



ShotSpotter[®]
Data for Good

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41,000
Americans die from
gun violence every year

25x
Americans more likely to
be killed in a gun
homicide than other
high-income countries

Source: Giffords Law Center

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What the Research Tells Us

"...the traumatic impact of gun violence for children may not necessarily be attached to direct victimization experiences but may also result from simply seeing or hearing it in their neighborhoods".

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Gun Violence Exposure and Posttraumatic Symptoms Among Children and Youth

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Although statistics on youth homicide and injury from gun violence are available, little research has focused on how gun violence overlaps with other victimizations or on the psychological impact of gun violence on children. Pilot survey data were collected on the experiences of 630 U.S. children (age range: 2-17 years) from Boston, Philadelphia, and rural areas of eastern Tennessee. Youth aged 10-17 years completed a self-report survey on a wide range of gun violence exposures, and parents of younger children (aged 2-9 years) completed the survey as a proxy for that child. Direct gun violence exposure, witnessing gun violence, and hearing gunshots were all significantly associated with other forms of victimization, $r_s = .10-.38, p < .001$. The findings suggest that youth who experience direct gun violence are often exposed to multiple violent contexts. For older youth (ages 10-17 years) polyvictimization was most strongly associated with posttraumatic symptoms, $\beta = .35, p < .001$, although witnessing gun violence still uniquely predicted a higher level of symptoms, $\beta = .18, p < .01$. For younger children (ages 2-9 years), hearing and witnessing gun violence were both related to posttraumatic symptoms, $\beta = .15, p < .01$ for both, even after controlling for polyvictimization. Mental health professionals and trauma-informed services should be mindful that the traumatic impact of gun violence for children may not necessarily be attached to direct victimization experiences but may also result from simply seeing or hearing it in their neighborhoods.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that homicide by firearm is among the top 10 leading causes of death for all youth, across all age groups (National Center for Health Statistics, 2017). Although many youths are directly exposed to gun violence, they can also be indirectly exposed by witnessing gun violence or hearing gunshots in their communities. Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, and Hamby (2015) found that approximately 8% of all children in a nationally representative U.S. sample reported being exposed to shootings, street riots, or bombings in their lifetimes, including hearing gunshots or seeing someone shot, with children 14 to 17 years of age reporting the highest level of exposure (13%). Given the substantially elevated rates of community violence exposure among urban adolescents in the United States (McDonald &

Richmond, 2008), rates of experiencing direct and indirect gun violence are likely to be even higher for this group of youth.

Although statistics on youth homicide and injury from gun violence are increasingly available (see Fowler, Dahlberg, Haines, Gutierrez, & Bacon, 2017), less research has focused on the psychological impact of exposure to gun violence.

The few studies that have addressed its psychological effects suggest that direct gun violence victimization and witnessing shootings are associated with increases in reports of posttraumatic stress symptoms and anger or aggression (e.g., Layne, Pynoos, & Cardenas, 2001; Slovak & Singer, 2001; Williamson, Guerra, & Tynan, 2014). However, the large body of research addressing child and adolescent exposure to violence has not typically distinguished gun violence exposure from other forms of violence exposure. It alone considered differences in types of gun violence exposure. We do not know, for example, how different levels of exposure (i.e., being a direct target of gun threats or violence, witnessing gun violence directed at others, or hearing gunshots in public places) may differ for children and youth with different demographic and residential characteristics or how these different levels of exposure influence mental health outcomes. It is possible, for instance, that simply hearing gunshots is not typically perceived as personally threatening and, as a result, may not arouse significant distress. On the other

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The Importance for Communities

"...childhood trauma is likely an important antecedent to engagement in gun violence.

...exposure often precedes gun violence and the development of violence risk factors, making childhood trauma a prime prevention foci."



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Childhood Trauma Exposure and Gun Violence Risk Factors among Victims of Gun Violence

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Abstract

Objective: Gun violence is a serious public health concern, yet risk factors for gun violence involvement remain understudied. Childhood trauma exposure, such as domestic violence (DV) and community violence (CV), may increase the risk for aggression, although this relationship has not been examined in the context of gun violence. The aim of the current study was to investigate whether different childhood trauma ecologies are related to increased gun violence involvement and gun violence risk factors among individuals hospitalized for a gun injury.

Method: Seventy-two gun violence victims reported on their gun violence involvement and gun violence risk factors (e.g., gun ownership, gun carrying, gun arrests, impulsivity, perceptions regarding violence) at hospital bedside.

Results: Childhood domestic violence (DV) and community violence (CV) exposure were both associated with increased gun violence involvement as well as numerous gun violence risk factors. Effect sizes were generally medium to large ($Md = .53$).

Conclusion: Childhood traumatic events, such as DV and CV, may be important antecedent risk factors for gun violence.

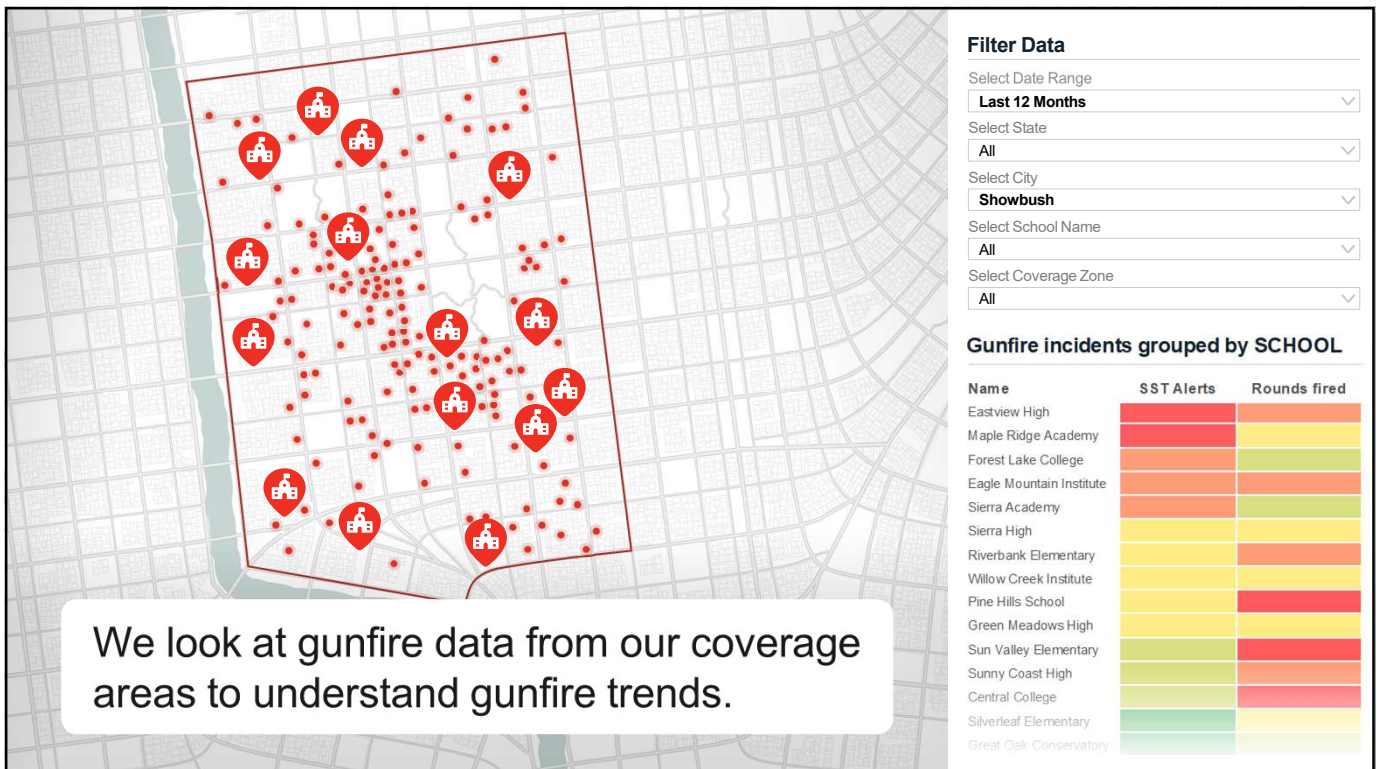
Keywords

Childhood traumatic experiences; gun violence; aggression; victimization

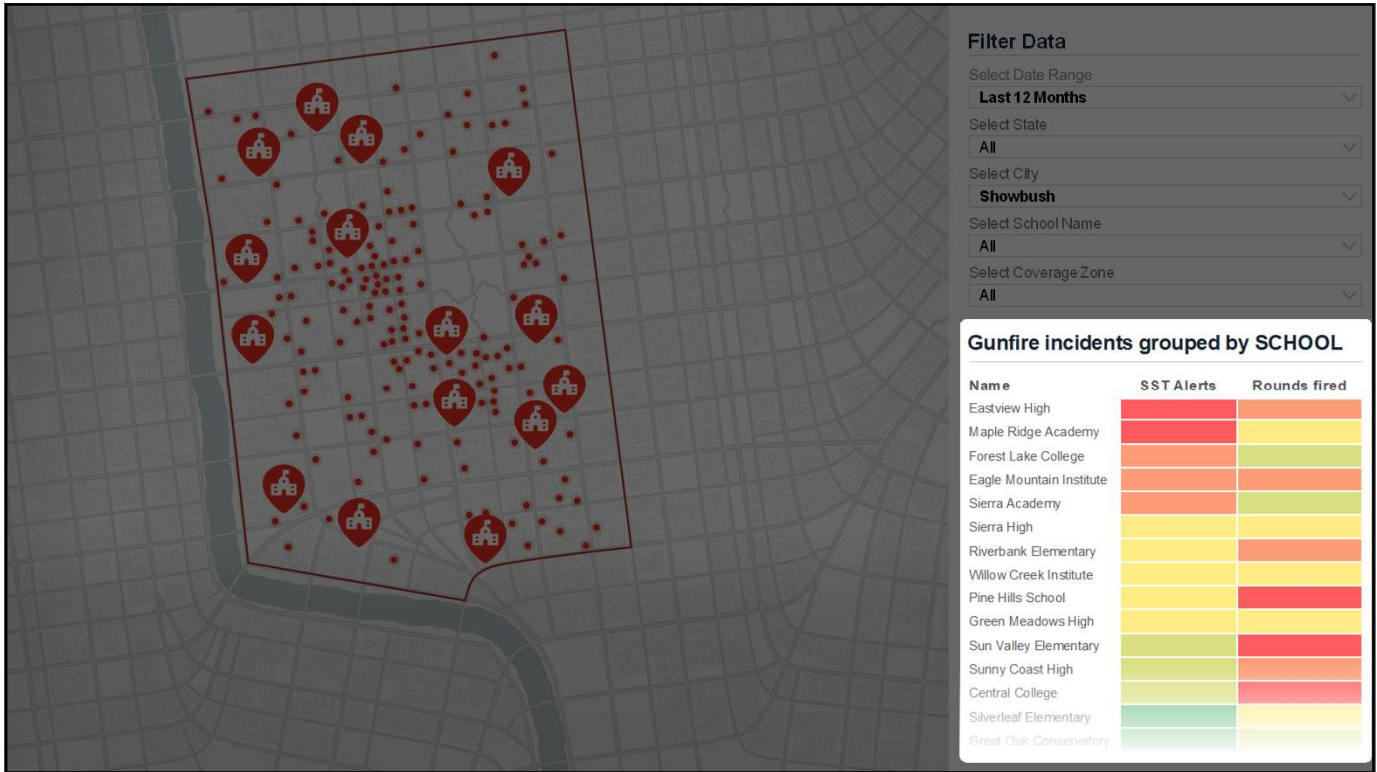
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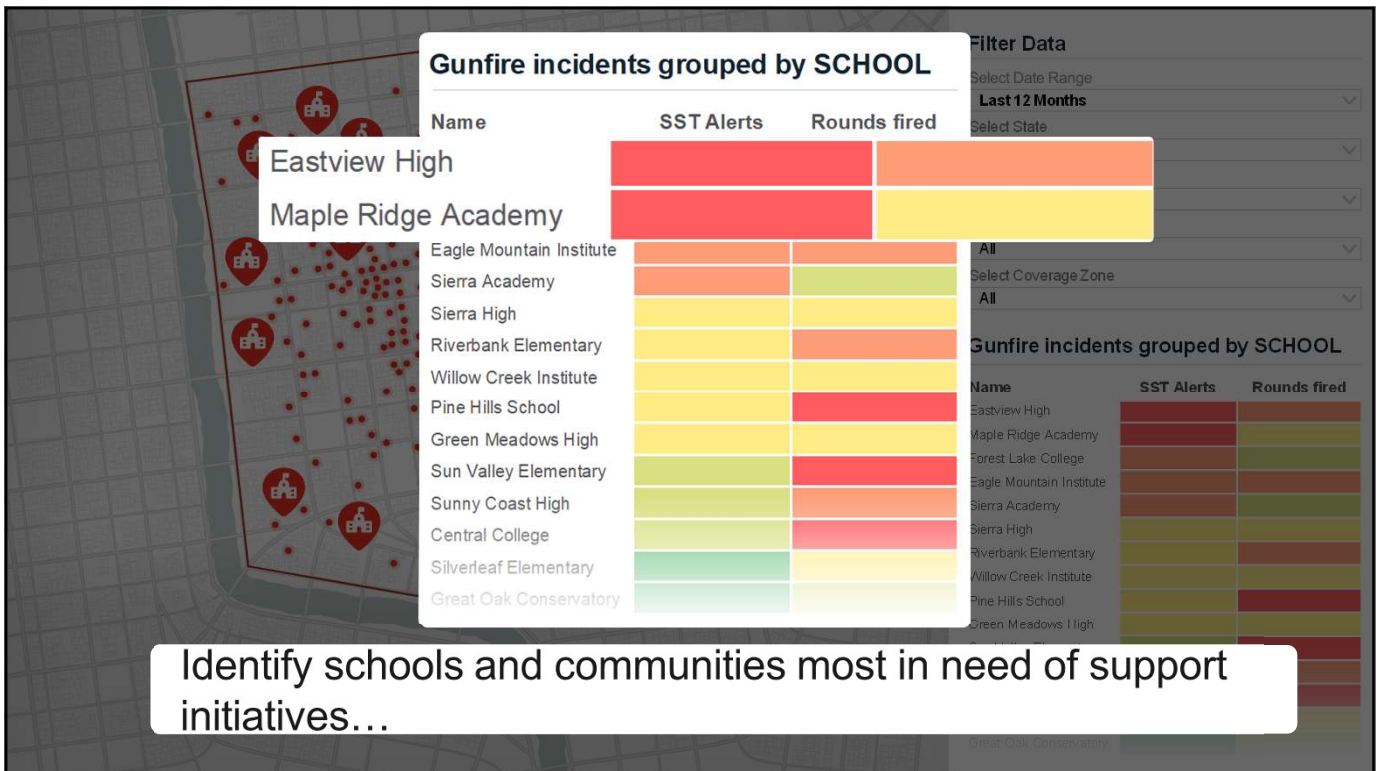
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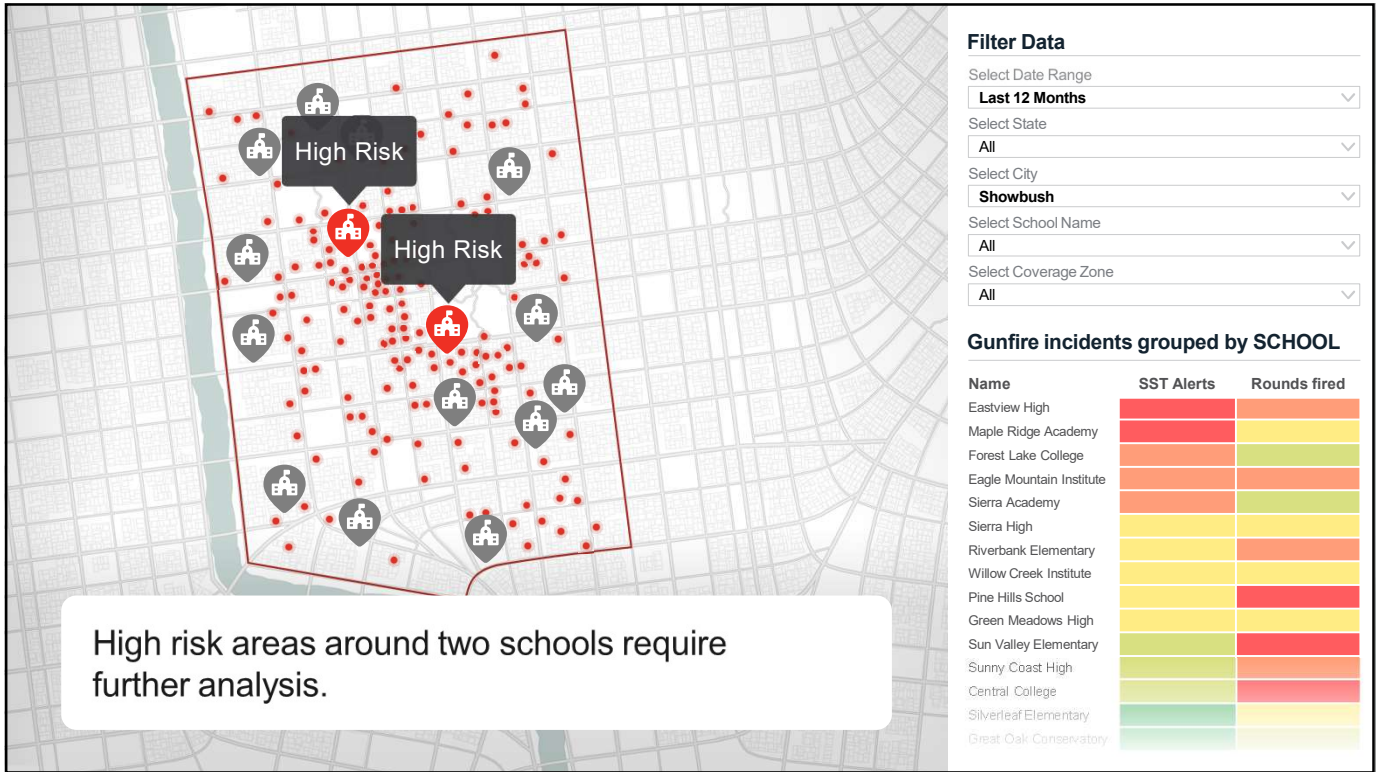
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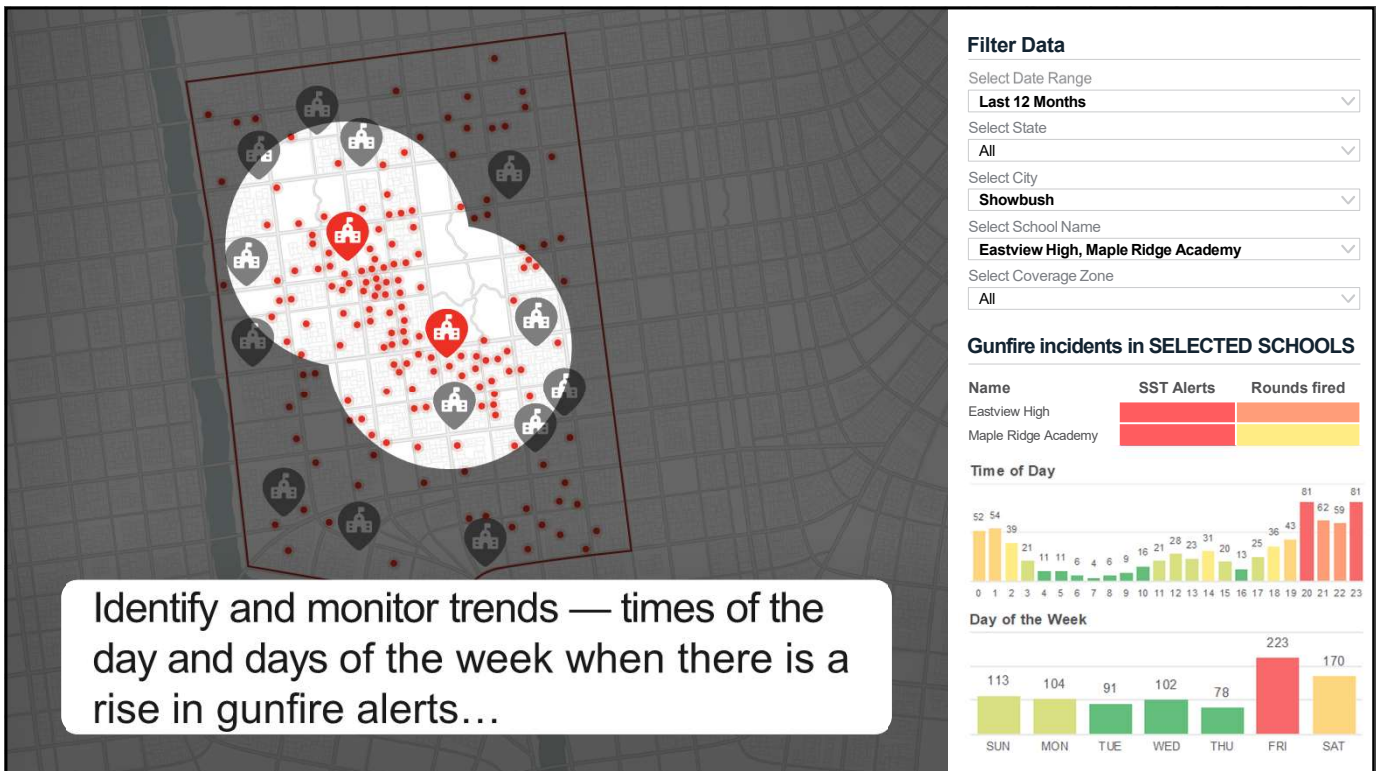
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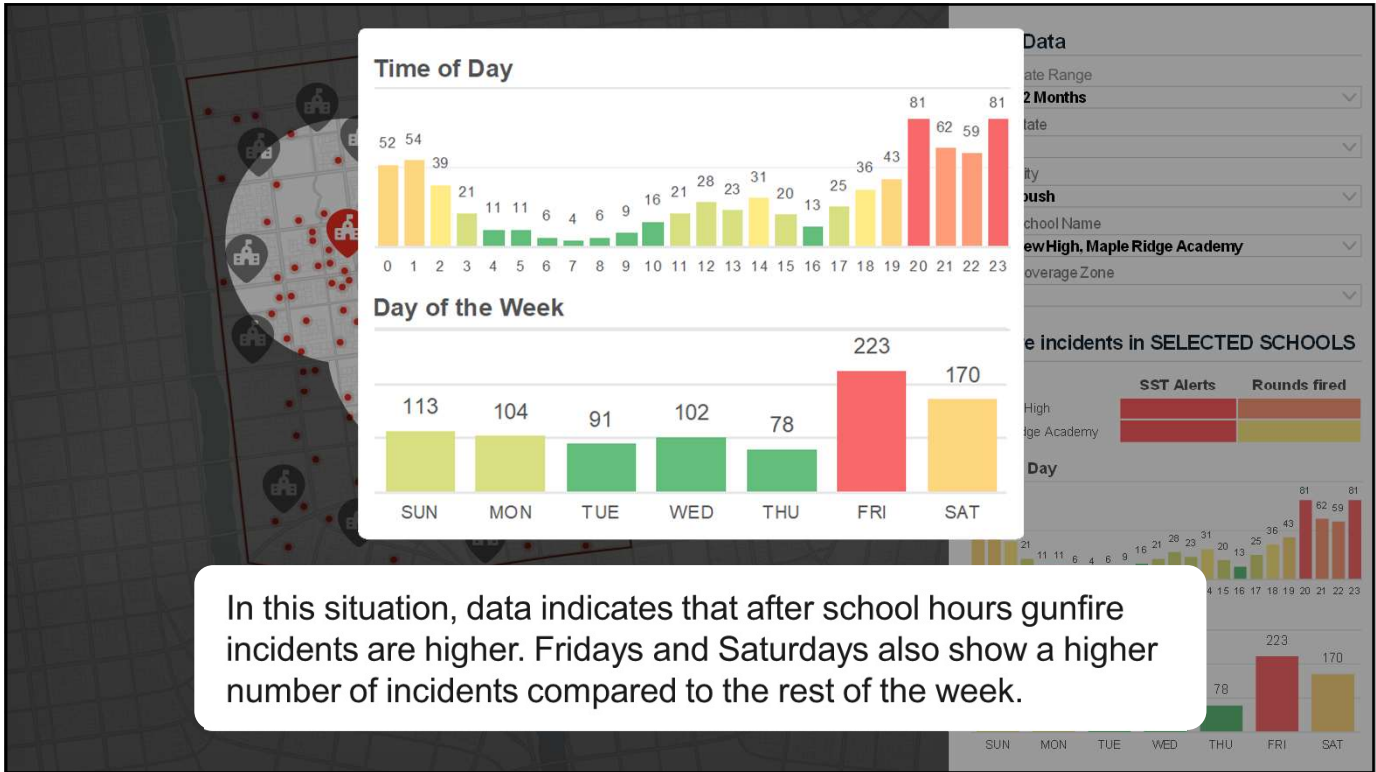
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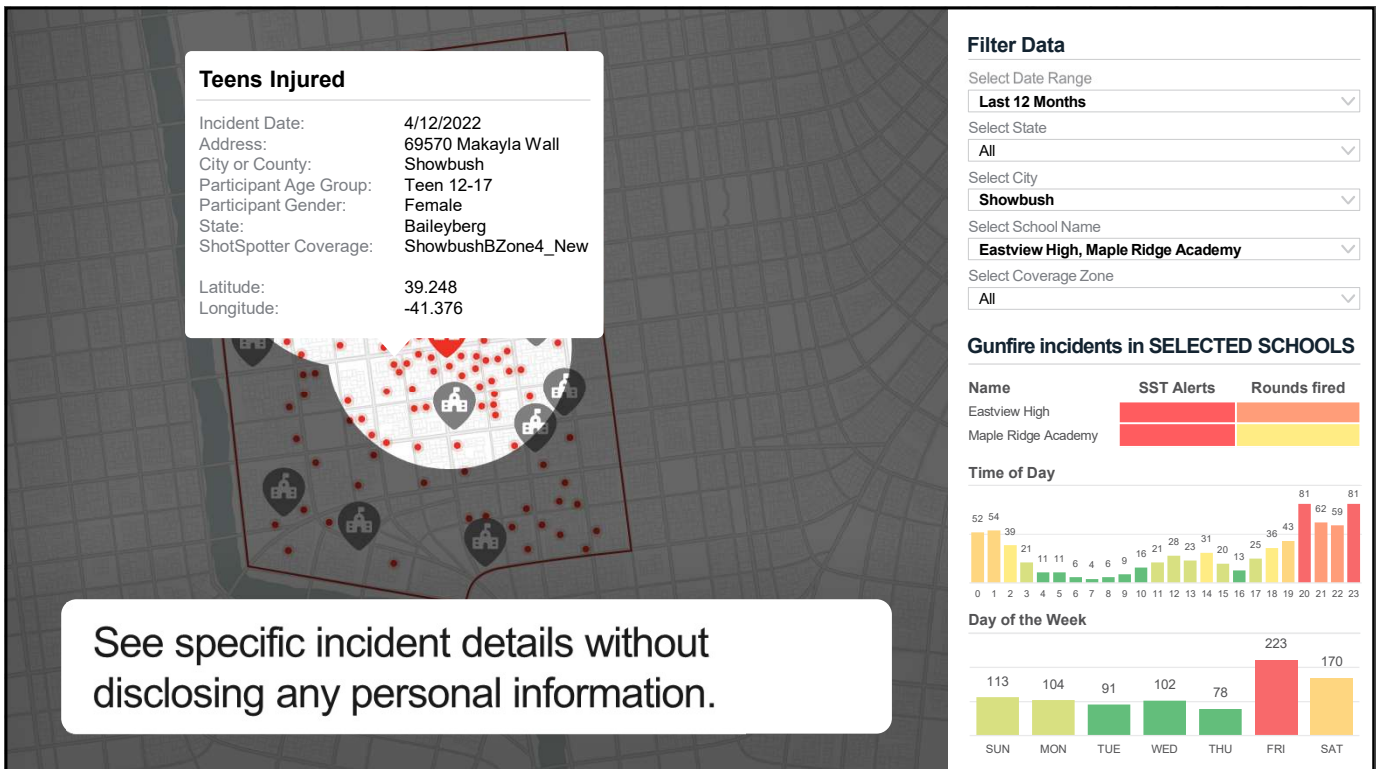
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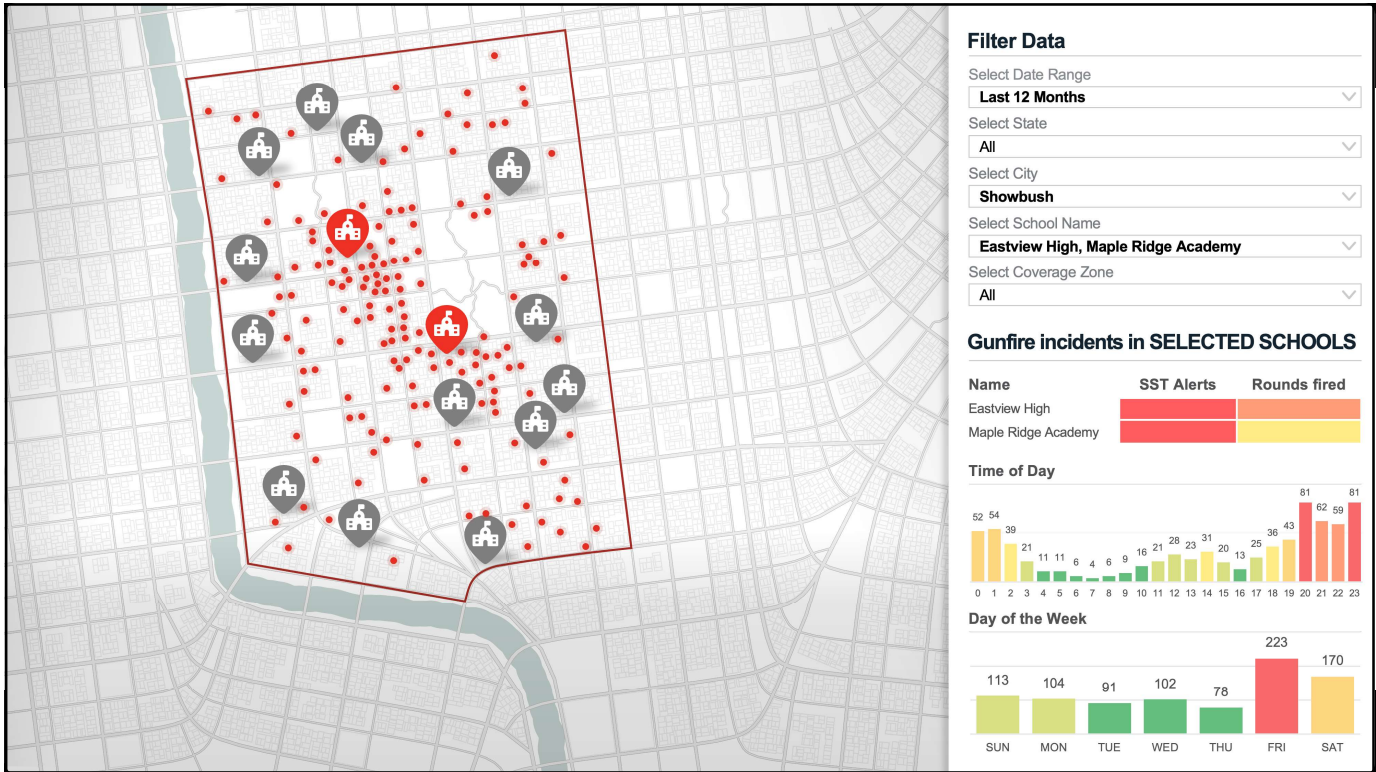
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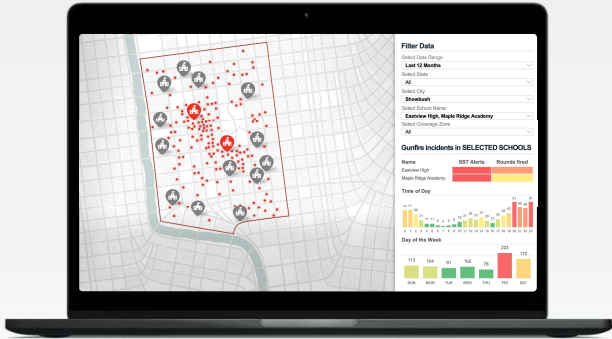
Identify high-risk areas


Help local authorities gain insights

Monitor trends


Develop support strategies for those who need them the most

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Offices of Violence Prevention and Neighborhood Safety




City and County Victim Services Programs




School-Based Handle with Care Programs




Departments of Public Health



Partnerships to develop support initiatives for those who are most in need



Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs



Federally Qualified Health Center Outreach Programs

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