

School security guards won't be in place by time school starts, despite high interest in job

[Caroline Glenn](#), Florida Today Published 5:08 p.m. ET July 3, 2018 | Updated 5:19 p.m. ET July 3, 2018

The BPS on Tuesday voted to postpone implementing the plan to arm school staff and instead opted to hire full-time armed "security specialists." Florida Today

Despite a large number of applicants interested in becoming armed security guards for Brevard County schools, [Sheriff Wayne Ivey](#) said there is no way the guards will be in place in time for the first day of school.

That leaves 28 elementary schools without a dedicated armed presence — potentially violating a new law passed in response to the Valentine's Day school shooting in Parkland that requires all schools to have an armed presence by the start of the 2018-19 school year. All of the district's middle schools and high schools already have school resource officers in place.

"Do I believe we'll be ready to start the school year? Absolutely not. We will not be ready," Ivey said.

The earliest all 28 security specialists could be in place is by late August.

In the meantime, Ivey said the sheriff's office and some city police departments will provide officers part-time at elementary schools that need them, but those officers won't be on campus the entire school day.

In the eyes of some school board members who approved the plan to hire armed guards, leaving schools without an armed presence could leave those schools open to potential threats.

School board member Tina Descovich said she wishes the district could get all of the specialists in place by Aug. 10 when school starts, "but I think it's important that we do the process right."

"Do I believe we'll be ready to start the school year? Absolutely not. We will not be ready."

Descovich said she hopes the state understands the school district is "doing the absolute best we can to keep the security of our students and staff in mind, so I hope that doesn't lead to any consequences on our part."

The school district received more than 100 applications during the window to apply, according to human resources director Carol Tolx, and plans to hire 28 "security specialists" who will carry concealed guns and work at elementary schools without dedicated school resource officers.

On Facebook, Brevard Sheriff Wayne Ivey made his case for a controversial marshal program to train and arm school staff to respond to an active shooter situation.

The specialists will be paid \$40,431 in salaries and benefits. They will be employees of the school district, and will be trained and outfitted by the sheriff's office. Hiring the specialists will cost the district about \$1.4 million, according to recent estimates from the district. The costs to the sheriff's office will be covered by the state.

Board members were concerned the relatively modest salary would not attract qualified candidates, but 126 people applied for the job, Tolx said.

Of those, 73 meet the minimum requirements: at least four years of experience in law enforcement, the military or similar experience; a concealed carry permit; 21 years or older; a high school diploma or some equivalent; 20/30 vision; and a valid driver's license with seven points or fewer.

Thirty-nine did not meet the minimum qualifications; eight are pending further criminal history and work performance reviews; four were disqualified due to criminal history or poor work performance reviews; and two have withdrawn their applications.

There are three levels of security specialists, and the requirements for each ranges from four years to 10 years experience in law enforcement, the military or a similar area of expertise.

Of the 73 qualified candidates, 28 fall into Level 1, which requires four years of experience; 16 fall into Level 2, which requires five years of experience; and 29 fall into Level 3, which requires 10 years of experience, and it is preferred they be certified by Florida Department of Law Enforcement as a law enforcement officer and have worked at least one year as a sergeant or in a similar supervisory role.

Ivey said, knowing the specialists will go through a stringent vetting and training process, he would be comfortable hiring people for any of the three levels.

However, some school board members have said they only want to hire people who would fall into Level 2 or Level 3, but the school board has yet to publicly discuss which levels are OK to hire.

In a surprising move, Brevard County Sheriff Wayne Ivey has pulled his proposal to train and arm school personnel. Video by Rob Landers. Posted April 11, 2018. Rob Landers

Once the school district has a final list of candidates, Ivey said his office will begin the vetting process, which Ivey said could take "weeks." Prospective security specialists will have to pass psychological screenings, interviews, drug tests and background checks before they can take part in the five-week training course, also through the Brevard County Sheriff's Office.

"This is not a process that we want to fly through. This is a process that we want to be meticulous in," said Ivey.

The five-week course involves 176 hours of training — the same program Ivey devised for his Sheriff-Trained Onsite Training Program, or STOMP, which would have allowed volunteer school employees to carry guns on campuses but was not approved by the school board.

"The training is quality training," said school board member Misty Belford. "I think a lot of people will probably not complete training because it's so intense."

The training includes:

- 80 hours of firearms training
- 24 hours of tactical automatic pistol training via firing range and simulator
- 24 hours of active shooter training, including first aid and CPR
- 16 hours of defensive tactics training, including firearms retention
- 12 hours of legal issues training
- 12 hours of diversity training
- 8 hours of mental health training
- Quarterly refresher courses at the gun range and in legal issues, firearm proficiency, self-defense and survival tactics
- 16 hours of training annually for recertification

Other school districts — including Broward, Duval, Hillsborough, Pasco, Polk and Volusia counties — have adopted similar plans to hire armed security guards. They, too, have received a high influx of applications.

In Polk County, more than 400 people applied for 90 available positions; in Pasco, 125 applied for 47 positions; in Duval, more than 300 applied for 105 positions; in Volusia, 180 applied for 44 positions. All of the counties plan to pay guards between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

Glenn is the education reporter at FLORIDA TODAY.

Contact Glenn at 321-576-5933

or caglenn@floridatoday.com.