

# Following Uvalde shooting, Texas sends home DNA kits to identify schoolchildren

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Texas is sending public school students home with DNA kits designed to identify their children in “case of an emergency.”

The program is part of a bill passed in 2021, which took effect in April 28 of that year. It provides “to all school districts and open-enrollment charter schools inkless, in-home fingerprint and DNA identification kits to be distributed through the district or school on request to the parent or legal custodian of any kindergarten, elementary, or middle school student.” The kits can be stored at home and submitted to federal, state, tribal or local law enforcement to “to help locate and return a missing or trafficked child.”

The Texas Education Agency said in a statement that it is collaborating with the Safety Blitz Foundation, National Child Identification Programs, Education Service Centers and school systems on the effort. The program is allocated \$5.7 million total for the 2022 and 2023 fiscal years.

The bill was passed after the Santa Fe school shooting and a year before the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, which left 19 fourth graders and two teachers dead following more than an hour of law enforcement inaction. Many children’s bodies were so shot up that they had to be identified by DNA swabs.

The Texas Education Agency in a statement attempted to dissuade concerns about the purpose of the kits, saying “The kits are designed to assist law enforcement in locating and returning a missing or trafficked child and are not distributed as a means of victim identification following a mass casualty incident.” It noted that while it is the first time the school systems were involved in such an effort, that “Texas has facilitated a statewide child ID program since 2006 through direct distribution to parents.”

MSNBC interviewed some Texas parents who were clearly concerned about the potential for the kits to provoke parents.

“This sends two messages: The first is that the government is not going to do anything to solve the problem. This is their way of telling us that,” Tracy Walder said. “The second is that us parents are now forced to have conversations with our kids that they may not be emotionally ready for. My daughter is 7. What do I tell her?”

*Education Week* ran a similarly themed article titled “Texas Schools Are Sending DNA Kits Home to Parents. Why This Is a Communications Mess.” The issue centered on by the article is the “optics” of sending out the kits, not why school massacres have increased drastically over the past decades.

The *Education Week* article extensively quoted “nationally recognized school safety expert” Kenneth Trump, whose main concern was that “without proper communication ... adults are likely to misinterpret the kits to mean that school and government leaders think there is a high probability there will be a school shooting.”

The response of Republicans, who control the Texas state government, to the rising epidemic of school shootings is to call for the militarization of schools, flooding them with more police and even arming teachers. The state has transferred nearly \$900 million for “public safety initiatives” across Texas with \$400 million to be divided among districts in an as yet unknown manner for security including upgrading doors, windows, fencing, communications and other safety measures in school buildings according to a news release. Fifteen million of the \$900 million is going to Uvalde to rebuild after the Robb Elementary shooting.

The response of the Democrats, however, is little better. Democrats downplay the social roots of the rise of mass shootings. In their own way, they present it as primarily a law enforcement rather than a social problem, to be resolved solely through laws restricting access to guns.

This obfuscation mirrors the Biden administration's downplaying of the pandemic, which it falsely claims to be over, and its elimination of all remaining public health restrictions in schools and workplaces. As a result, record numbers of children are being hospitalized.



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