

Interim report details “systemic failures” by law enforcement in Uvalde, Texas, school shooting

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18 July 2022

A special investigative committee of the Texas House of Representatives issued an interim report on Sunday that says it “constitutes the most complete telling to date of the events of and leading to” the massacre at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, on May 24, 2022.

The 77-page report focuses on a description of the “shortcomings and failures of the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District and of various agencies and officers of law enforcement” that made it possible for 18-year-old Salvador Ramos to kill 19 fourth graders, two teachers and wound 17 others with an AR-15 style rifle before he was fatally shot by a US border patrol officer.

The introduction and executive summary of the interim report says the committee found “systemic failures and egregious poor decision making” during its investigation. The three-member panel compiled the report after interviewing 33 witnesses in private during eight hearings in Uvalde and at the Texas Capitol in Austin and another 39 informal interviews.

The committee also reviewed thousands of pages of documents from the school district and multiple law enforcement agencies, as well as hundreds of crime scene photographs and audio and video recordings, including surveillance camera footage, bodycam footage, smartphone video, 911 calls and radio transmissions.

The body of the report focuses on the lack of leadership and chaotic law enforcement response, the lax security practices at Robb Elementary School and background details of the shooter.

The report says that a total of 376 law enforcement

officers arrived on the scene on May 24. However, the report says that no one within this group of federal, state and local police officials assumed and exercised “effective incident command.”

The Uvalde school’s Police Chief Pete Arredondo, who would have been “a natural person to assume command over an incident as it developed,” did not take up this role and, instead of setting up a command post outside the school, decided to stay inside the building.

While Arredondo was fumbling around with his radio, the report says that communication between the different law enforcement groups was ineffective, and there was “confusion among officers about whether the scenario was an ‘active shooter’ or ‘barricaded subject,’” which caused officers to be distracted from the primary task of “stopping the killing” as instructed by their active shooter training.

Chief Arredondo was also searching for keys to Classrooms 111 and 112, while no one checked the doors to see if they were locked. The report says, “Room 111 probably was not.” No one called the principal of the school to ask for a master key, and the search for keys was a factor in delaying the breach of the classroom, where children were bleeding and dying.

Among the conclusions of the report about the law enforcement response were, “There was an overall lackadaisical approach by law enforcement at the scene. For many, that was because they were given and relied upon inaccurate information. For others, they had enough information to know better.”

The report says that most of the victims perished in the initial barrage of gunfire in Classrooms 111 and 112. However, if there had not been a delay of more

than one hour between the first responders' arrival at Robb Elementary School and their eventual breach of the classrooms, "it is plausible that some victims could have survived if they had not had to wait 73 additional minutes for rescue."

Even though the Uvalde school district had its own police department as of 2018 and the district had implemented an active shooter response plan as of 2019, Robb Elementary was not adequately prepared for an armed intruder, the report says.

Among the security lapses identified were the fact that a five-foot tall exterior fence was inadequate to impede an intruder, and "there was a regrettable culture of noncompliance by school personnel," who frequently ignored security procedures by propping doors open and deliberately circumventing locks, the report said.

However, the report goes on to say that, due to a key shortage, the school administration "actually suggested circumventing the locks as a solution for the convenience of substitute teachers and others who lacked their own keys."

The report also highlighted the fact that Robb Elementary School was built in 1955 and that maintenance and upkeep of the facilities required two full-time custodians on staff. Rodney Harrison, the director of the Uvalde school district's maintenance and operations department, told the committee that it is difficult to keep his department staffed, and "he has recently lost employees to two retirements during the COVID pandemic, one death, and another employee moving away."

Although it did not mention him by name, the report gave new details about the background of Salvador Ramos, both at home and at school as a student of the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District.

Of his home life, the report says, "The attacker had an unstable home life with no father figure and a mother struggling with a substance abuse disorder," and "The attacker's family moved often and lived in relative poverty."

The report also says of Ramos that he "developed sociopathic and violent tendencies, but he received no mental health assistance."

In school, the shooter had "few disciplinary issues" but struggled academically, having completed only the ninth grade by the time he was 17. The district made

"no meaningful intervention" before he was involuntarily withdrawn from school for poor performance and excessive absences in October 2021.

The report says that there was "no information actually known to the school district that should have identified this attacker as a threat to any school campus." But it also says that Ramos posted about guns on social media, and he mentioned he was going to "do something" his friends would learn about in the news.

Before the shooting, family members "were aware during the time leading up to the attacker's 18th birthday that he was estranged from his mother and that he had asked for help in buying guns through straw purchases that would have been illegal. Family members uniformly refused to buy guns for him."



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