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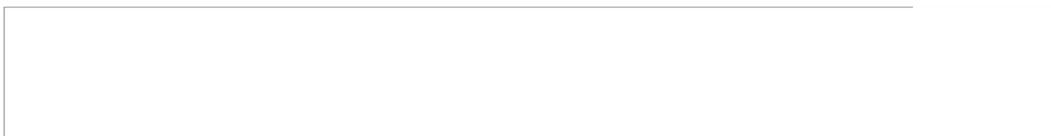
## Clayton County schools to spend \$1.1 million on clear backpacks after weapons surge



LOCAL NEWS

By [Leon Stafford](#), The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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Clayton County schools will spend \$1.1 million to supply the district's 51,000 students with clear backpacks for the new academic year beginning Aug. 3, the school system said Wednesday.

The move is an effort by the south metro Atlanta district to improve campus and bus safety after leaders saw a surge in the number of weapons brought to school during the 2021-2022 academic year.

Documents obtained by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution through an open records request found that close to 100 weapons were brought to Clayton school campuses or on its busses last year. They included an AR-15 assault rifle, handguns, brass knuckles, knives, BB guns, stun guns and tasers.

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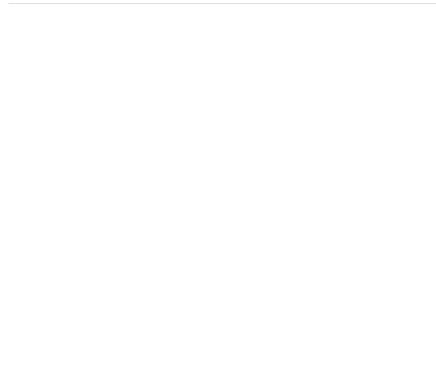


“The use of clear bookbags is another layer to enhance a safe learning and teaching environment for our schools,” the district said in an update of the mandate on Wednesday.

Clayton’s policy reflects growing concerns among school systems across metro Atlanta over campus safety as mass shootings have become a regular occurrence in the United States. School leaders were especially shaken after the deaths of 19 students and two teachers in the May shooting massacre at a Uvalde, Texas, elementary school.

Thad Johnson, a former police officer and assistant professor in Georgia State University's Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, said it's unclear whether clear backpacks are effective. Students determined to bring weapons to schools can sneak them in through hollowed out textbooks or sandwich them between a laptop and brown bag lunch.

But they can have a positive psychological impact, making teachers, staff and others feel protected, even if the just is still out on whether it's reality or illusion.



"The clear bags make us feel safe, but just like surveillance cameras out on the streets, it doesn't always make you safe," he said.

Rockdale County also has mandated clear backpacks for the 2022-2023 academic year. The southeast metro Atlanta district of more than 15,000 students will spend \$167,000 supplying clear backpacks to its kindergarten through 12th graders, spokeswoman Cindy Ball said. The district expects to get its supply of book bags in the next couple of weeks.

If a student loses a school-issued clear backpack, it is up to the student or parent to replace it with another clear book bag, Ball said. Rockdale officials also said the district has enhanced its ability to detect weapons with a new wireless metal detection system and classroom surveillance systems.

In a Wednesday update to its new book bag mandate, Clayton leaders said the backpacks will be distributed during open houses at the district's schools, unless there are supply chain issues. Parents can also purchase clear backpacks separately.

The district will allow student athletes to bring duffel bags that are not clear to sports practices, but the bags will be taken by coaches and stored securely until they are needed for activities. Purses and brown bags for lunch do not have to be clear, but will be inspected by school leaders.

Lockers will also be available for use. The district [banned the use of lockers](#) in late April because of safety concerns.

Clear backpacks are a good tool for safety, but they must also include some form of privacy for students, Lisa Morgan, president of the Georgia Association of Educators, said.

Students should be allowed to put feminine hygiene products or medicines in non-transparent pouches. She also said that while clear book bags are a step toward safety, the bigger challenge of school violence is societal.

"There's not this magic barrier around our schools where the issues that are occurring in the community stop ... and don't cross into school buildings," she said.

## About the Author

### Leon Stafford

Leon Stafford covers south metro government