

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

Let's close out the school week with a final batch of school news, shall we?



The Big Takeaway

I'll begin with a very normal story out of Alaska, where a proposed bill would require school districts to train volunteers to serve as armed guards. Schools would be exempted only if no one agrees to assume the role of unpaid sentry, or if no one is "able" to do it, [per the Alaska Beacon](#).



“Yeah, no, they’d be volunteers. With guns. In schools. And I thought we’d shield them from liability. Cool?”

(Photo by James Brooks/Alaska Beacon)

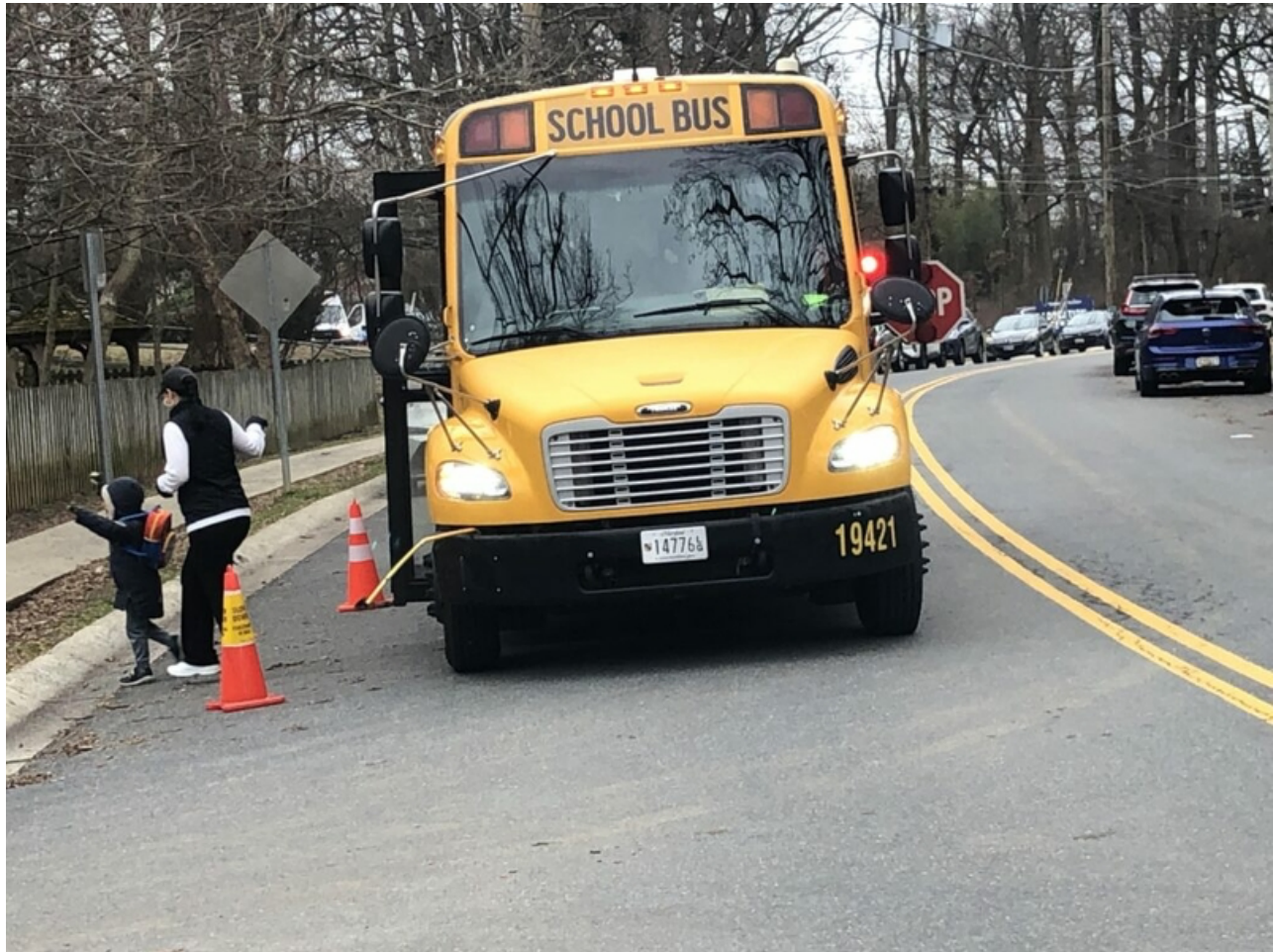
Proponents of [the bill](#) — really just state Sen. Shelley Hughes, the Republican who sponsored it — said the guards would add a layer of security for schools in isolated locations without law enforcement agencies nearby. In Alaska, it can take hours — and a plane or boat — to reach certain places, she added.

“There have been times when it can take — because of weather — three to five days to get to a remote village that doesn’t have any kind of law enforcement present that are armed,” Hughes said last week at a Senate Labor and Commerce Committee hearing. “So [the bill] is a needed stopgap.”

Each armed volunteer would operate under rules and procedures crafted by the district, which would also be required to submit annual active-shooter plans to state and local police, according to the bill. Districts would pay or reimburse volunteers for training programs, which must be equivalent to a “nationally recognized” firearms, school resource officer or school safety course. Once they’re on the job, volunteers would be shielded from liability for their actions or “failure to act” during a crisis, except in cases of gross negligence.

Mostly, people hate this bill. Forty-nine of 51 letters sent to the committee opposed the measure, including one from a trauma surgeon, who wrote that “the reality of putting guns in schools, in the hands of inadequately trained civilians, would likely increase risk of harm to students more than it would help prevent violence.” (Even police — ostensibly well trained in both emergency response and firearms — often [fail to intervene](#) in [school shootings](#).) Another questioned the logic of forcing districts to fund gun training when they’re struggling to pay for basic needs.

“This bill,” wrote April Rochford of Anchorage, “is, frankly, quite stupid.”



*When the sign says to stop, you stop.
(Photo by Tim Henderson/Stateline)*

It’s also stupid to blow past a stopped school bus, but drivers across the country keep doing it anyway. As many as [242,000 vehicles](#) illegally pass school buses *daily*, even in several dozen states where buses are outfitted with automatic cameras that record violations. That technology has been around for more than a decade, but enforcement is still a work in progress, [Stateline reported](#).

Reasons vary. Some states have cited the technical limitations of the cameras themselves, which often miss evidence needed to enforce certain laws, or flag cars in lanes or on streets where they aren't legally required to stop. In other states, lawmakers softened penalties to shepherd the bills through the legislature, effectively defanging the cameras as a deterrent, according to Pennsylvania District Court Judge James Motznik.

"It's actually less of a deterrent," he said. "If a police officer witnessed this, there'd be a \$500 fine, a license suspension, points toward losing your license. A camera sees the same thing, it's \$300 and goodbye."

It's hard to know exactly how those shortcomings have affected kids' safety, mostly because no one really tracks deaths and injuries from cars passing stopped buses. A review of crash records in Pennsylvania found 12 collisions in 2022 and 13 in 2021, with one death in each year ([one student](#), one parent) and a total of 23 injuries. Nationwide, there were 53 fatalities between 2000 and 2021, half of them school-age children, according to a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration analysis requested by Stateline.



*High five for some good news.
(Photo by Andi Rice for the Alabama Reflector)*

To wind things up, here's some good news from Alabama, where K-12

students scored higher on standardized math tests last year than before the COVID-19 pandemic. The metric is an outlier for Alabama, which broadly followed national trends in pandemic-related learning loss, according to [an analysis](#) of test scores from 8,000 districts across 30 states. The state's high-poverty districts lost more ground, while high-income districts fell slightly, or not at all, behind.

But it's also the only state in the report where average math scores exceeded pre-pandemic levels. And it's the only place where high-poverty districts led the rebound, [per the Alabama Reflector](#).

Take Birmingham City Schools, a district where [87.26%](#) of students are considered economically disadvantaged. Kids there made up nearly half a grade-level equivalent in math in one year, far better than the nationwide average of one-third. Administrators attributed the success to periodic "enrichment sessions," outside partnerships, and better data collection, which allowed principals to track achievement rates and make adjustments as needed.

Post-pandemic, the district also incorporated social and emotional learning into its lesson plans, with the goal of easing students back into the classroom. Teachers were [trained](#) to identify signs of depression and anxiety in students, and to engage them in discussion as a way of gauging their progress. Pandemic relief funds covered the cost of those programs, with additional federal grants covering costs going forward.

"We got a long way to go, but I think we've got the right plan," said Mark Sullivan, the district's superintendent. "We've got the right people in place to make this work."



State of Our Democracy

Remember in 2018, when Republicans lost [a bunch of House seats](#) because Donald Trump was such a drag on the party? Remember in 2020, when Trump was a drag [on his own ballot](#)? Remember in 2022, when Trump wannabes suffered [a similar fate](#) in midterm contests across the country?

A reasonable person might look at this and conclude that Trumpism is not a winning strategy. (A reasonable person, probably, would not have banked on

Trumpism in the first place.) A Trump supporter, though? A Trump supporter just shrugs. A Trump supporter believes *this* time will be different, in part because a Trump supporter does not believe that all of those *other* election losses really count as losses.

“I don’t care what they say, 2020 was stolen,” Wayne Cates, a Trump stalwart in Nevada, [told the Nevada Current](#). “The numbers show it.” ([It wasn't.](#))

His wife, Catherine, concurred.

“I saw a lot of shady things,” she said. “They can say none of it happened but with our eyes, and our ears, and our experience, we know better.”



*Just some very normal campaign merchandise.
(Photo by Jeniffer Solis/Nevada Current)*

There are other reasons for the continuing support, of course. Voters waiting in line to see Trump in Las Vegas Saturday praised his border policies, trade tariffs, tax cuts, and the fact that he did not start any new wars as reasons for their ongoing fealty. One woman said she thought Trump could clinch the race simply by campaigning on the border and inflation “that has been caused by Biden.”

Presidents don't control inflation, and the economy has performed better under Biden (4.9% GDP) than Trump (2.5% GDP). But none of that matters to voters, who respond more to the effects on their personal finances than to the economy as a whole. This is also why Trump largely evaded blowback for massive tax cuts that avored corporations and wealthy people. Put simply, it didn't affect them.

Other supporters said they believed Trump could deliver better insurance coverage under Medicare and Medicaid, even though he regularly proposed cuts to benefits while in office and has recently vowed to scrap the Affordable Care Act. None of that matters, according to one 73-year-old retiree. Because Trump will “do what's right for the country.”

“I don't think he does anything for political means, so to speak,” he added.



Uh-huh.

(Photo by Jon Cherry/Getty Images)

Other supporters seemed to embrace the futility of it all. Sure, Trump could cut Social Security, but does it really even matter? Social Security will probably run dry on its own anyway! Someday, the sun will engulf the earth! Everything is meaningless! Vote for whoever you want!

“I’ve lived as if Social Security won’t be there when I retire and I’m very close to that age,” said Susan, a Florida resident who spent her Vegas vacation in line at a Trump rally. “I don’t think it should be cut. But if you’re in your 20s I don’t think it should be something that people depend on, especially if our government keeps being run the way it’s been run, there won’t be the money for it. It’s not a good thing, but...”



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- [Arizona GOP proposal would ask voters to guarantee life sentences](#)



One Last Thing

Justin Timberlake is reportedly [“seething”](#) over the drama he himself created by taking [a passive-aggressive shot](#) at Britney Spears on Wednesday during a free concert to promote his [terrible new music](#), telling the crowd he wanted to take a moment to “apologize to absolutely [expletive] nobody.” The weird comment came days after Spears praised the song (titled [“Selfish,”](#) because we live in a simulation) *and* offered a vague apology for the bombshells included in her memoir, which revealed that Timberlake had urged her to [get an abortion](#).

She was feeling much less magnanimous Thursday.

“Do you want to bring it to the court or will you go home crying to your mom like you did last time ???” she wrote on Instagram. “I’m not sorry !!!”

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