

# Under fire

Community and schools cope with gun violence in American schools

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**T**ourniquets shoved in drawers. Bandages placed on shelves. Ladders propped up in cabinets. Teachers trained to treat bullet wounds. Stocked like a medical facility, this is what Ladue High School looks like in 2023. With an increasing emphasis on safety comes new procedures and materials, a stark difference from just a few years ago. School safety impacts everyone: students, staff and the entire community, and their voices must be heard.

Since 1999, there have been **377 school shootings** and **349,000 students** have faced **in-school gun violence**

Sources: Office of Justice Programs, CNN, Foundation for Economic Education, Education Week, Washington Post

**The Dieckhaus family**  
March 27, six lives were taken at The Covenant School in Nashville, Tenn. That day, six families and countless communities were changed forever. The aftershocks traveled 397 miles, where junior Emily Dieckhaus faced the unthinkable — the loss of her 9-year-old cousin, Evelyn Dieckhaus. After this tragic event, Emily grappled with anxiety.

“There's always that background in your head like, ‘What can happen today?’” Emily said. “You see so much [gun violence] on social media and it seems to be almost growing at this point. The gun violence just keeps getting worse and worse. And it's crazy

how you never know if it'll affect you, and then, it does.”

Emily first found out about the Covenant shooting on social media. She didn't know about Evelyn's death at the time, and initially saw the post as yet another routinely tragic event.

“All these shootings happen all the time and you see the names and you kind of scroll over them,” Emily said. “But now that name is standing out to you; my last name is on this social media post.”

After learning of Evelyn's death, Emily and her family drove to Nashville. There, the community rallied around them — offering transportation, food and even medical assistance for the family dog. She saw this as a double-edged sword,

as it provided comfort, but it also carried the weight of appearances in public.

“This was the one thing that really hit close to home,” Emily said. “You really never ever think it'll happen to you until it does. Especially her being so young and then the whole school shooting aspect of it and then it being on social media. [We got] approached in grocery stores [by people saying,] ‘Are you the Dieckhaus family? We saw your name on the news.’”

Emily was very close with Evelyn, who was a beloved member of the family.

“Evelyn had her own little connection with everyone, her own little thing with everyone, and her being the youngest, she was just everyone's little baby,” Emily said.

The Dieckhaus family traveled together often with all of the cousins, so Emily and Evelyn spent a lot of time together. Evelyn was only 9 years old when she died — but even so, her vibrant personality was apparent. To honor that, the family wore pink to her funeral.

“We said in her eulogy that she liked the color pink and she liked the color black,” Emily said. “She would wear combat boots, but she would also wear skirts and it was like she had these two sides to her.”

After Evelyn's death, Emily couldn't help but notice the vulnerability of school safety, no matter the precautions taken.

“There's talk about how the

shooter was able to shoot down the door and just walk right in and it makes you wonder, ‘How did no one see this on camera?’” Emily said. “It's just kind of weird. It makes me wonder, ‘It's really that easy?’ I don't understand how it could be that easy. It makes me wonder if only someone had spotted the person first or they had bulletproof glass or something and then all this would not have happened.”

The grieving process has been tumultuous for Emily and her family. Evelyn's death left an enormous hole in their lives, one that can never be repaired.

“At one moment we can all be laughing and having fun together, and then the next minute it all hits us and then we're sitting there talking about her [saying], ‘How could this have happened?’” Dieckhaus said. “Every single day, it gets a little bit better, but deep down I know that I'll always be changed by this.”

## Government

School safety starts at the top — the government and their regulations. However, some feel that not enough is being done by the government; especially when considering that there are no standardized requirements for school safety procedures. This idea concerns student and Community Services Assistant Superintendent Derrick Wallace.

“At this point in time, there are no national or state standards regarding school safety,” Wallace said. “[It] would be helpful if we

**95%** of public schools practice active **shooter drills** and lockdowns

Annually, U.S. schools spend **\$3.1 billion** on security features

This number rises around **8%** each year

**Oct. 14, 2022**, the Department of Justice awarded **\$190 million** in grants to support **school safety**

had national or state standards on safety. Think about it. We have standards for driving a vehicle: you have to have a driver's license, you have to drive on the right [and] the steering wheel is on one side. So it would help with consistency.”

Governor Mike Parson of Missouri signed a bill Feb. 27 to allocate \$20 million to school safety. Standardizing procedures would allocate additional funds to aid in the implementation of more extensive security measures.

“Yes, [I wish we had national or state standards for safety] because then I think [that] would free up funding,” Ramirez said.

Governmental policies regarding mental health have also played a large role in the national gun violence debate. Jessica Meyers, director of the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission, feels a holistic approach should be taken. She believes that the availability of mental health resources, or lack thereof, is a root cause of gun violence incidents.

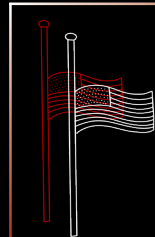
“We have way too few mental health services in the country, especially for youth, whether it's counselors, peer support or psychiatrists,” Meyers said. “Not everybody needs medication, but some people do and the fact that it can take months or years to get someone under 18 in to see a psychiatrist is disgraceful. How are we putting them, their families and their communities at risk by not being able to appropriately treat that person?”

## Administration

Another entity responsible for school safety is that of administration. Student and community services assistant superintendent Derrick Wallace has his own goal of safety for Ladue.

## Violence running rampant

Gun violence has become increasingly prevalent



In 2023, there have been **more mass shootings than days.**

**2 out of 5** U.S. adults live in a household with a gun



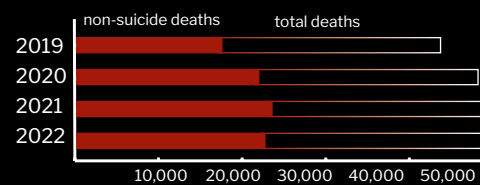
As of April 19, the U.S. has faced

**167** mass shootings this year

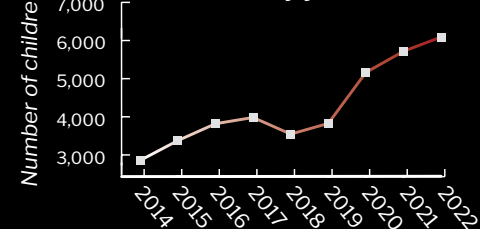
**921** people have been **injured or killed**

illustration by | MIMI ZHOU

### Total firearm deaths by year



### Number of children killed or injured by firearms by year



## Lives and legislation

Gun-related statistics by state

Missouri's **2007 repeal** of the permit-to-purchase law, requiring **background checks**, was associated with a **47% increase in gun homicide rates.**

The number of firearm deaths per 100,000 people

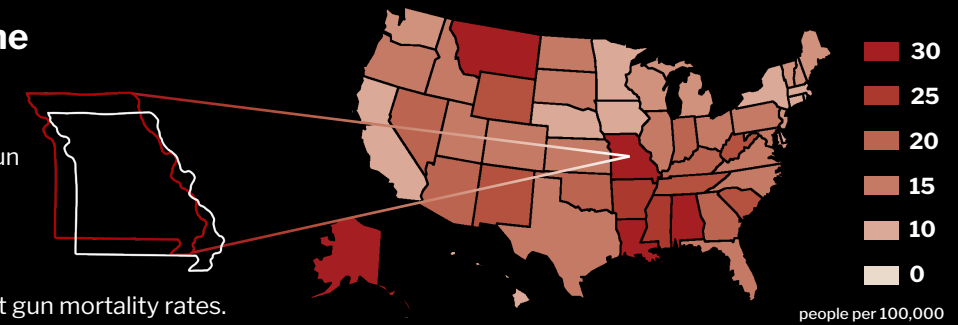
Missouri is the

**#10**

state for weakest gun laws and the

**#6**

state for the highest gun mortality rates.



Sources: CDC, Center for American Progress, Everytown for Gun Safety, Gun Violence Archive, Pew Research Center and World Population Review

"Safety means you all as students can come and thrive and achieve at high levels, our staff can come to work and function at a high capacity, working with you all as students," Wallace said. "So that really is the hope."

The increasing prevalence of active shooter situations in schools has caused schools to implement new and creative safety measures. During the 2022-2023 school year, Ladue high school students experienced their first active shooter drill, practicing the 4 E's procedure: Educate, Evade, Escape, Engage.

"Before, there was no training for an incident like this, and now we're really pushing for the change," Ramirez said. "It's a public outcry or we've seen

**"Kids have to feel safe to be able to learn. The safer they feel, the better off they are in a learning environment."**

**Richard Ramirez, school resident officer**

it on TV and I think there's a need for it. So it evolves. We're gonna evolve with it."

In order to stay vigilant, Ladue continuously updates security measures. In the future, Ramirez anticipates additional measures that will help to better protect schools.

"There are several systems that we're putting in schools," Ramirez said. "By [this] time next school year, they should be up and running. We

stay on top of that, and I think Ladue really does an excellent job compared to the Missouri area."

### Response

Regardless of the strides made by Ladue administration, active shooter situations are often on the forefront of their minds. As shootings have become commonplace and schools are often targeted, many have felt increased anxiety.

"This issue of gun violence is [an issue] that directly affects our lives as students," eighth-grader Calvino Hammerman said. "[It's] one of the biggest because we are in school, we have to be there and we should not be subjected to the dangers."

For students and staff, it is impossible to fully escape the threat of gun violence. As a former Marine and current teacher, Hank Harrison questions why the idea of school shootings are even present in society.

"First thing I think of [when hearing 'school shooting'] is 'why?'" Harrison said. "Why has society devalued life so quickly in the 23 years that I've been [at Ladue]?"

This concern is also felt by Reed Elementary second grade teacher Lindsey Anderson. She has been teaching for 23 years and has consistently felt like Ladue should do more.

"[I don't think Ladue is doing enough to prepare], but I think that that's universal," Anderson said. "Schools in general are not prepared.

I think there should be bulletproof glass in all schools. We have a lot of security measures as far as our doors; our exterior doors are all locked, [and] there's a little vestibule before you can actually enter the building. So we have put things in place, but I don't think that it's necessarily a Ladue issue, I think it's a universal issue. It needs to be taken a little more seriously."

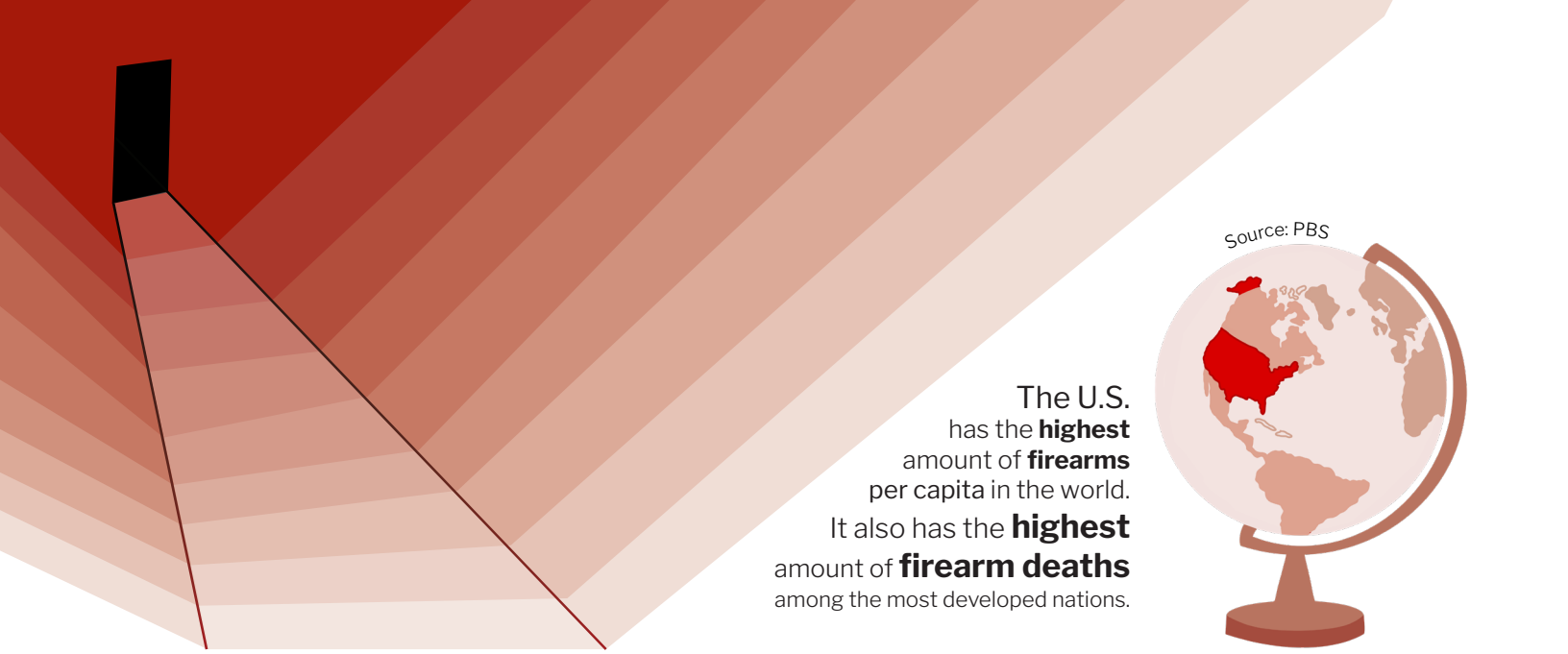
**Lindsey Anderson, teacher**

After asking for safety supplies to keep in her classroom, Anderson was turned down due to budgetary rea-

sons. She feels that additional funding is needed to be adequately prepared.

"I would love to see all possible measures considered, and not considered from a financial standpoint, but from the mental, emotional, physical well-being of students and staff," Anderson said.

Though the cause may seem helpless, there are actions students and staff can take. Wallace hopes that students will tell an adult when they hear anything regarding safety concerns — even comments that may be perceived in a joking manner.



Source: PBS



The U.S. has the **highest** amount of **firearms** per capita in the world. It also has the **highest** amount of **firearm deaths** among the most developed nations.

“That adage ‘if you see something, say something’ seems so simple, but the more that we can remind everyone to do that, the better off we will be,” Wallace said. “There are times where, as students, you might see something, and then we look into the situation and find out [that] someone didn’t say something earlier. And as early as we can share whatever in-

formation we have on the topic, the better it is going to be. We can provide some additional support to someone; we can get an evaluation for someone.”

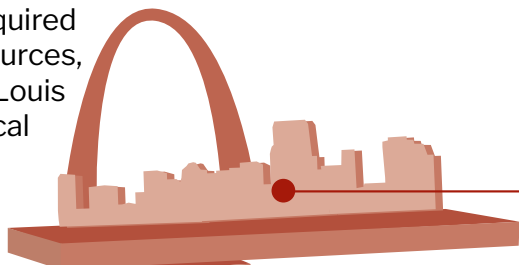
In order to advocate against school shootings and for gun reform, Hammerman organized a walkout at Ladue Middle School April 5. A total of 350 students participated, leaving their classes to send

a message and spread awareness. Hammerman believes that events such as these serve as a platform for students to engage with the world around them.

“[The walkout participation] proves that [students] do have a voice and we do care about what’s happening,” Hammerman said. “We are not disengaged from what’s happening in the world.”

# Violence prevention resources

Gun violence prevention and education can be acquired through various resources, from the greater St. Louis community to our local Ladue community.



## Community resources

Scan these QR codes to learn more



Missouri Foundation For Health



St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission

1. call  
1-866-748-7047  
Anonymous Tip Line



2. download, fill out form or call  
Courage2ReportMO



## Ladue's hotline resources

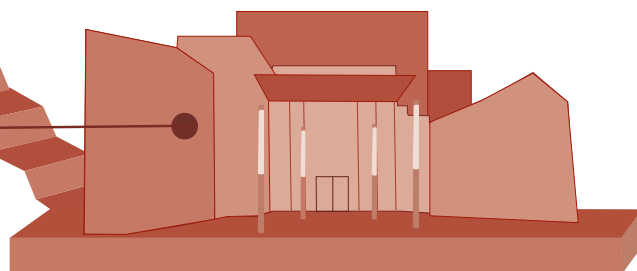


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