freedom to breathe (without a mask, but possibly with COVID) will have to wait.

MANDATES OR FREEDOM THE CHOICE IS YOURS: [Arizona schools chief cancels \\$70 million in COVID-19 funding to set up tutoring program](#) ... [Some Connecticut schools are using artificial intelligence for student tutoring](#) ... [Idaho AG Labrador parcels out lawsuit, pushes back against State Board of Education](#) ... [Speakers urge Iowa panel to save higher education groups from the chopping block](#) ... [Demoted LSU grad assistant, state senator both unhappy with vulgar voicemail aftermath](#) ... [Do cops actually make schools safer?](#) ... [Schools Over Stadiums files referendum challenging Nevada public funding for A's](#) ... [Advocates call on New Jersey lawmakers to make school meals free for all students](#) ... [North Carolina State Board of Education reclaims charter school authority with new policy](#) ... [Taxpayers paid \\$22,500 for inflammatory video from Oklahoma State Department of Education](#) ... [Excessive heat and humidity leads to widespread school closures](#) ... [Texas' political environment driving faculty to leave, survey finds](#) ... [Facing program cuts and layoffs, West Virginia University faculty overwhelmingly pass 'no confidence' vote in Gee](#) ... [Lawmakers react to southwest Washington teacher strikes](#)



From The Newsrooms

- [Doctors, ethicists skeptical that nitrogen executions will be humane](#)
- [All roads converge on Florida Supreme Court as justices decide future of abortion rights](#)
- [Ohio Supreme Court dismisses congressional redistricting cases](#)
- [Millions more workers would receive overtime pay under proposed Biden administration rule](#)
- [Child advocate has New Hampshire lawmakers rethinking abuse, neglect placements](#)



One Last Thing

Absolutely no one:

Steven Spielberg: [What if Tiny Toons went to college?](#)



Ah, the 90s, when nothing was rebooted and everything was low-res.

(via Giphy)

News From The States

A PROJECT OF STATES NEWSROOM

Did someone forward you this newsletter?

[SUBSCRIBE](#) | [LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR NEWSROOMS](#) | [FOLLOW](#)

Share this post:



Copyright © 2023 [States Newsroom](#), all rights reserved.

1414 Raleigh Rd #127 | Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27517

info@newsfromthestates.com

You are receiving this email because you opted in via our website or Facebook signup form.

TO MANAGE YOUR ACCOUNT, CLICK ON "UNSUBSCRIBE" BELOW

[Unsubscribe](#) or [Manage Your Preferences](#)