

A Preliminary Report on the Police Foundation's Averted School Violence Database

JEFFREY A. DANIELS



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice



This project was supported, in whole or in part, by cooperative agreement number 2014-CK-WX-K023 awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) or contributor(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific individuals, agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s) or contributor(s) or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

The internet references cited in this publication were valid as of the date of publication. Given that URLs and websites are in constant flux, neither the author(s) or contributor(s) nor the COPS Office can vouch for their current validity.

Recommended citation:

Daniels, Jeffrey A. 2019. *A Preliminary Report on the Police Foundations Averted School Violence Database*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Published 2019

A Preliminary Report on the Police Foundation's Averted School Violence Database

JEFFREY A. DANIELS





Contents

Letter from the Director of the COPS Office	v
Background	vii
Introduction	1
Case Study	3
Background	3
Averted attack	4
Police actions	4
Disposition	4
Plotter information	4
Lessons learned	4
Recommendations	5
Data Analyses	7
Basic information	7
School Information	7
Plotter information	11
Event information	14
Findings	17
Students	17
Parents	18
Schools	18
Police	19
Recommendations	21
Preparation	21
Develop relationships	21
Break the “code of silence”	22
Know the school’s culture	22
Know the physical facilities	22
Take all reports seriously	22
Assume nothing	22
There is no profile	22
Conclusion	23
References	25
About the Police Foundation	27
About the COPS Office	28



Letter from the Director of the COPS Office

Colleagues:

It is essential that our children's schools be safe and supportive learning environments.

Unfortunately, communities across the country have been shattered by school violence for far too long. Leaders of government, school administrations, law enforcement agencies, and community stakeholders are diligently working to protect children and education personnel from school attacks. The Police Foundation, in collaboration with the COPS Office, implemented the Averted School Violence (ASV) database in 2015 as a platform for law enforcement, school staff, and mental health professionals to share information about ASV incidents and lessons learned with the goal of mitigating and ultimately preventing future injuries and fatalities in educational institutions. The database was begun with accounts of past incidents—starting with Columbine High School (1999)—and is available for submission of further incidents as they continue to occur.

The reports in the database can document “close calls” with weapons—guns, knives, improvised explosive devices—and can include information about incidents that were thwarted in the planning stages and incidents that were contained as well as what we know about incidents that were completed. Users can submit reports anonymously; the reports are never used for punitive measures but rather as a research tool and information resource for stakeholders.

The Police Foundation has completed a comprehensive analysis of the information collected from the ASV database as well as interviews with law enforcement and stakeholders to write two companion reports. The first is a preliminary analysis of the ASV database and detailed case study of an averted attack, and the second is a comparison of averted and completed school attacks. The reports provide a detailed picture of school-based violence, including the type of attacks, student demographics and type of school, and security measures in place on campus at the time of the averted incidents. The case study of one averted attack details lessons learned, including the code of silence—students' reluctance to trust school staff with information about a peer who may want to harm themselves or others. The reports provide findings and recommendations for schools to increase the safety and well-being of all the students on campus. Ultimately, we want teens and children to be happy and successful in their school careers. Through the information in these reports, communities can learn about best practices and methods to improve school safety.

On behalf of the COPS Office, I thank all the law enforcement, school staff, and mental health professionals who have submitted reports and work each day with teens and children in our schools. We applaud their commitment to making a difference in their communities and the lives of children. I urge everyone to continue to use the ASV database to report incidents of school violence, both completed and averted, in the hope that school shootings will soon be a thing of the past. I also thank the staff and leadership of Police Foundation for their work on the ASV database and these companion publications on averted school violence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Keith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "h".

Phil Keith
Director
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Background

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) provided funding to the Police Foundation to initiate the Averted School Violence (ASV) project. Through this project, the Police Foundation developed a database (Police Foundation 2018) to collect, analyze, and publish (in an online library [Police Foundation 2018b]) incidents of averted and completed acts of school violence that have occurred since the attack on Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999. The data are drawn from the public domain as well as from law enforcement, school officials, and others entering reports into the database. The database is intended to serve as a resource to law enforcement, school, mental health professionals, and others involved in preventing school violence by sharing ways in which other school attacks across the country have been identified and prevented.

In this report, 51 averted incidents of school violence, a sample drawn from the Averted School Violence (ASV) database, were analyzed to help further our understanding of averted school attacks. The ASV project defines an incident of averted school violence as a violent attack planned with or without the use of a firearm that was prevented either before or after the potential perpetrator arrived on school grounds but before any injury or loss of life occurred.

The 51 averted attacks do not constitute every incident of school violence that has occurred in the United States since April 20, 1999, nor do they constitute a representative sample. Rather, averted attacks (those that were identified from open sources) were selected based on the amount of information available in open sources and with an effort made to find reports in a wide range of states.

Information collected on each averted school violence consisted of the following categories as displayed in the database:

- Basic information (about the person submitting the report)
- School information (about school security procedures, size, education level, etc.)
- Event information (about the planned attack and its discovery)
- Suspect information (about the plotter's behavioral history, background, warning signs exhibited, etc.)
- Documentation (lessons learned from the planned attack and recommendations on how to prevent future planned attacks of a similar nature)

Because the majority of the data came from open sources, it was not always possible to gather data for all the information categories presented in the database.¹ Thus, in some areas, the data cannot be assumed to be complete.

1. For example, whether or not a perpetrator had ever received mental health treatment or what kind of emergency preparedness plans a particular school had in place at the time of the attack was not always available.



Introduction

LETHAL SCHOOL VIOLENCE IS NOT A NEW PHENOMENON, but since Columbine (1999), there have been many resources devoted to understanding lethal school violence and methods of preventing these attacks. Federal agencies studied school shooters to determine if there are common characteristics or if they exhibit any warning signs (O'Toole 2000; Vossekuil, et al. 2004). There has also been much research conducted on school violence from a multidisciplinary perspective, including psychologists (e.g., Langman 2009; 2013) sociologists (e.g., Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, and Roth 2004), and criminologists (e.g., Levin and Madfis 2009). Through all of this research, much has been learned about school shooters, the schools at which shootings occur (Flores de Apodaca et al. 2012), and the social conditions surrounding school shootings (Brown, Osterman, and Barnes 2009).

While a significant body of research exists on completed acts of school violence, less is known about school attacks that were averted. In the first published article that addressed averted shootings in K–12 schools, Daniels, Buck, et al. (2007) conducted a content analysis of published news reports of averted school shootings. Of interest to the present report, they found that 76.7% of plots were for high school attacks, 13.3% were for middle schools, and 10% were for elementary schools. In 80% of the cases, firearms were the intended weapon of choice, and many cases also included bombs or incendiary devices. Almost all (91.4%) of the would-be attackers were male.

Daniels, Bradley, et al. (2007) found six ways in which the planned attacks were discovered. The most common was when concerned students came forward and reported the plot to school personnel or the police (57.1%). In 25% of the cases, alert administrators and other school staff discovered plots. Other ways in which plots were discovered were when the police received tips, notes or email messages were discovered, school staff overheard rumors, or specific threats were made.



Following up on the initial study, Daniels, Volungis, et al. (2010) conducted interviews with school staff and administrators and school resource officers (SRO) who intervened to prevent a school attack. Primary themes that emerged from the qualitative analyses included school conditions, interventions, crisis planning, interpersonal relationships, prevention efforts, and problematic issues. *School conditions* represents the environments within the school that participants believed contributed to the prevention of the attack and includes efforts to break the code of silence, watchfulness, and establishment of meaningful relationships with students, among others. *Intervention* represents actions that were taken once the plot was discovered, such as notifying school authorities, conducting search and seizure and maintaining order, and de-escalation. *Crisis planning* entailed training and practice and adherence to established policies and procedures. *Interpersonal relationships* referred to prevention through establishment of trusting relationships between school personnel and students. These processes included activities such as establishing trust, treating students with respect and compassion, and accentuating student strengths. Some examples of *prevention efforts* included following established roles, training and practice, and crisis planning. Finally, *problematic issues* represents

unforeseen problems that emerged during the crisis including missed warning signs and handling the media. Among these, four pertain to conditions the schools had in place that participants believed prevented the attacks. Interventions occurred once the plot was discovered, and problematic issues were identified following closure of the events.

The final study of averted school shootings Daniels, Volungis, et al. (2010) identified was a study of the extent to which students broke the “code of silence” and reported plots to authorities (Madfis 2014). The code of silence was identified in the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) assessment of school shooters (O’Toole 2000), and represents students’ hesitancy in reporting a fellow student’s threats, plot, or other concerning behavior. From interviews with school personnel and police officers, Madfis (2014) found that post-Columbine, interviewees believed that the code of silence has been diminished but still exists to some extent.

This paper presents initial findings from 51 averted school attacks in the Police Foundation’s ASV database, focusing first on case studies and followed by analyses of various data points.

Case Study

Background

A FAMILY OF FOUR (parents, an 18-year-old daughter, and a 17-year-old son) moved to a small town in the southwestern United States prior to the 2017–2018 school year. Despite the fact that the father had a good job, the family was homeless because most of the money he made went to support the parents' methamphetamine addiction. They found a house that was being demolished, with one back room remaining. The four moved into this shack with no running water. A neighbor, living in a camper, allowed them to run an extension cord into the room so they had minimal electricity.

When school started, the son, Robert,² stood out in several ways. First, he was new to a small school; second, he had long hair and appeared somewhat “goth;” and third, because the family had no running water, he wore the same clothes each day and had poor hygiene. Some of the other students began teasing him; specifically, they started calling him “school shooter.”

On Thursday, November 9, 2017, during a class, four students asked Robert when he was going to shoot up the school. By now, growing tired of the teasing, Robert responded: “Y’all better not come to school tomorrow, because I’m going to shoot the place up.”

Code of Silence

A common phenomenon surrounding school shootings is the *code of silence* (O’Toole 2000). In a report for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on school shooters, O’Toole defined the code of silence: “A ‘code of silence’ prevails among students. Few feel they can safely tell teachers or administrators if they are concerned about another student’s behavior or attitudes. Little trust exists between students and staff.” (O’Toole 2000, 23) In a qualitative study (Daniels, Volungis, et al. 2010), scholars found that an important factor in averting school shootings was that school personnel took active steps to break the code of silence. In the present case, none of the four students reported Robert’s statement to school staff or administration.

2. Names have been changed to protect individuals’ privacy.

Averted attack

That evening, one of the four students told his parents what Robert had said. The parent notified school staff, and they called the school superintendent and the police.

Police actions

Because it was late at night by the time the police were notified, a decision was made to apprehend the student the next morning when he left for school. The local police force consists of a chief, a part-time officer, and an on-call officer. Therefore, the chief called in the county sheriff and other regional officers. The next morning, Friday, several officers were sent to the school to guard each of the entry points in case Robert had already set out for school. The remainder went to the residence and waited. When Robert and his sister came out to go to school, he was apprehended by three officers without incident.

One of the reasons the chief decided to wait until morning is that, because it was such a small town, he knew that there had been no reports of stolen firearms. He did not believe Robert had access to any. Robert was taken to the school, where he was questioned in the principal's office. The officers also took statements from the four students who had witnessed his threat.

Disposition

Robert openly admitted that he made the statement but said that afterward he realized he should not have because he was not serious about the threat. He said he was just kidding because of the teasing about being a school shooter. In addition, he did not have any weapons. However, the police believed they had enough to take him into custody and did not want to take any chances. Robert was sent to a juvenile facility in a nearby city and was released after three weeks, with mandated counseling. The family relocated to the city, where the children were homeschooled after Robert's release.

Plotter information

Robert had a history of poor academic performance. He tended to earn low grades and had been held back one year. However, there were no known prior disciplinary issues. According to the police report, he had undergone prior treatment for a diagnosis of depression. The responding officer reported that he appeared to have a depressed mood and had problems with social withdrawal and isolation from peers. There were no reports of physical bullying (Robert is a large young man, so the responding officer doubted many would physically provoke him), but as previously described, he was verbally bullied. These issues notwithstanding, the officer reported that he was a personable and even likable young man.

Robert and his sister lived in poverty conditions for much of their life. In the city in which they lived prior to coming to the small town, they had reportedly lived in a storage unit. In addition to the chaotic family environment in which Robert and his sister lived, he had been reported to Child Protective Services because of the family's living conditions.

Lessons learned

A follow up phone call with the police chief was conducted, and he shared the following lessons learned for other law enforcement officers:

1. Never take reported threats lightly. Assume all reports have merit and then take the necessary action.
2. Always err on the side of caution.
3. Cover all the bases; do not give a student an opportunity to carry out the attack.
4. In a small department, there are specific challenges to bringing in other agencies and coordinating the efforts. The chief in this case needed to call in several other agencies and coordinate all of their efforts.
5. Parents were upset that they were not notified about a possible attack. Some would have kept their children home that Friday. This was not the chief's call; the school superintendent made that decision.

Recommendations

This case may not have escalated to a verbal threat had there been a greater awareness of the verbal bullying that Robert experienced. School faculty, staff, and administrators need to be aware of the culture of their school and notice when any student is being singled out for teasing or bullying from his or her peers. In their study of averted school shootings, Daniels, Volungis, et al. (2010) found that an important deterrent to misbehavior, including bullying, is to maintain a watchful presence throughout the school, especially during movement times.

Second, schools should develop a culture of respect wherein students are treated with dignity by school personnel and learn to treat others in the same manner (Daniels, Volungis, et al. 2010). These efforts seem to decrease teasing and bullying.

A third recommendation is for schools to develop an environment that will help to break the code of silence. In this case, none of the four witnesses reported Robert's threat to their teacher or anyone else in the school. Perhaps they did not believe Robert was serious, or perhaps they did not know whom to tell. Either way, schools can open lines of communication by building positive relationships with all students and expressing the importance of reporting their concerns to a trusted adult. These efforts also include making a distinction between "snitching" (which is reporting to get somebody in trouble) and reporting a concern (which is intended to help others).

Figure 1. Averted school violence incidents in reports analyzed from Police Foundation database (n=51)

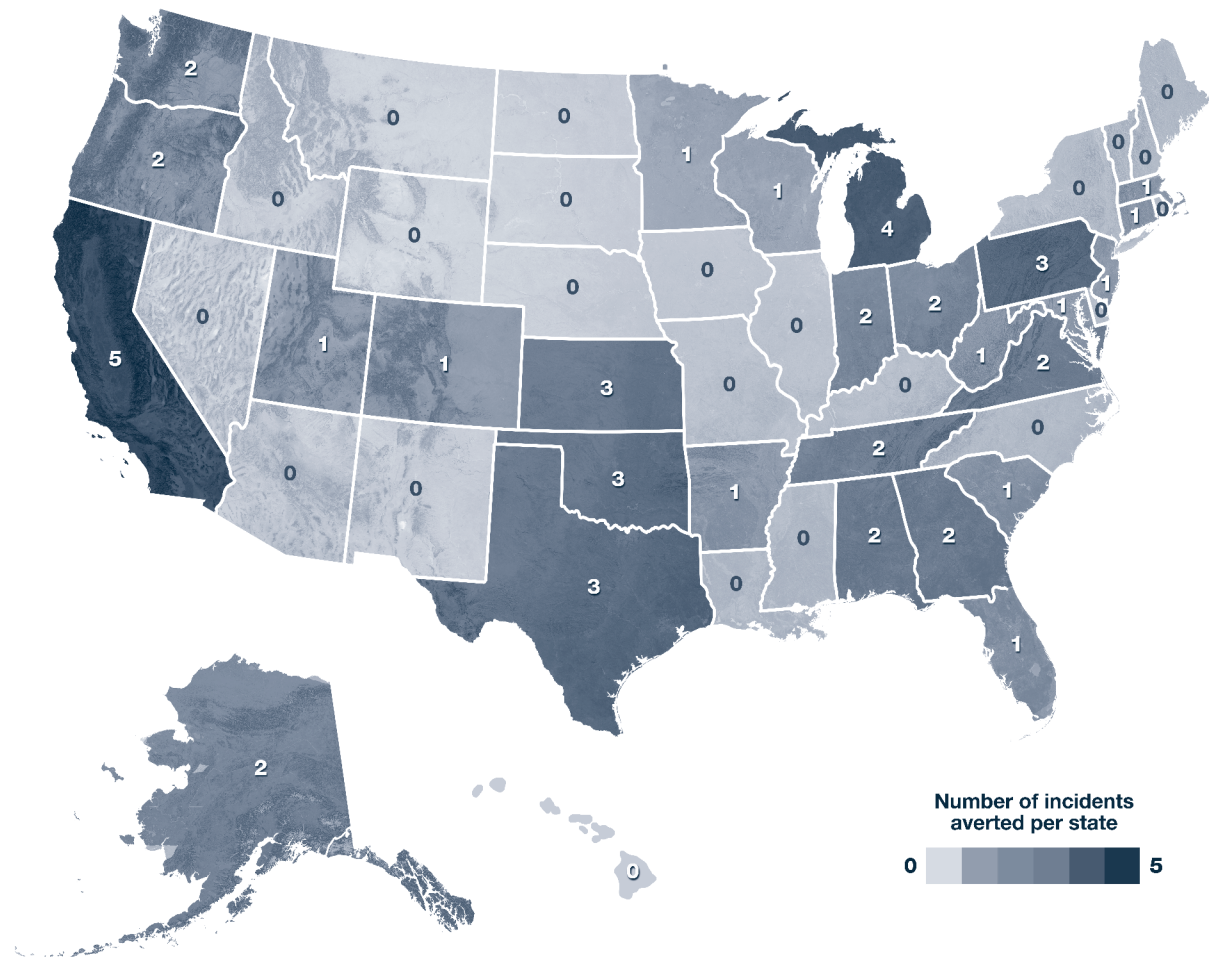
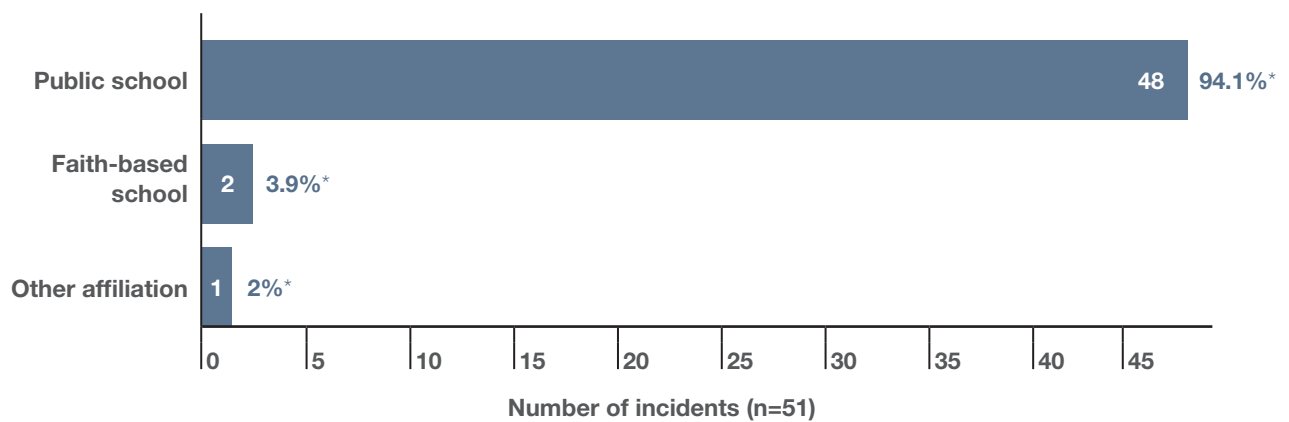


Figure 2. Types of schools where violent incidents were averted (n=51)



* Percentages may not add up exactly to 100 because of rounding.

Data Analyses

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL ANALYSES WERE CONDUCTED on the 51 cases that had been entered into the database as of January 2018. Analysis begins with basic information about each case, followed by descriptions of the schools at which the events were averted, an examination of how the plots were discovered, and what actions were taken to avert violence in schools.

Basic information

The information used to develop most (49, or 96.1%) of the 51 reports on averted incidents analyzed for this publication was gleaned by Police Foundation staff and project subject matter experts from open sources including news reports, websites of the involved schools, *Campus Safety* magazine, and court documents. Two of the 51 reports (3.9%) were entered by a law enforcement officer and a school administrator directly involved in the incidents of averted violence.

School Information

As shown in figure 1 on page 6, averted school shootings analyzed for this publication occurred in 27 states throughout the United States. Fourteen states had more than one averted incident (California, 5; Michigan, 4; Kansas, 3; Oklahoma, 3; Pennsylvania, 3; Texas, 3; Alabama, 2; Georgia, 2; Indiana, 2; Ohio, 2; Oregon, 2; Tennessee, 2; Virginia, 2; and Washington, 2). Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, South Carolina, Utah, Wisconsin, and West Virginia each had one averted incident.

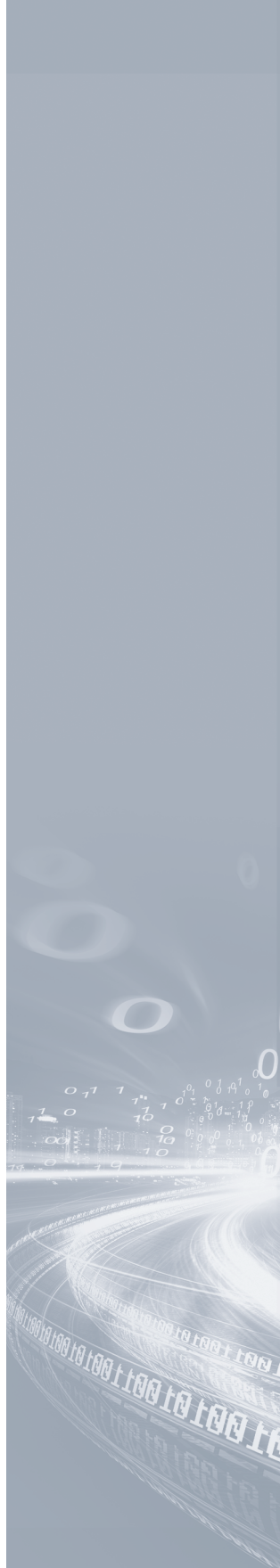


Figure 3. Education level of schools where violent incidents were averted (n=51)

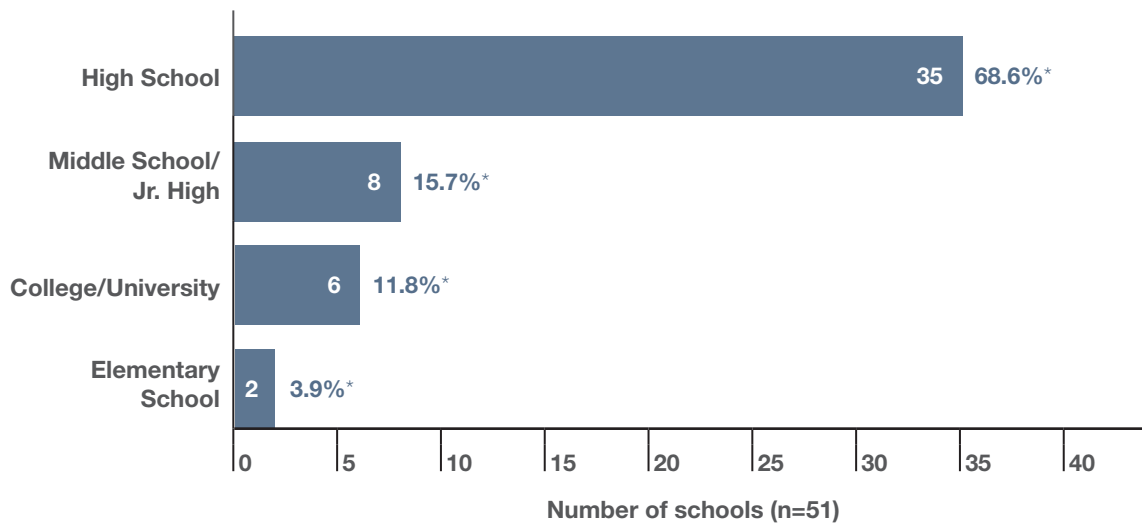
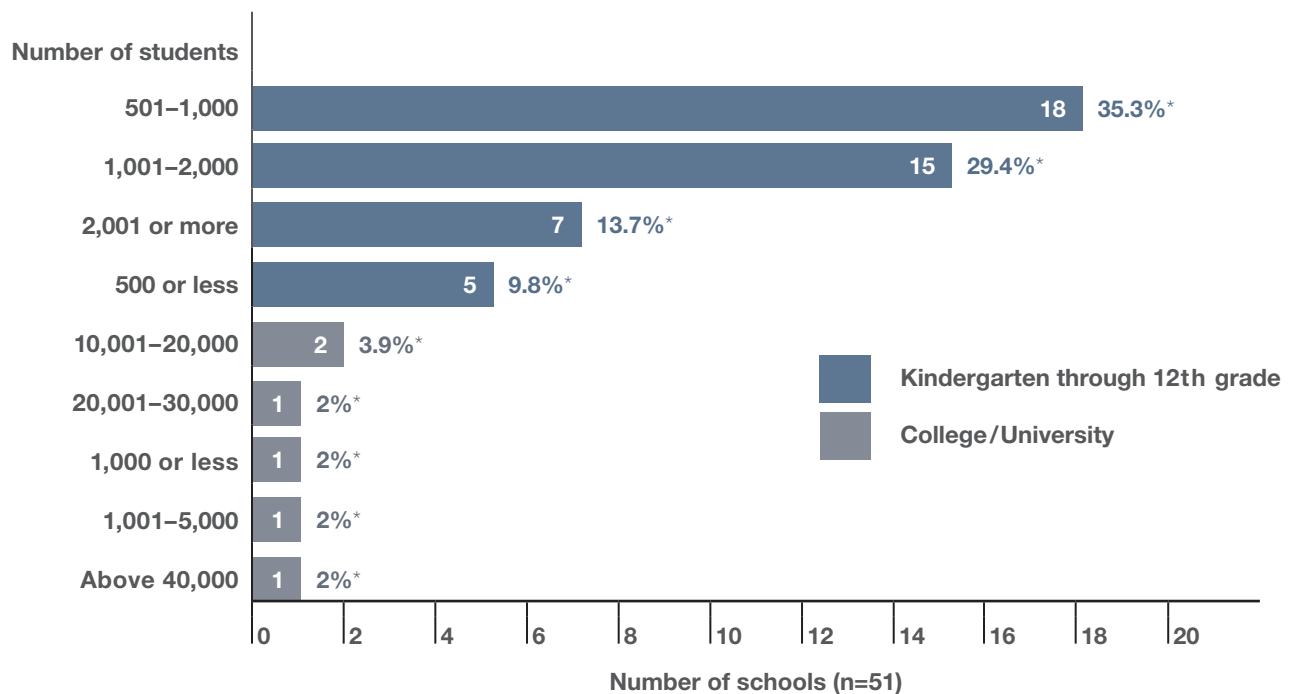


Figure 4. Size of student body at schools where violent incidents were averted (n=51)



* Percentages may not add up exactly to 100 because of rounding.

As shown in figure 2 on page 6, of the 51 averted school attacks, 48 or 94.1% occurred in public schools while just two attacks (3.9%) were averted at a faith-based school and one attack (2.0%) was averted at a charter school. Furthermore, attacks were most frequently averted at high schools in the sample (68.6%), as shown in figure 3.

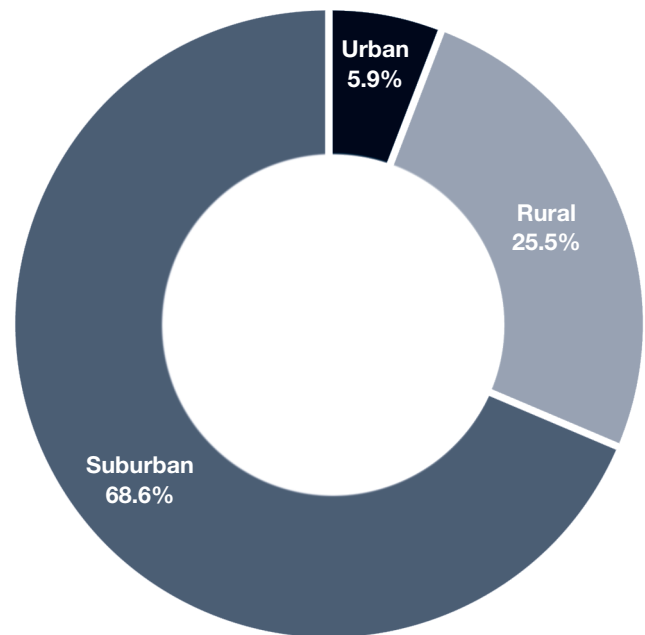
Figures 4 and 5 present numbers and percentages for the size of the school and the community population classification in which each school was located.

Figures 2 through 5 suggest that the model averted school shooting from the ASV sample of incidents occurs at a public high school with a student body between 501 and 2000 in a suburban community. However, these figures also point out that an averted school shooting can occur anywhere and at any grade level (between elementary school and a college or university).

Counselors

We asked about the presence of one or more counselors at the school. Most schools did have a counselor at the time of the averted shooting. Of the 35 K-12 schools in the sample, all either had a counselor (30, 85.7%) or it was not reported or unknown (5, 16.7%).

Figure 5. Population classification of communities where incidents of school violence were averted (n=51)



Security systems

The schools' security measures were assessed. Table 1 presents each area that was queried and the number of schools at which each was reported. As shown in table 1, most schools (58.8%) have a security officer or a police officer at the school as the primary security measure. Interestingly, few schools reported limiting access to the building or school grounds. Also of note, following Columbine many security experts recommended metal detectors, which many schools invested in—but none of the schools in this database had a metal detector.

When “Other” was chosen, respondents were asked to indicate what security measures they took at their school that were not included in the provided checklist. At one school, the respondent described a two-prong security system, consisting of lockdowns and a “secure mode.” In this person’s words:

Lockdown. “Staff is trained to gather students into the nearest locked classroom and wait for direction. Law enforcement officials are trained to enter the school building to assist with the crisis at hand, and members of the fire department are skilled in securing the perimeter and assisting with people who may be trying to enter the premises. If a critical incident were to occur, parents would be provided with information using our emergency phone system.”

Secure mode. “All of the exterior and interior doors are locked, visitors are restricted from entering the building, and children may not leave the classroom unless accompanied by an adult. Otherwise, school proceeds as normal until the incident is resolved. Typically, a Secure Mode protocol is the level of security that is most often rehearsed.”

Table 1. Security measures at schools where incidents of school violence were averted*

Security measure	ASV schools where measure was used (N)	ASV schools where measure was used (%)
Security officers or police officers at or in school	30	58.8
Security cameras used to monitor the school	14	27.4
Controlled access to buildings during school hours	9	17.6
Visitors required to sign in	8	15.7
Controlled access to grounds during school hours	7	13.7
Visitors required to wear badges or ID	7	13.7
Other	6	11.8
School staff monitoring hallways	6	11.8
Locked entrance or exit doors	5	9.8
Locker checks	5	9.8
Teachers and staff required to wear badges or ID	2	3.9
School police department	1	2.0
Visitors must be escorted into the building	1	2.0
Behavior threat assessment team	0	0.0
Blue Light college security systems	0	0.0
Students required to go through metal detectors	0	0.0

*Schools could report more than one type of security measure.

Other responses for the “Other” category for security systems included an emergency alert system with escorts and emergency phones, a computerized lockdown system, and occasional bomb- and drug-sniffing dogs. In one school, there is a security officer assigned to the whole district, so at any given time the officer may be absent from the reporting school. Finally, although one respondent checked the “Security officers or police officers at or in school,” that respondent also wrote in “Other:” “Security officers or police officers at or in school.”

Response training

Response training protocols were also assessed, even though this information was not available for most of the cases in the database. Overall, we have data that five schools practice lockdown drills, four practice active shooter scenarios, and three have all-hazards drills.

Two reported evacuation drills, and five reported “other” response training. These included covering the school’s crisis and emergency plans and practice with the school’s emergency notification system. One

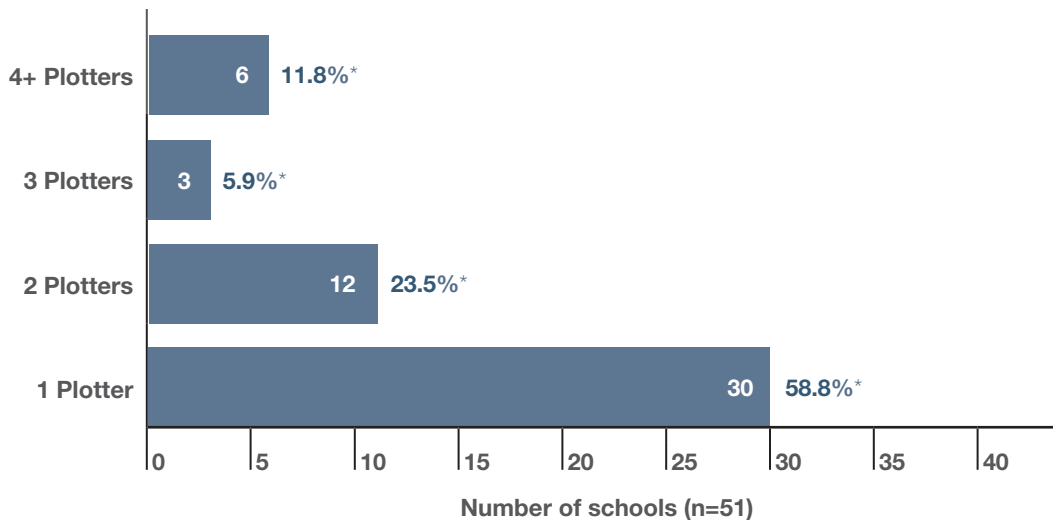
individual reported having a “comprehensive emergency operations plan that addresses emergency mitigation and prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery procedures relevant to natural and human-caused disasters.”

Plotter information

This section addresses information about lone or primary plotters. Secondary and other plotter information is not included because of low sample sizes. Also, it is presumed that the primary plotter in most cases was the “mastermind” of the plot, although we do not have clear data to support this. Plotter information includes the sex and age of the plotters, the number of plotters involved in the plot, and the race or ethnicity of each. The plotter’s relationship to the school was assessed as well as the plotter’s academic standing and performance. We also assessed prior disciplinary actions and prior offenses. Because “leakage”³ is a common characteristic of school shooters (O’Toole 2000), we assessed for any pre-event warning signs and behaviors.

Plotted attacks ranged from one plotter (30, 58.8%) to four or more plotters (6, 11.8%). Figure 6 represents these data.

Figure 6. Average number of victims by education level of school in completed attacks (n=51)



* Percentages may not add up exactly to 100 because of rounding.

3. “Leakage” means disclosing violent intentions to other people.

Figure 7 shows plotters' demographic information. Most of the plotters were male (48, 94.1%), although three (5.9%) were female. Ages ranged from 12 to 47, with an average of 18.1 years.

Information about the race or ethnicity of the primary plotters was reported for 22 cases (43.1%). Of these, the majority were Caucasian – Non-Hispanic (n19, 86.4%), with one each (4.5%) Black/African American, Asian/Asian American, and Latinx. The race or ethnicity of the remaining individuals was either unknown or not reported.

As shown in figure 8, most of the plotted attacks were from current students at the school (39, 76.5%). Seven would-be attackers (13.7%) were former students, and five (9.8%) were categorized as "Other affiliation."

Table 2 on page 13 shows the grade level of the would-be attackers who were currently affiliated with the school at the time of the incident (n=39).

Academic performance was reported for only five plotters—two college undergraduates, one high school senior, one high school freshman, and one non-student. Of these, three (one of the undergraduates, the non-student, and the high school senior)

had a history of poor academic performance, and the remaining two students had a history of above average academic performance. Only one plotter was known to have a history of disciplinary problems at school. In most cases the student's academic history was unknown.

Nine plotters were known by law enforcement prior to the plot discovery. In some cases, there had been a prior arrest, and in others, the plotter was part of an abuse investigation.

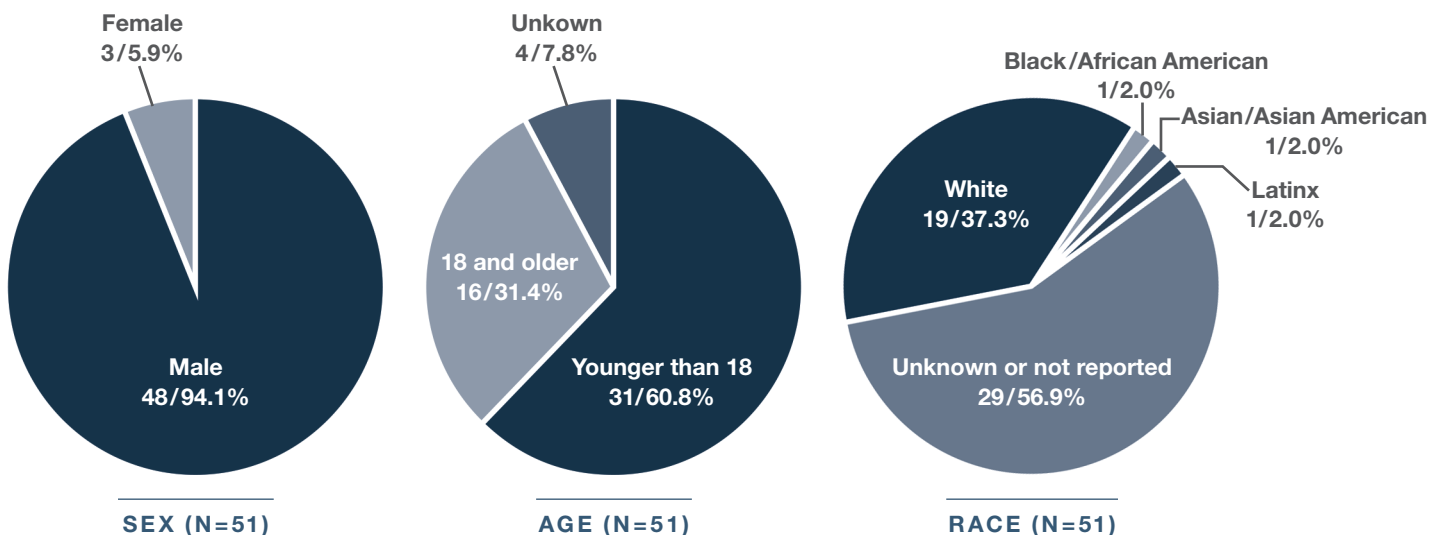
Warning signs

We also gathered information about behaviors or warning signs that may have appeared prior to the plotted attack those signs can include one or more of the following:

- Impaired social/emotional functioning
- Social withdrawal
- Depressed mood
- Easily enraged
- Hypersensitivity to criticism

The most common warning signs were depressed mood and social withdrawal.

Figure 7. Demographics of plotters of averted school violence incidents

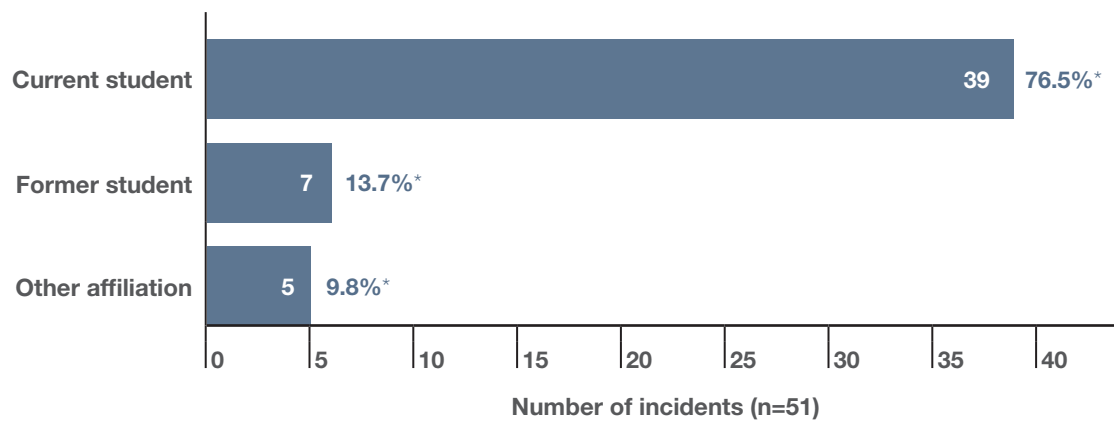


* Percentages may not add up exactly to 100 because of rounding.

Table 2. Grade level of current students plotting averted incidents of school violence (n=39)

Grade level	AVS plotters currently affiliated with target schools (N)
Grade 10	7
Grade 11	7
Grade 8	6
Grade 12	6
Unknown	6
Grade 9	4
Undergraduate	2
Grade 7	1

Figure 8. School affiliation of plotters of averted incidents of school violence (n=51)



Event information

Considerable data were gathered about each event, including the event narrative and the plotter's plans for the attack. The plotter's pre-attack behavior was assessed, as was information about how the plot was discovered and how it was foiled. We also assessed the types of weapons the plotter intended to use and how he or she acquired or planned to acquire them.

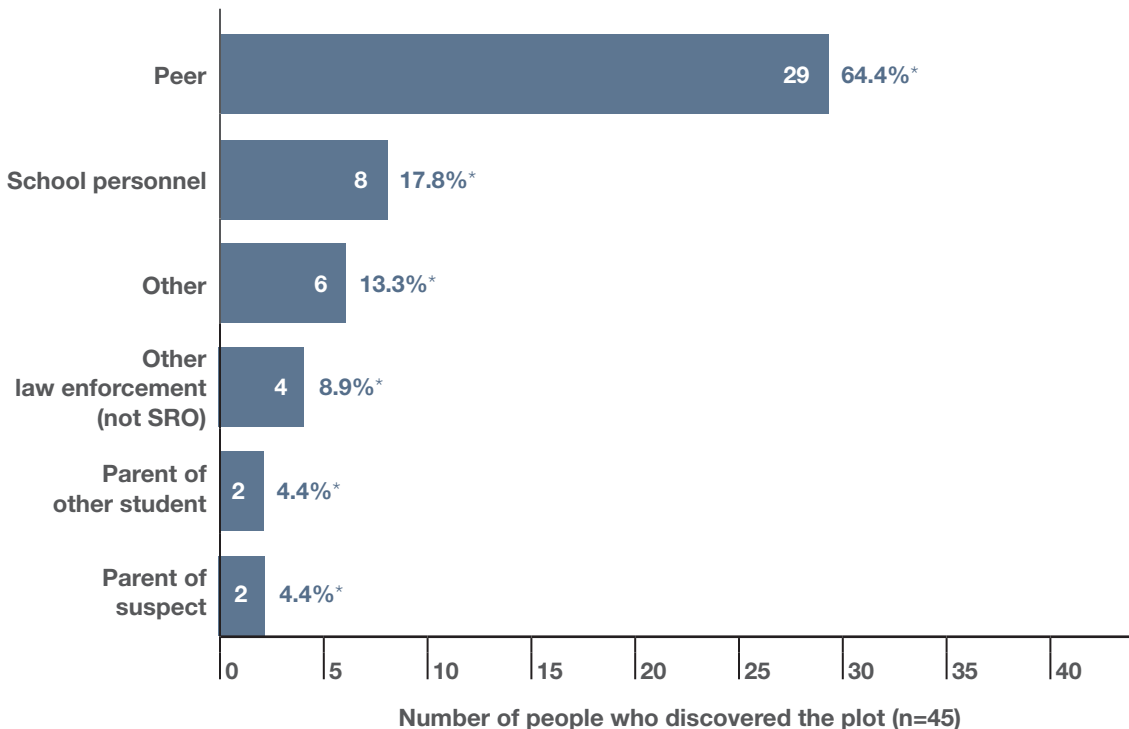
Time between plot discovery and arrest

In most cases we know the date on which the plot was discovered and the arrest date of the plotter(s). The actual arrest day was unknown in 25 (49%) of the cases. However, of the remaining 26 cases, most (16, 61.5%) plotters were arrested the same day the plot was discovered.

Who discovered the plot

As shown in figure 9, a variety of people discovered the school violence plots. Most commonly, peers discovered and reported the plot (29, 56.9%). In four cases, the plot was discovered by other law enforcement officials (other than SROs; no plots were discovered by SROs), and school teachers discovered three plots. Two plots each were found by the following individuals: school counselors, school administrators, parents of the plotter, and parents of other students. Other school faculty and staff (a school bookkeeper) discovered one plot, and one plot was discovered by a neighbor of a plotter. Finally, one plot was discovered by a drug store employee (who developed photos of the plotter's arsenal), one by a gun store owner, and one by an unknown social media follower.

Figure 9. Who discovered the plot for averted incidents of school violence (n=45)



The person that discovered the plot was unknown in six of 51 cases. For the cases in which this information was known (n=45), sometimes multiple people discovered a single plot.

* Percentages may not add up exactly to 100 because of rounding.

Plot discovery

Plots were discovered in numerous ways. Most commonly, the plotter told somebody who reported the information to authorities, which occurred in 17 cases.⁴ In 10 cases, the plotter made his or her intentions known on social media, and in five cases, somebody overheard the plotter talking about his or her plans. In four cases each, the plotter wrote about the plans and somebody found a note, and the person was seen carrying weapons on school property. In two cases, parents discovered that their son had stolen firearms from their house, and in two cases the would-be attacker was seen acting suspiciously. One plot was discovered when the perpetrator began shooting on school property (specifically, he fired rounds into the school gym floor). One each of the following led to the discovery of plots:

- Parents found bomb-making supplies their son had ordered online.
- The plotter took photos of his arsenal and a concerned photo developer called police.
- The plotter displayed erratic behavior and violated a prohibition against being on school grounds.
- Police searched a stolen vehicle and found weapons and directions to a college campus.
- The plotter pulled into the school parking lot and said concerning things to school staff in the parking lot, and they saw weapons in his car.
- The plotter took a classroom hostage.
- The plotter was heard detonating pipe bombs.
- The plotter was heard loading a firearm in the school bathroom.
- The plotter called 911 on himself.

How the attack was averted

We asked about how the planned attack was averted. In 19 cases violent threats were reported, and in nine cases social media posts were reported. In six cases, the plotter was tackled or physically restrained, and five plotters were talked out of the attacks. In addition, the “Other” category was selected for 15 cases, and responses were entered to describe the circumstances surrounding the averting of the plot. The following were reported:

- The plotter was arrested after parents reported evidence of impending attack.
- Photos raised concerns.
- The plotter was arrested for other crimes.
- The plotter was arrested after being questioned by police about an unrelated offense.
- School officials heard rumors about plans for violence and reported them to police.
- The plotter had written plans that were reported.
- A teacher reported a student to police after reading a journal.
- The plotter was arrested before he could do any harm (3 students told teacher about the gun, teacher told principal, principal searched locker and found gun).
- The plotter was arrested before he could get on campus.
- The plotter was arrested by police (two cases).
- The plotter was taken into the school office for a meeting with his parents and two law enforcement officers, who found the guns.

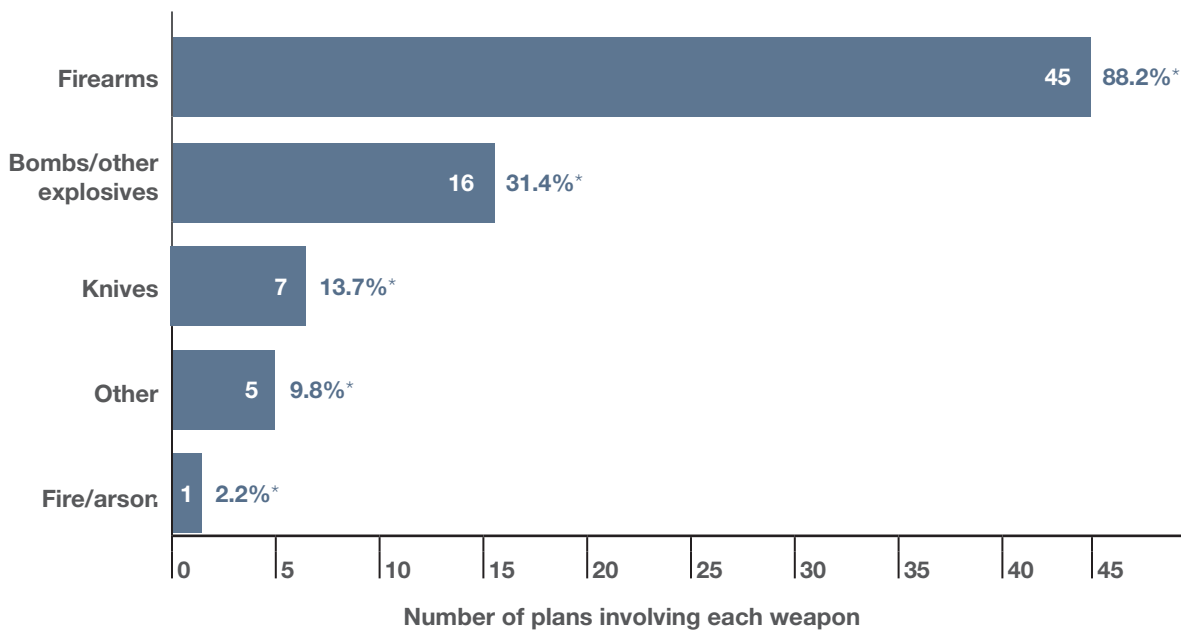
4. In the “plot discovery” and “how the attack was averted” sections, we do not provide percentages, because many plots were discovered or averted in multiple ways by multiple people. Plot discovery was unknown in six cases.

Weapons

We assessed the types of weapons the plotters had planned to use. These included firearms, knives, bombs and explosive devices, fire, and other. The most common intended weapons were firearms (45, 88.2%). Twenty-three plotters (45.1%) had planned to use more than one type of weapon. Other weapons that were to be used in the attack included bombs or other explosive devices (16, 31.4%), knives

(7, 13.7%), fire (1, 2.2%), and other (5, 9.8%). This last category of weapons, “Other,” included propane tanks and gasoline attached to the plotter’s truck, a machete, scissors, and a sword, and one plotter planned to use both a chainsaw and a sword. Because many plotters planned to use multiple weapons, figure 10 presents planned weapons by plotter.

Figure 10. Weapons intended to be used by plotters of averted incidents of school violence (n=51)



* Percentages may not add up because many plotters planned to use more than one type of weapon.

Findings

ACROSS THE 51 CASES, a number of findings were identified. In this section, we categorize these by constituent: students, parents, school personnel, and the police.

Students

Findings regarding students were identified for 31 cases, as shown in table 3.

- The main lesson learned about students is that most school attacks are averted because students report their concerns about another student's threat, plot, or other concerning behavior.
- Second, the primary reason students gave for not reporting their concerns about another student was that they did not take the threat seriously.
- Two plotters reported that their plot/threat was (1) a joke or (2) a work of fiction. Students should not joke or write about killing others.
- Student responses to the attacks were appropriate. When students heard shots fired they ran for cover. In a classroom captive-taking event, students remained calm, thereby not escalating the captive-taker's emotions. Students should not try to subdue an active shooter.
- One plotter reported that he had been bullied by other students.

Table 3. Findings—students (n=21)

Finding	Number of cases* (% of cases)
1. Student reports concern	21 (67.7%)
2. No student reports concern	4 (12.9%)
3. Plotter minimizes the threat	2 (6.4%)
4. Student responds to attack	2 (6.4%)

* The totals represented sum to 32 because in one lesson learned about students, an initial group of students did not report the threats, and later another student did.

- In several cases the primary plotter attempted to recruit others to aid in the attack. When one or more recruits reported this to another, it was included in the first lesson learned (most school attacks are averted because students speak up). In one case, it was only reported that others were recruited. When a student attempts to recruit one or more additional students to help with the attack, these prospective recruits must report the overture to a trusted adult.
- There were an additional two lessons learned, each revealed in one case. (1) The plotter alleged that he was bullied, although others denied this; and (2) the plotter attempted to recruit others (see previous bullet point).

Parents

Findings related to parents were identified in 28 cases. Of these, 21 cases accounted for the four main lessons learned, as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Findings—parents

Finding	Number of cases (% of cases)
1. Other parents report	8 (28.6%)
2. Plotter's parents report	7 (25.0%)
3. Plotter's parents were unaware	4 (14.3%)
4. Plotter stole parent's gun	2 (7.1%)

- Several attacks were averted because parents of other students reported or encouraged their children to report a threat, plot, or concerning behavior.
- In seven cases, the plotter's parents reported their concerns to authorities. When parents discover their child's threat, plot, or concerning behavior, they must notify the authorities and seek help for their child.

- In four cases, parents of the plotters were unaware of the plot, threat, or concerning behavior. In one of these, the mother bought her son chemicals to make bombs because he told her he was going to build a rocket.
- In two cases, the plotters stole one or more guns from parents or other family members.

There were an additional six lessons identified, each only once: (1) The plotters were thought to come from neglectful homes; (2) parents were attempting to get help for their troubled daughter; (3) parents were upset that following the interruption of an attack the school did not immediately notify them; (4) the plotter attempted to steal his mother's gun but was unable to do so because it was locked in a safe; (5) it was unknown if the plotter got his guns from home; and (6) the plotter's parents refused to cooperate with the police investigation.

Schools

Findings that pertain to schools were identified in 37 cases. The most common lessons learned were identified in 33 cases, as shown in table 5.

Table 5. Findings—schools

Lesson learned	Number of cases (% of cases)
1. Immediate response	13 (35.1%)
2. Alert personnel, take threats seriously	7 (18.9%)
3. Bullying	4 (10.8%)
4. Communications	3 (8.1%)
5. Relationships	2 (5.4%)
6. Training	2 (5.4%)
4. Remaining calm	2 (5.4%)

- The most common lesson learned was that when school personnel became aware of a threat or situation, they acted immediately.
- Several attacks were averted because alert school personnel took rumors seriously and then acted on them.
- In four cases, there was reportedly bullying at the school. When bullying is brought to the attention of school personnel, they must act immediately and effectively.
- In three cases communications were described. In two, the schools had a well-functioning communications system. In the third, the school failed to dispel rumors about another potential plotter. Schools must have clear and effective communications plans and follow them.
- In two cases, it was stressed that administrators and counselors should develop trusting relationships with students so they will report rumors or concerns.
- Training for crises, including active shooters, helped to avert two attacks.
- In two captive-taking incidents, the teacher and administrator remained calm so as not to escalate the situation.

There were an additional five lessons learned, each occurring once. (1) Cooperation between the school and the police; (2) one plotter was tackled by a teacher and held until police arrived; (3) the plotter had been using the school's computer to shop for a rifle; (4) schools may come under attack from outside of the building, such as in a parking lot; and (5) in one case there was a disconnect between the school's behavioral intervention team and staff.

Police

Police findings were identified in 37 cases. Of these, 34 cases accounted for the four main lessons learned, as shown in table 6.

Table 6. Findings—police

Lesson learned	Number of cases (% of cases)
1. Immediate response	24 (64.9%)
2. Taking threat seriously	4 (10.8%)
3. Coordination with others	3 (8.1%)
4. Conducted an investigation	3 (8.1%)

- Most frequently, when police became aware of the threat they acted immediately.
- Police, including SROs, took rumors seriously.
- In several instances, there were multiple jurisdictions involved, or others with specialties were called. Police may need to coordinate with other local, state, or federal agencies.
- When details were not clear, the police conducted a thorough investigation before making arrests. In one case, they had been investigating small bomb explosions for months, which turned out to be the plotter's bomb-making trial and error.

In addition, one each of five other findings were identified: (1) Interviewed the plotter; (2) removed the plotter from the school and transported him for a psychiatric evaluation; (3) alert police officers noticed unusual behavior; (4) during a classroom barricaded captive-taking, the police escorted a third-party intermediary to the classroom; and (5) when the plotter was not found, police issued a warrant for his arrest.



Recommendations

BETWEEN THE CASE STUDY AND THE STATISTICAL ANALYSES, the following recommendations for police officers, law enforcement administrators, and school administrator are offered.

Preparation

In research and interviews with law enforcement, preparation for possible school-based crises is essential to averted and mitigating violence. Law enforcement preparation includes working closely with the school system and having plans in place for school emergencies. Preparation also includes procedures for police involvement, such as the command struck when first responders arrive and the roles and responsibilities of school administrators and reunification protocols.

Develop relationships

Relationships need to be established between law enforcement and school personnel, including “silent staff” such as custodians and cafeteria employees. Relationship building should include ongoing engagement and training to prepare for emergency response situations.

In addition to relationships among professionals, it is also important for school personnel and specifically school-based police officers to establish positive relationships with students, creating a positive school climate with trust and respect so students will feel comfortable reporting concerns about a possible threat.

Recommendations for improved school safety

- Preparation
- Develop relationships among staff, law enforcement, and students
- Break the “code of silence”
- Know your school’s culture
- Know the physical facilities of your school
- Take all reports seriously
- Assume nothing about a student or event
- There is no clear profile of a school shooter

Break the “code of silence”

An important factor in breaking the code of silence is to develop trusting relationships with all students. This relationship building can be facilitated when schools develop a culture of respect wherein students are treated with dignity by school personnel and learn to treat others in the same manner. Students who feel comfortable with a trusted adult are more likely to report their concerns to that adult when they become aware of threats or rumors.

Know the school’s culture

School faculty, staff, and administrators need to be aware of the culture of their school and notice when any student is being singled out for teasing or bullying from his or her peers. It is imperative that when school personnel become aware of mistreatment, they act appropriately, using best practices for intervening in bullying and other incidents. If a school’s culture is not positive, the school must take steps to change it.

Know the physical facilities

This recommendation is for law enforcement and emergency managers. Preparation and training must include familiarity with the layout of all schools in the agency’s jurisdiction. Hardware such as cameras and policies such as controlled access during school hours should be maintained and updated with collaboration from school administration. In addition, law enforcement should work with schools on safety measures such as visitor access; parking rules for staff, students, and family members; and procedures for after-school events like dances and sports events.

Take all reports seriously

Every report of a threat or potential for harm must be acted upon as if it is a serious and credible threat. There may be some false negatives (acting as if a threat is credible when it is not). However, these should not deter school personnel and law enforcement from acting on every threat. As the police chief in the case study reported earlier noted, “err on the side of caution.”

Assume nothing

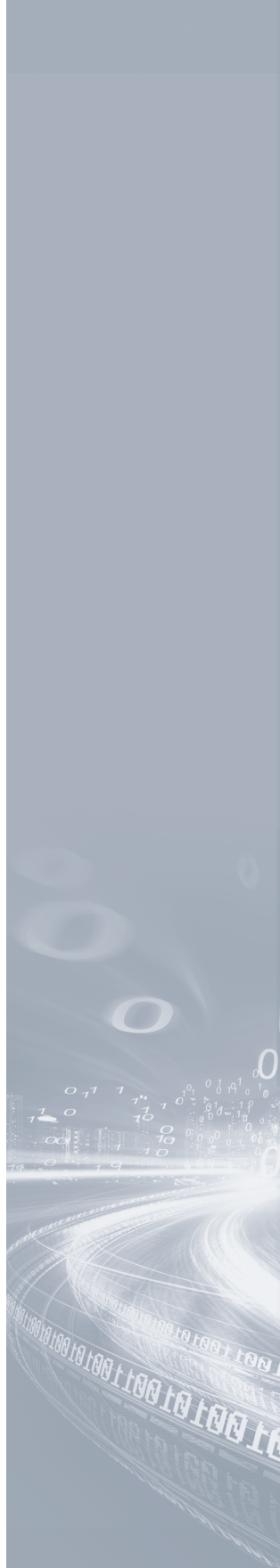
Lethal school violence is not just an inner-city problem. Never assume that a school attack won’t occur in your small, tight-knit community. As shown by the data in this report, attacks can be planned and carried out at any type of school, for any school level, and in any location.

There is no profile

Perpetrator demographics of school shooters (O’Toole 2000; Vossekuil et al. 2004) show that there is no one type of school shooter. Although the majority are young White men, school shooters have been female and members of various ethnic minority populations. Likewise, the demographics presented in the “Plotter information” section on page 11 reveal that there is no profile of a potential school shooter. Therefore, do not discredit any threat because the student does not fit a stereotypical mold.

Conclusion

THE POLICE FOUNDATION'S AVERTED SCHOOL VIOLENCE DATABASE is the first nationwide repository of its kind. The desired outcome of the database is that eventually every averted and completed school attack will be entered by an individual (or individuals) who was involved with the attack prevention or response. These individuals can include law enforcement officers, SROs, school personnel, mental health professionals, and other relevant persons. As the database expands and is populated with greater detail than what can be gathered primarily from open sources, future research can better point to methods that work in averting deadly attacks.



References

- Brown, Ryan P., Lindsey L. Osterman, and Collin D. Barnes. 2009. "School Violence and the Culture of Honor." *Psychological Science* 20(11): 1400–1405.
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02456.x>.
- Daniels, Jeffrey A., Mary C. Bradley, Daniel P. Cramer, Amy J. Winkler, Kisha Kinebrew, and Deleska Crockett. 2007. "The Successful Resolution of Armed Hostage/Barricade Events in Schools: A Qualitative Analysis." *Psychology in the Schools* 44(6): 601–613.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/pits.20250>.
- Daniels, Jeffrey A., Ilene Buck, Susan Croxall, Julia Gruber, Peter Kime, and Heidi Govert. 2007. "A Content Analysis of News Reports of Averted School Rampages." *Journal of School Violence* 6(1): 83–99.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J202v06n01_06.
- Daniels, Jeffrey A., Adam Volungis, Erin Pshenishny, Punita Gandhi, Amy Winkler, Daniel P. Cramer, and Mary C. Bradley. 2010. "A Qualitative Investigation of Averted School Shooting Rampages." *The Counseling Psychologist* 38(1): 69–95.
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0011000009344774>.
- Flores de Apodaca, R., Lauren M. Brighton, Ashley N. Perkins, Kiana N. Jackson, and Jessica R. Steege. 2012. "Characteristics of Schools in which Fatal Shootings Occur." *Psychological Reports* 110(2): 363–377.
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2466/13.16.PR0.110.2.363-377>.
- Langman, Peter. 2009. "Rampage School Shooters: A Typology." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 14(1): 79–86.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1359178908000839>.
- . 2013. "Thirty-five Rampage School Shooters: Trends, Patterns, and Typology." In Nils Böckler, Thorsten Seeger, Peter Sitzler, and Wilhelm Heitmeyer (eds.), *School Shootings: International Research, Case Studies, and Concepts for Prevention*, 131–156. New York: Springer.
- Levin, Jack, and Eric Madfis. 2009. "Mass Murder at School and Cumulative Strain: A Sequential Model." *American Behavioral Scientist* 52(9): 1227–1245.
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002764209332543>.
- Madfis, Eric. 2014. "Averting School Rampage: Student Intervention amid a Persistent Code of Silence." *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 12(3): 229–249.
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1541204013497768>.
- Newman, Katherine S., Cybelle Fox, David J. Harding, Jal Mehta, and Wendy Roth. 2004. *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*. New York: Basic Books.
- O'Toole, Mary Ellen. 2000. *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*. Quantico, VA: FBI Academy.
<https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/stats-services-publications-school-shooter-school-shooter/view>.

Police Foundation. 2018. "Averted School Violence." Accessed July 5, 2018. <https://www.asvnearmiss.org/>.

—. 2018b. "Reports." Averted School Violence. Accessed July 5, 2018. <https://www.asvnearmiss.org/reports/>.

Vossekuil, Bryan, Robert A. Fein, Marisa Reddy, Randy Borum, and William Modzeleski. 2004. *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>.

About the Police Foundation

The **Police Foundation** is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing innovation and science in policing. As the country's oldest police research organization, the Police Foundation has learned that police practices should be based on scientific evidence about what works best, the paradigm of evidence-based policing.

Established in 1970, the foundation has conducted seminal research in police behavior, policy, and procedure and works to transfer to local agencies the

best new information about practices for dealing effectively with a range of important police operational and administrative concerns. Motivating all of the foundation's efforts is the goal of efficient, humane policing that operates within the framework of democratic principles and the highest ideals of the nation.

To learn more, visit the Police Foundation online at www.policefoundation.org.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide

training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, round tables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, www.cops.usdoj.gov. This website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.

The Police Foundation, in collaboration with the COPS Office, implemented the Averted School Violence (ASV) database to provide a platform for sharing information about averted incidents of violence in institutions of elementary, secondary, and higher education. The ASV project defines an incident of averted school violence as a violent attack planned with or without the use of a firearm that was prevented before any injury or loss of life occurred. This preliminary report analyzes 51 averted incidents of school violence selected from the ASV database to begin to improve our understanding of averted school attacks. The report begins with a case study of one averted attack and then details findings on the 51 averted incidents in the study. It concludes with recommendations for law enforcement and school administration to improve school safety. A companion report (Langman and Straub 2018) compares these 51 averted attacks with 51 completed attacks and presents findings on the similarities and differences.



COPS

Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
145 N Street NE
Washington, DC 20530

To obtain details on COPS Office programs, call
the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

Visit the COPS Office online at www.cops.usdoj.gov



Police Foundation
1201 Connecticut Ave NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036

Visit the Police Foundation online
at www.policefoundation.org