

I T'S THE POP that gets her.

When a classmate opens a bag of chips, junior Maddie Doyle flinches. The *bang* of a water bottle hitting the ground is even worse.

It's not because Doyle has sensitive ears. At school, she's always on high alert. It's hard not to be, she said, with gun violence on the rise and occurring at schools near East.

On Aug. 30, Blue Valley Northwest went on lockdown after reports of two armed burglars hiding in the school, according to KMBC. An Olathe East student shot two school administrators in March. And 21 were killed at a Uvalde elementary school in May. Doyle fears East is next.

In the wake of this violence, SMSD has tightened safety policies to prevent and defend against future attacks, but some students question whether the increased security is worth the inconvenience, loss of freedom and paranoia at school.

"I think about it *all* the time," Doyle said. "I should feel like, at least I'm at school and I'm protected, but I don't feel protected."

East has strengthened security by locking all entrances during the school day, restricting who can enter the building and adding a hall monitoring period to each teacher's schedule. Propping doors open, ordering food to school and walking the hallways without a pass are no longer safe, according to Principal Jason Peres.

Some students feel fearful and frustrated by the atmosphere the new policies create.

Doyle's lunch conversations are consumed by complaints about wearing hallway passes and not being able to Doordash Panera to school. Many students feel they're being punished for the shooters' actions, she said.

"It feels like we're putting more blame on the students rather than caring for the students," Doyle said. "Like it's the students' fault that this is happening."

To senior Olive Goldman, the changes are a reminder that a shooting could happen any moment. When a student reaches into their backpack, she tenses up. She fears getting a detention for letting a friend inside the

school. While Goldman understands the need for safety measures, she regrets that they've made East a stricter place.

"The whole exciting thing about high school was that teachers are supposed to trust you," Goldman said. "Being able to come and go and regulate yourself and leave for seminar felt very freeing. Now, you can't do that."

SMSD Director of Emergency Services and Chief of District Police Mark Schmidt, who supervises district security measures, hopes students trust these policies to protect them. Being on high alert and worrying about active shooters are the student resource officers' jobs, he said.

"[Education is] the main thing we don't want to be affected," Schmidt said. "We want security to be out of your mind. We want you to feel comfortable, so when you get [to school], it's a safe place."

Doyle, Goldman and other students question the policies' ability to protect East. In an Instagram poll

of 259 students, 69% didn't think the new security measures would effectively prevent a shooting.

East Against Gun Violence president and junior Eve Benditt fears anyone could bypass East's security efforts. Especially since perpetrators are often students.

"The door's still open from the inside," Benditt said. "Someone lets who they think is just a student in, and then that student pulls a gun from their backpack and shoots them. It's not rocket science."

Despite backlash from students against the policies, East staff members support using caution as school shootings rise.

Students have approached French and Spanish teacher Gina Halksworth to ask why teachers are now stationed in the hallways on each floor, questioning where students are going and if they have a pass. Halksworth explains that the new policies help many teachers — including herself — feel more secure.

"I absolutely love it," she said. "As a professional that [has lived] in a school building for her whole adult life, it makes me feel a lot safer because it's a potentially threatening place. We're

not trying to punish the kids, we're just trying to make sure that we know where [students are] headed."

Before implementing the policies, Associate Principal Susan Leonard and other administrators discussed the potential negative side effects, including the inconvenience and added anxiety. To maintain a sense of normalcy, SROs now wear polos and khakis instead of uniforms, according to SRO Tony Woollen. But they still carry glocks and body cams.

"It's such a balancing act," Leonard said. "I want people to feel safe. I want an open campus. I want us to enjoy coming and going, especially students at your age. Becoming responsible, part of that is freedom. But with freedom comes risks."

Students have complained to Leonard about walking from the junior lot to the front entrance due to side doors locking after 8 a.m. Almost daily, she speaks with students who propped entrances open — a mistake that allowed the Uvalde shooter inside the school. She understands their frustration, but believes the added precaution is worth the inconvenience.

"I've seen kids prop the doors and I think, of course nobody ever thinks [a shooting] is gonna happen here," Leonard said. "But how would you feel if it happens at East and you watched that video later, and you see that perpetrator came through the door that you propped? It's totally not worth it at that point."

East's administration anticipated reactions of confusion and resistance to the tightened policies. In a speech to each grade level, Peres emphasized the importance of the safety procedures and encouraged students to follow them. Last school year, he visited each senior seminar class to discuss why leaving seminar unexcused was unacceptable. He felt the conversations were largely productive and students understood the need for change.

"The last thing we want is for kids to feel like it's a prison, because it's not — it's a public school," Peres said. "But we have enacted security measures because we want to keep kids safe and because we live in a day and age

where we have to do things like that. It's unfortunate, but I prefer to err on the side of safety and that's what we're gonna do."

Though some students and staff disagree on the policies' effectiveness, the majority see a need for government intervention. In a poll of 301 students, 85% said that stricter gun laws would better reduce school shootings than school safety policies.

East alum and former East Against Gun Violence president Emma Kate Squires believes that strengthening school protocols will not effectively prevent violence, since many shooters obtain guns from their homes.

Squires was a freshman at a Colorado charter school when two students entered with handguns hidden in their guitar cases, resulting in one student's death and eight injuries. Later, she found out

one of the shooters stole the gun from his parents. She feels that the shooting — and hundreds of others — could've been avoided if there were stricter regulations on securing guns within a person's house.

East Against Gun Violence member and senior Delaney McDermed agrees. While she's glad East is increasing security, she disagrees with the fact that schools are forced to change their rules instead of the government.

"It's like telling someone to avoid harassment by wearing less sexual clothes — that should not be the solution to avoiding harassment," McDermed said. "There's a root cause, and we should be addressing that. We shouldn't be addressing the surface issue. We definitely need stricter gun control."

Leonard also resents that schools must act alone to address shootings. Real change, she believes, requires government effort.

"All this policy talk, I don't even want to get into it," Leonard said. "Bottom line is, kids in schools are getting shot. The ones that aren't, their rights to freedom and moving about freely are being more and more limited because of that."

NOT A WAR ZONE

story by **francesca stamati**

Following recent school shootings, students and teachers weigh the effectiveness and impact of East's new security measures

IT'S LOCAL.

Recent shootings near the East area

OF OLATHE EAST ENTERED THROUGH OFFICE AND USED A POLYMER80 9 MM HANDGUN THAT SHOT 2 PEOPLE 12 MILES AWAY FROM EAST.

BY THE NUMBERS.

Number of K-12 school shootings by year

SHOOTER THREAT
ACTIVE SHOOTER

2020 113

2021 240

2022 118 **SO FAR.**

**according to statista.com*

THE HARBINGER

design by **peyton moore**
photo by **macy crosser**



This image has been photoshopped and is not a real photo.