

The School Guardian Program

Marco Avila

Abstract

Active shooters in schools and a specific school shooting in Florida led to The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act. In recent years, law enforcement has been increasingly tasked with the appropriate response to active shooter incidents. As a continued response, there are now trained civilians in some schools who can respond to an active shooter incident. This paper examines some early history leading to the inception of the School Guardian Program. This history includes examining changes implemented by law enforcement to combat school shootings and how those practices are being used to train School Guardians. In this study, some Florida counties provided information about the impact of Guardian presences or non-presence in their county.

Introduction

Active shooter incidents in this country and others can be traced back decades. There are several instances throughout history where a disturbed individual has sought out innocent victims to murder. These incidents are not typical to a specific location or specific group of people. The mass murder of individuals has taken place in educational institutes, military bases, businesses, public gatherings, and places of worship.

The original moniker active shooter is also being interchanged with active assailant. No longer is the mass murder of innocent people being carried out by means of only firearms, active assailants are killing by any means. Active assailants have murdered with weapons including knives, swords, and automobiles. Active shooters have targeted and also killed indiscriminately.

Active shooters have traveled to locations known to them and killed innocents, as well as killing acquaintances. Other active shooters began their rampages by first murdering family members. Any of these incidents affect many in the wake of destruction caused by the murdering of innocent people. Not only did this affect people who were touched by these murders, it also affected law enforcement's response to these incidents.

Law enforcement response plans needed to change to keep up with the quick reaction required to find, engage and eliminate an active shooter. Across the nation law enforcement organizations adapted to tailor training to meet the challenge of this crisis. Perhaps the most recent and most notable plan to combat school active assailants was the development of the School Guardian Program.

Literature Review

Definition:

An active shooter is defined as an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area. These types of killings have been ongoing for many years. People have killed for reasons of religion, race, hate, and unknown reasons. The term mass shooting is also associated with both planned and unplanned incidents. This term is defined as an attack with four or more casualties. Several active shooter incidents that have taken place around the world are considered mass shootings due to the number of casualties associated with the incident. (Editors, 2019)

History:

Using the previously listed definitions, between 1967 and May 2018 the United States experienced 152 mass shootings. The average dead per incident is eight when the active shooters death is included. When ranking mass shootings, the United States leads in mass shootings than any other country. In most cases, active shooters use a pistol and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims. As early as 1966 Charles Whitman killed 16. Named the Texas Bell Tower Sniper, Whitman murdered his wife and mother then traveled to the University of Texas and began killing others using a rifle. After about twenty minutes of him shooting at students and innocents, residents began to gather their own firearms and started to shoot back. An Austin police officer finally reached Charles Whitman and shot him dead. (Lawler, 2016)

This incident became the catalyst for the formation of the University Police Department in Texas as well as tactical police units around the country, including the state of Texas. Founded in 1968, the University of Texas Police Department began to patrol the campus and surrounding properties in central Austin. The department also adopted a shift of officers twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Tactical units which developed after the shooting became known as Special Weapons and Tactics teams, or SWAT teams. Prior to the Texas shooting law enforcement first responders handled almost any call for service. After the Texas incident, an officers' duties at critical incidents changed. Patrol officers no longer would handle critical incidents but rather act as perimeter, evacuate people or call for SWAT to resolve a situation. (Nichols, 2006)

Although many SWAT teams formed, it was not until 2008 when a set of SWAT standards were published for law enforcement agencies. The purpose of SWAT is to increase the likelihood of safely resolving critical incidents and the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) established standards for managing and operating SWAT teams. These standards were set to prepare law enforcement to respond to emergency, high-risk incidents, all the way up to and including a terrorist attack.

On February 12, 2007, President George W. Bush signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive 19, which addressed the threat of terrorist use of explosives in the United States. The directive included the development of new guidelines for the employment, training and equipping of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams for response to explosives operations and for bomb technicians that support SWAT operations. (National Tactical Officers Association, 2008)

Events:

The Columbine school shooting on April 20, 1999 stunned the country. The shooting at the time was the worst school shooting in United States history. The two male teens responsible for the shooting were described by the media as dressed in trench coats and possible part of a “trench coat mafia,” described as a group of student outsiders who did not fit the norm. The media also reported on journals left behind by the two and it was discovered they had planned the attack for a year. These two students who entered the school with rifles, pistols, several explosives, and killed 13. The Columbine High School students targeted by the shooters were murdered in less than 20 minutes and 21 others were wounded in the shooting. The school shooting ended with the death of the two shooters by their own hands. Propane tank bombs were found in the cafeteria, by responding officers where the shooters had planned to detonate the tanks to increase the death toll.

The Columbine tragedy sparked a strong criticism of slow police response. It also began a trend of zero tolerance policies in schools across America. Schools would no longer allow disruptive behavior and threats of violence from students. Despite the fact that the shooting at Columbine took place at approximately 11:19 am, law enforcement officers did not enter the area of the school where the shootings took place for several more hours and allowing time for victims to bleed to death. This massacre began a national debate on ending gun violence in our schools. Also, the criminal justice system responded by partnering with educational administrators in a target hardening campaign. The campaign’s intention was to secure the nation’s schools from future Columbine-like attacks. (Garcia, 2003)

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University shooting was another school shooting incident where a single male shooter armed with a pistol and murdered a number of people. On April 16, 2007, the Virginia Tech shooter killed 32 students and faculty in a short amount of time before taking his own life. In this case, the shooter purchased one of two pistols online and the other from a gun shop. During this mass shooting the murderer mailed a package containing video, photographs and writings to NBC News in New York. As result of the incident, the state of Virginia paid 11 million dollars to victims and families of those killed by the shooter. (Langman, 2009)

The families who settled a wrongful death claims were also granted the opportunity to receive briefings of the after-action reports from the college and the Virginia State Police. The briefings would include all the information associated with the shootings and findings. The college would also be responsible for maintaining an archive of records related to the incident and provide families access to those archives. Ultimately the families wanted to openly discuss any breakdowns in the educational system which may have allowed this massacre to take place. Also established was a hardship fund that covered the needs of victims and families with portions of the funding covering campus security and security grants. (Sluss, 2017) Another significant incident of national impact was the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut. A 20 year male old killed his mother in their home and traveled to an elementary school where he killed shot an entrance into the building. This was another incident where the shooter had a history of mental illness, yet was still able to legally obtain and possess a firearm. At the end of the incident and as responding units

approached, he took out a handgun and shot himself in a classroom. Twenty students, kindergartners and first graders along with six adults were killed at the school.

Of unique impact was the mass shooting at the Pulse Night Club in Orlando, Florida on June 6, 2016. 49 people in the club were killed when the shooter entered and began to indiscriminately shoot club goers. At the time it was estimated 330 people were in the club. In this incident an off-duty Orlando police officer exchanged fire with the gunman that eventually fled to the bathroom and law enforcement breached an external wall when another gun battle took place and the shooter was killed. At the time, this incident was the worst mass shooting in recent US history. (Ioannou, 2015)

On October 1, 2017, over 22,000 Las Vegas concert goers were attending a concert in an outside venue. The crowd of people were gathered when shots began to rain down onto the crowd from his hotel room at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino. The single shooter continued to shoot from his 32nd floor room, killing 59 and injuring more than 500. This incident, 14 months after the Orlando night club shooting was called the worst mass shooting in modern American history. Once entry was made into the shooter's room 23 firearms were found there and another 19 at his home. (Shultz, 2017) November).

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas School shooting took place on Valentine's Day 2018. The lone male shooter appeared on a public website and proclaimed "I'm going to be a professional school shooter", before he was picked up by an Uber and entered the high school and killed 17 and wounded 14. With this incident a national movement began to take shape for the safety of students in the state of Florida. (Davis, 2019)

Fort Hood was another event which marked a first in history. The male active duty Army psychiatrist used a hand gun and killed 13 and wounded 32 others. The shooting took place at the Fort Hood Soldier Readiness Processing Center. The shooter targeted troops who were their receiving medical checkup before a deployment to Afghanistan. The November 5, 2009 rampage marked the worst mass murder at a military installation in United States history. The shooter targeted soldiers using a high – powered handgun utilizing a laser sighting system. The military court sentenced the shooter to death in this case. (Kenber, 2013)

January 23, 2019, a male entered a Sun Trust bank in Sebring, Florida and killed five woman that were in the bank at the time. The shooting seemed to be a random act of violence however the killer shot each of the victim's execution style. He made the women lie down on in the banks lobby and shot each one. One bank employee heard the shots and managed to run from the back of the bank to safety. After killing the women, the shooter called 911 dispatch and stated that he had shot five people. When SWAT arrived at the bank, the doors were locked but the shooter surrendered to the authorities. The shooter had recently resigned as a Correctional Officer Trainee on January 2, 2019.

Actions:

As result of Columbine an increasing amount of schools throughout the United States began to invest in deterrents such as private security forces and metal detectors as security measures to prevent such incidents from occurring again. This effort to make schools more secure was accompanied by Law Enforcement changing their

practices when responding to school shooter incidents in the wake of Columbine. Their response to these types of incidents needed to be faster and more directed at eliminating the threat. Prior to Columbine, when a single law enforcement officer was first to respond to an in-progress shooting, the single officer waited for additional units to arrive before making entry into the area after the single officer was met by additional officers, a team was established to make entry into the area and eliminate the threat. After Columbine, law enforcement agencies trained and responded differently to quickly eliminate the threat and save more lives by doing so. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) began an informative campaign about what to expect in a law enforcement response during an active shooter situation.

As part of the campaign by the FBI, they developed information that was informational to educational institutes. This information listed what the individual could do in the act of an active shooter. It also explained what to expect when law enforcement responded to the incident. The information included how the individuals should be prepared mentally and physically to run, hide, fight. It also explained once law enforcement arrives on the scene, they would not stop to assist the injured but would bypass to engage and possibly eliminate the threat. (Department of Homeland Security, 2011)

Incidents involving an active shooter are unpredictable and usually evolve rapidly. The Columbine massacre was the incident that made law enforcement agencies recognize that techniques previous used as initial response to school shootings needed to be examined. The immediate deployment of law enforcement personnel to the location is essential to take action against an active shooter and mitigate harm to others. After several school shootings or active shooter incidents dictated that previous wait periods needed to be changed. Law enforcement responded by changing policy as they relate to active shooters. No longer would law enforcement wait to gather additional units, now they would be trained to deploy as a single unit to the area of the shooting, find, engage and eliminate the threat.

Results:

In response to recent events, schools do not advise students to just try to hide from active shooter, now it is advised to run, hide or fight as a last means of survival. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting changed many things locally in Florida. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act was signed into law March 9, 2018 by Governor Rick Scott. This act required every public school in the state of Florida to have an armed officer or guardian on campus for the 2018- 2019 school year. (Ready, 2013)

Polk County, Florida used the sentinel program as a basis for the guardian training. These special deputies sworn in by the Sheriff would be trained to potentially stop an active shooter in Polk County schools for the upcoming school year. These guardians do not have the authority to act in a law enforcement capacity, except to prevent or stop an active assailant on a school campus. Guardians received a total of 144 hours of training, which included, 104 hours of firearms related training, 8 hours of active shooter training, 8 hours of defensive tactics training, 12 hours of legal issues,

and 12 hours of diversity training. Guardians are paid \$30,000 per year and receive benefits. (Judd, 2018)

Methods

The purpose of this research was to identify those Florida counties which were affected by The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act which was signed into law on March 9, 2018.

Data was collected through electronic surveys sent to Florida County Sheriff's Offices and other municipal law enforcement agencies responsible for the coordination and implementation of the School Guardian Program. The survey questions that were sent to these agencies were meant to gather facts about the program. The survey questions were layered in such a way where the recipient could answer basic survey questions even if the agency had not yet implemented the program. After the initial set of survey questions were answered those recipients could continue to answer the survey questions until the survey was completed. The survey was meant to understand the scope of the program in Florida, issues encountered, to include any future plans for the program.

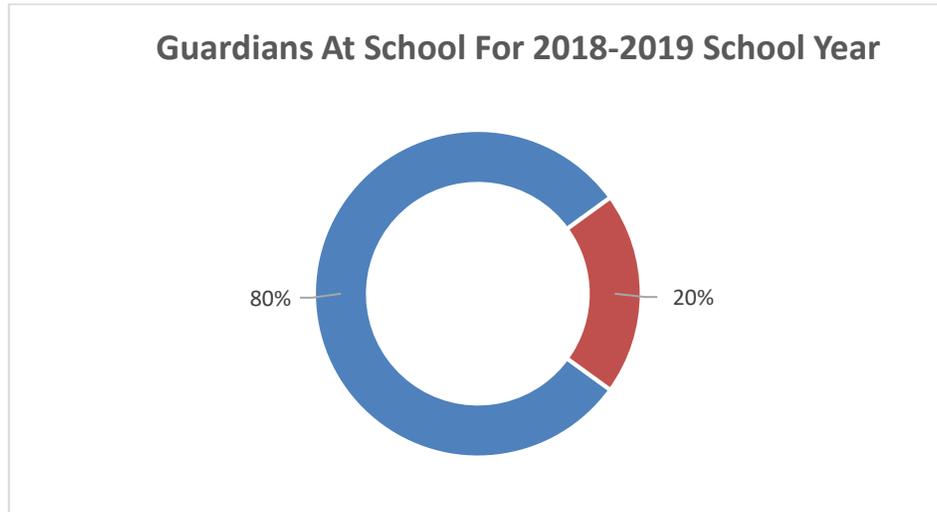
The information gathered from the surveys was important in that it showed a few common trends between agencies. Along with the survey questions, I included questions about the size of the counties in the survey and type of instruction School Guardians were receiving in those participating agencies. I implemented an end date that all surveys would be accepted.

The survey was not anonymous. It was not structured to purposely gather names of those answering questions, only the data to gauge each agencies level of involvement in the program. I believe this was a strength of the survey. A potential weakness of the survey was a delayed response of recipients. Another potential problem that had not been accounted for is when the survey was delivered, what was the large percentage of counties and agencies which had not yet coordinated, trained or planned to implement the Guardian Program.

Results

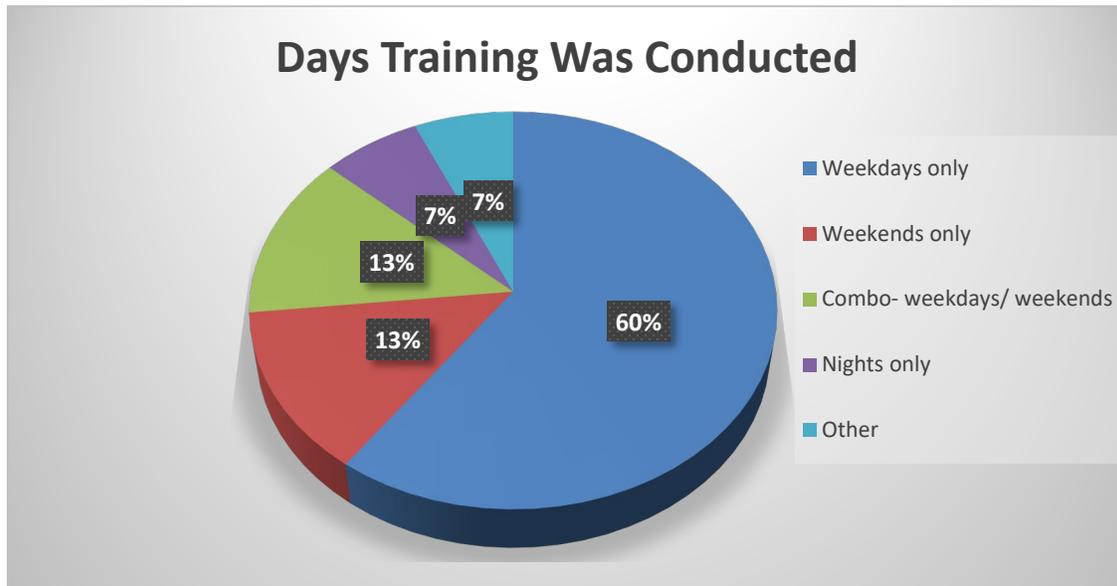
The first question requested participants indicating if the Guardian program was in place for the county for the first day of the 2018-2019 school year. Three of the fifteen respondents (20%) responded their county was not in compliance with the bill on the first day of the 2018-2019 school year. Twelve (80%) responded their county was in compliance.

TABLE 1: 2018-2019 School Year:



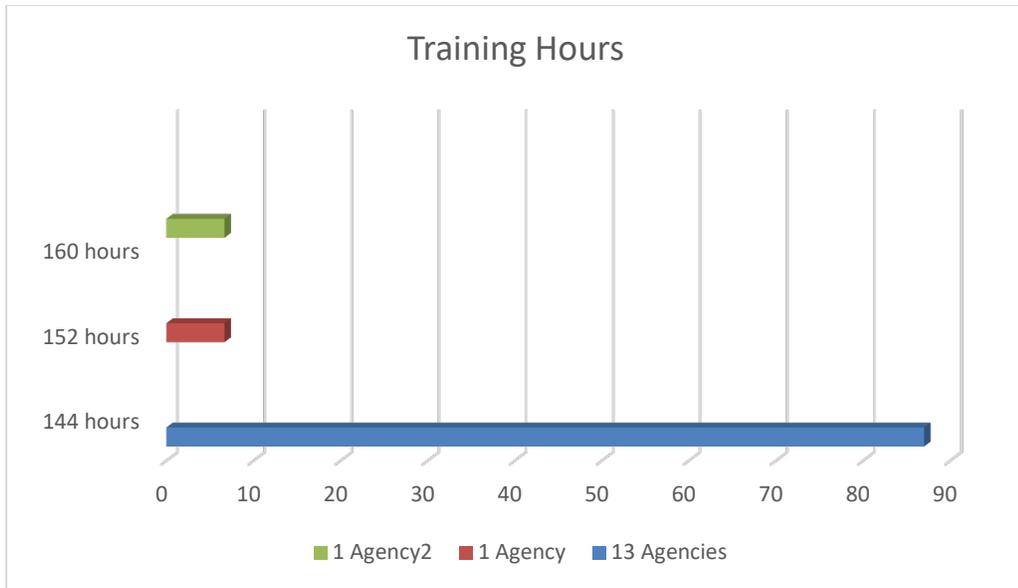
The second question surveyed what day or days the program was conducted. Nine of the fifteen respondents (60%) responded they conducted training on weekdays only. Two of the fifteen respondents (13%) responded they conducted training on weekends only. Two of the fifteen respondents (13%) responded they conducted training on a combination of weekdays and weekends. One of the fifteen respondents (7%) responded they conducted training on nights only. The last respondent replied one (7%) responded they conducted training on other means.

TABLE 2: Training Days:



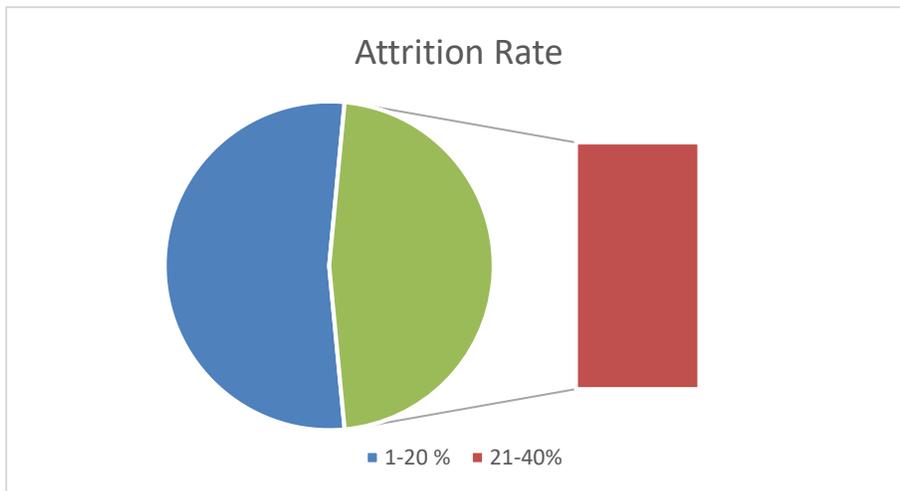
The fifth question requested clarification on how many hours each Guardian trained. Thirteen of the fifteen surveyed (86.6%) responded they provided 144 hours of training to each Guardian participant. One of the fifteen agencies surveyed (6.7%) responded they provided 152 hours of training to each Guardian participant. One of the fifteen agencies surveyed (6.7%) responded they provided 160 hours of training to each Guardian.

TABLE 3: Training Hours:



The eighth question asked how many trainees voluntarily left or failed from the program. Eight of the fifteen surveyed (53%) responded their attrition rate was between 1-20%. Seven of the fifteen surveyed (47%) responded their attrition rate was between 21-40%.

TABLE 4: Attrition Rate:



Discussion

The survey created surprising results for this research. As the research project and survey was developed, I did not think that all Florida counties had begun the guardian program but expected that more would have. The School Guardian Program has a solid training foundation and it was interesting to see how data received in the form of a survey tells a larger story.

Currently thirty Florida counties participate in the Guardian Program, however no two train their Guardians exactly the same. Variations can be as large as the number of training hours offered or the order in which training is conducted. Even in my own experience in coordinating training, I might allow additional days in the program or additional training hours for portions of the program, specifically, the active shooter portion. I would assume it must be hard for a civilian to volunteer for this training and have to not only endure long hot days on the range but also be able to potentially take another person's life when necessary.

In examining the survey results an obvious statistical issue stood out. Those counties which trained Guardians during the week days had lower attrition rates. I would contribute this to a more normal work schedule for many civilians and them being able to focus more solely on the training with schedules that mimicked their regular work hours.

Recommendations

The results indicate the Guardian Program's success is based on solid training. Results also show how counties still have not begun or have failed to follow the Senate Bill of 2018. The survey does show progress is being made for the benefit of all who attend, work or teach at schools in Florida. Responsibility lies with everyone to combat active shooters, and one way we can provide support is to encourage additional security measures within the school systems.

Over the years, we have witnessed several school shootings that have taught several lessons about civilians surviving and law enforcement eliminating the threat. One example is the way law enforcement now responds when a shooting occurs. Agency leaders and communities have joined to combat shootings by training teachers, students and first responders' best practices during an incident. Schools are working to build more secure campuses and focusing on securing existing ones and law enforcement is working to be more aware. Additionally, a second bill was passed that allows Sheriffs of other counties to train Guardians not their own. In this bill it also mandates additional training for Guardians. The current trend of securing our schools and everyone in them is improving; however, we must continue to assist these efforts by providing additional training to Guardians that specifically deals with an active shooter incident.

Lieutenant Marco Avila began his employment with the Polk County Sheriff's Office as a trainee in 1999 and progressed through line level ranks to Detention Training Instructor. In 2010, Marco was promoted to Sergeant in the Court and Support Services Bureau. From 2013 -2015 he served as Sgt. with the Training Section where he was assigned to the Training Academy at Polk State College. In 2015 Marco was promoted to Lieutenant and served as shift commander at both South County Jail & Central County Jail as Echo Platoon Lieutenant. In 2018 he was transferred to the Professional Development Division as Training Section Lieutenant. Marco has a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice from Everest University and a Master's of Science in Management from Warner University.

References

- Columbine high schools. (2019, March). Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com>
- Davis, J. (2019, January). Marjory stoneman douglas public safety commission presents final report. Retrieved from <https://campuslifesecurity.com/Articles/2019/01/04/Marjory-Stoneman-Douglas-Public-Safety-Commission-Presents-Final-Report.aspx?Page=1>
- Department of Homeland Security. (2011). Active shooter educational sheet. Retrieved from https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/active_shooter_pocket_card_508.pdf
- Garcia, C. (2003). School safety technology in America: Current use and perceived effectiveness. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 14(1), 31.
- Ioannou, M. (2015, March). A model for differentiating school shooters characteristics. *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, 5(3),188.
- Judd, G. (2018, summer). Polk county school safety guardian program- a partnership that works. *All Points Bulletin*, 28(3), 14-15.
- Kenber, B. (2013, August). Nidal hasan sentenced to death for fort hood shooting rampage. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/nidal-hasan-sentenced-to-death-for-fort-hood-shooting-rampage/2013/08/28/aad28de2-0ffa-11e3-bdf6-e4fc677d94a1_story.html?utm_term=.c90512ef8fed&wpisrc=nl_headlines.
- Langman, P. (2009, January). Rampage school shooters: A typology. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 14(1),79-80.
- National Tactical Officers Association (2008, September). SWAT standards for law enforcement agencies, 8-9.

Nichols, T. (2006, November). Pendulum swing: Preparing our first responders. *Campus Law Enforcement Journal*, 36(6), 23.

Ready. (2013). Active shooter. Retrieved from <https://www.ready.gov/active-shooter>.

Shultz, J. (2017, November). The las vegas shooting- underscoreing key features of the firearm epidemic. *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, 318(18) 1754.

Sluss, M. (2017, June). Judge clears tech shooting settlement. The Roanoke Times. Retrieved from https://www.roanoke.com/webmin/virginia_tech/judge-c87b6b9e-b97c-5655-9e1d-cb2408a709cb.

Appendix A

Guardians Program Survey Questions

1. Was the Guardian program in place for the county the first day of the 2018-2019 school year?

- Yes
- No

If you answered No, please provide all responses that apply.

- No plan in place
- No funding for program
- No need for guardian program

2. What year did the county begin the Guardian Program?

- 2018
- 2019

3. How did you schedule your program training?

- Weekdays only
- Weekends only
- Combo- weekdays/ weekends
- Nights only
- Other

4. How many classes / groups have you trained?

- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5-6
- < 7

5. How many hours is your program?

- 80
- 100
- 144
- Other

6. How many Guardians trainees began training at that time?

- 1-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- < 41

7. Who trained your Guardians?

- CJSTC Instructors
- CJSTC Instructors & Subject Matter Experts
- Agency Instructors
- Civilian Staff
- Other

8. What was your attrition rate?

- 1-20%
- 21-40%
- <50%

9. Do you employ.

- Retired LEOs
- Security Guards
- Guardians
- Other

10. How many Guardians does your county employ?

- 1-20
- 21-40
- 41-60
- 61-80
- <81

11. Are Guardians in every school in your county?

- Yes
- No

12. How many schools currently have Guardians?

- 1-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- <31

13. Do the Guardians wear a uniform or Plain Clothes, under cover?

- Yes
- No

14. What firearm(s) are they issued?

- Pistol only
- Rifle only
- Pistol & Rifle
- Neither

15. How often do they qualify?

- Annual
- Semi- annually
- Other

16. What qualifications do they perform?

- FDLE qualification
- Agency qualification
- Other

17. What is their qualifying percentage score?

- 80%
- 85%
- <85%

18. Do they have other annual mandates?

- Yes
- No