

Wave of tragic school shootings resumes across the US with return of students to fall classes

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Along with the start of the 2023-2024 academic year, instances of on- and off-campus gun violence, shooting deaths and threats of violence have tragically resumed at educational facilities across the US.

On Tuesday, law enforcement officials charged 34-year-old University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC) graduate student Tailei Qi with first degree murder and ordered him to remain in jail without bond for the fatal shooting of his faculty advisor on Monday.

Qi was also charged with possessing a 9mm handgun on educational property. The graduate student is accused of killing Zijie Yan inside a lab in a science building on the UNC campus in Chapel Hill. Yan, an associate professor in the UNC Department of Applied Physical Sciences, had worked at the university since 2019.

According to a page on the university's website, which has since been removed, Yan was listed as Qi's graduate advisor and Qi was said to be one of three students in Yan's research group. Qi was also co-author of two research papers after joining the group in 2022.

The alleged shooter earned a bachelor's degree in physics at Wuhan University in China before moving to the US and earning a master's degree in mechanical engineering at Louisiana State University in 2021.

In his short court appearance on Tuesday, where the charges against Qi were translated into Mandarin by an interpreter, the defendant did not enter a plea. Meanwhile, although first degree murder is a capital crime in North Carolina, the county district attorney said that the death penalty would not be sought in the case. Qi's next court appearance is scheduled for September 18.

UNC Chapel Hill Chief of Police Brian James told a news conference on Tuesday that Qi and Yan "knew each other and the suspect went directly to the victim and then left Caudill Labs." After the shooting, the campus was in lockdown for three hours while officers swarmed the area and ultimately apprehended the suspect around 2:30 p.m. Chief James said it was too early to determine a motive for the shooting.

In another incident, a 20-year-old University of South Carolina (USC) student was fatally shot early Saturday morning when he tried to enter the wrong home on the street where he lived. Columbia police reported that Nicholas Anthony Donofrio was found dead from a gunshot wound to his upper body when they arrived on the front porch of a home on South Holly Street, approximately two miles from the USC campus.

Police reported that a 911 call was received at 2:00 a.m. reporting a home burglary and then, shortly thereafter, the emergency was upgraded to a "shots fired call" as officers were en route to the location. The identity of the shooter has not been released.

According to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, South Carolina's "stand your ground" law permits individuals to use deadly force if they are not breaking the law and in places where they are supposed to be. The non-profit group also says that the state does not require gun owners to be licensed to possess or purchase guns.

Donofrio, who graduated from Daniel Hand High School in Madison, Connecticut, was a sophomore at USC and studying kinesiology and exercise science, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Other reported incidents of gun violence and threats of violence at or near schools in the past few days

include:

- **Tyler, Texas:** Hubbard Middle School was the scene of a lockdown on Monday following a shooting near the new campus construction site. Reports of a shooting were made to police just before 3:00 p.m. Tyler Police Department PIO Andy Erbaugh said one victim is in the hospital and at least one of two suspects involved was at large and considered armed and dangerous. Bullet casings from both a pistol and a rifle were found on the side of the road once police arrived. He said the suspect and victim knew each other but they are not yet sure which party fired shots first.

- **Georgetown, South Carolina:** A man suspected of firing gunshots at a Georgetown High School football game on Friday was taken into custody on Monday. Tyrell Douglas Handy surrendered to law enforcement and was charged with four counts of attempted murder with additional charges expected. The shooting took place when a fight broke out at the nighttime football game.

- **Arlington, Texas:** Seguin High School was on lockdown Monday after a student made a threat to shoot up the school, according to police. The student who threatened the school is facing charges but has not been identified. At 11:56 a.m., Arlington Police responded to a call about a shooting in progress on the high school campus. The student was taken into custody and removed to a juvenile detention center.

- **Las Vegas, Nevada:** Authorities are investigating a shooting that was reported near a central Las Vegas valley high school on Tuesday afternoon. Emergency calls came into police just after 12:15 p.m., across from Clark High School, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police said in an email.

- **Oxford, Michigan:** The Oakland County Sheriff's Office reported Tuesday that a 17-year-old from Maryland faces criminal charges in his home state after allegedly making threats to shoot up Oxford High School. The unidentified teen was arrested Thursday and charged in Maryland juvenile court with threats of mass harm, improper use of a telephone and other crimes. Sheriff's officials said they were alerted to the threat after receiving a report on OK2Say, a tip line set up for students to communicate suspicious behavior. Oxford High School was the scene of a deadly shooting in 2021 in which 15-year-old Ethan Crumbley killed four students and injured six others and a teacher.

According to the K-12 School Shooting Database maintained by the nonprofit The Violence Project, there have been 222 school shootings so far in 2023. The group's criteria for school shootings includes "when a gun is fired, brandished (pointed at a person with intent), or bullet hits school property, regardless of the number of victims, time, day, or reason."

The data shows that there have been shootings in 41 states in 2023, with 165 taking place outside but on school property, in which 117 people were wounded and 47 killed including 10 shooters. In 2015, the number of school shootings in the US was 40, and these incidents rose rapidly each year thereafter to a total of 305 in 2022. The Violence Project projects the number of school shootings will reach 326 in 2023.



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