

Targeted Violence Averted

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CASE STUDIES



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
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Letter from the Director of the COPS Office

Colleagues:

It is essential that students in post-secondary education have safe campuses for class attendance, social activities, and dormitory housing. School administration, law enforcement agencies, and student groups are diligently working to improve campus safety. To support the work of these stakeholder groups, the Averted School Violence (ASV) database, in collaboration with the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA), collects and analyzes information about averted violence events on college campuses.

The National Police Foundation created the ASV database in 2015 with COPS Office funding. The database is a platform for law enforcement, campus administration, stakeholders, and students to share information about averted violence incidents and lessons learned with the goal of mitigating and preventing future injuries and fatalities in educational institutions. It includes accounts of past incidents—starting with Columbine High School (1999)—and catalogs contemporaneous averted incidents as reported and collected via media. The COPS Office awarded funding to the IACLEA to promote engagement and data collection with post-secondary education institutions. Through IACLEA's work, the ASV database has expanded collection and documentation of averted violence reports on college and university campuses.

This report documents representative case studies of incidents in which targeted violence was thwarted by the actions of college students, school administrators and faculty, campus police, and other stakeholders. The examination of these case studies and the lessons learned from them demonstrates progress toward increased safety at colleges and universities. In addition, a companion publication entitled *School Resource Officers: Averted School Violence Special Report* presents information on K–12 averted violence incidents and the role school resource officers (SRO) assume in supporting student safety.

I urge campus law enforcement professionals 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 the National 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 written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "K".

Phil Keith

Director

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Letter from the Executive Director of IACLEA

Dear campus public safety colleagues,

As you are keenly aware, law enforcement and public safety agencies across the nation are facing unprecedented challenges simultaneously. A global pandemic, social unrest, and a concerted push to reimagine policing in the United States require us to step back and genuinely listen and learn from those most directly affected by our actions to serve and protect campus communities.

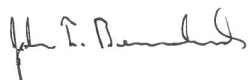
We already know that students will return to campuses that look and feel different than when they left. We are being told that our students may well bring with them heightened anxieties and a worsening of preexisting mental and behavioral health challenges that have been exacerbated by the need for social distancing. Even as we face new budget constraints resulting from the novel coronavirus and the reallocation of funds to non-law enforcement purposes, we must prepare our agencies and campus communities to be more aware than ever of those who may be struggling. What is more, systems must be in place by which information can be shared regarding concerning behavior and to provide appropriate support to our students.

Mass casualty attacks on college and university campuses are low-frequency but high-impact events that resonate down through the decades, often creating a cascade of fear. And, as we well know, fearful climates are hardly ideal for learning. There is encouraging news, however. The national Averted School Violence (ASV) database clearly illustrates the actions we can take in partnership with our campus communities to prevent targeted school violence. The cases in the ASV database demonstrate that “See Something, Say Something” is an essential violence prevention tool. Further, when we educate our campus communities about indicators of potential self-harm or targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior, we put ourselves in a strong position to (1) identify, (2) communicate, and (3) act to intervene with students and others who may be on the pathway to violence.

This special report will serve as a useful tool to guide your policy, procurement, and training decisions as well as your daily operations. I encourage your use of the campus cases in the ASV database as real-life scenarios for building tabletop exercises to train your staff and behavior threat assessment and management team.

The ASV database is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and is administered by the National Police Foundation. I am grateful for our partnership with the National Police Foundation and for the support provided by the COPS Office to IACLEA and the national campus public safety community to include the lessons learned from prevented violence at colleges and universities in the ASV database.

Stay safe!



John Bernhards

Executive Director

International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators

Introduction

On a hot August morning in 1966, an engineering student who was about to graduate took the elevator to the top floor of the Main Building tower at the University of Texas at Austin. He carried three rifles, one shotgun, three handguns, and a large quantity of ammunition. The sniper, who had killed his wife and mother the previous day, killed three people on the top floor of the tower, and then began shooting students and others below. Approximately an hour and a half later the shooting stopped when law enforcement officers confronted the sniper and eliminated the threat. A total of 17 people were killed and 31 wounded.

Inarguably, this was a watershed moment in our nation's history and in the evolution of campus public safety in the United States. This tragic event, coupled with civil unrest from coast to coast, was the genesis of a progression that continues today: Colleges and universities have made great strides in professionalizing their public safety services. In a growing number of cases this professionalization has involved moving from using nonsworn and unarmed campus security officers to employing full-service police departments with officers both sworn and nonsworn as well as armed. This is particularly true at public colleges and universities. (Reaves 2015)

Another watershed moment took place in April 2007, at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. This act of targeted school violence at Virginia Tech, also carried out by a university student, resulted in the deaths of 32 students and faculty members and injury to 23 others (17 by gunfire). And, just like the mass casualty attack in 1966, this catastrophic event led to numerous changes in how campus communities now address prevention and response to low frequency – high consequence incidents. Specifically, in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007, we witnessed an increase in the number of colleges and universities taking the following actions:

- Deploying emergency mass notification systems
- Creating behavior threat assessment and management teams
- Ensuring that campus public safety and law enforcement officers, administrators, faculty, and staff receive active shooter training

While these enhancements are necessary and commendable, two deal only with responding to major critical incidents.

Sadly, as a nation we have gotten very good at responding to these events. Increasingly, however, campus public safety professionals have turned their attention to the prevention of targeted school violence. In large part the impetus for this shift has flowed from tragedies perpetrated in K-12 school communities, such as Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012 and Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in 2018. Preventive strategies now being explored and implemented in both K-12 schools and colleges and universities include the following:

- Focusing on positive school climate and anti-bullying efforts
- Expanding access to mental health services
- Creating anonymous reporting systems
- Educating community members on indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence
- Promoting “See Something, Say Something” on campus and via social media
- Mandating the creation of behavior threat assessment and management teams, which build relationships and facilitate information sharing among campus officials, law enforcement, mental health providers, and other key campus safety stakeholders

“See Something, Say Something” is a national campaign based on the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI), which asks community members to report behavior identified as a possible indicator of terrorism-related suspicious activity such as unusual items or situations, persons attempting to elicit information, and unusual surveillance or observation. The campaign focuses on behavior, not the appearance of an individual. More information is available at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s website (<https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>).

These strategies are evidence-based. The U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education conducted a groundbreaking study of 37 incidents of targeted school violence that occurred from December 1974 through May 2000. The *Safe School Initiative* produced a number of findings that support the proposition that targeted school violence can be prevented. Key findings include the following:

- In 93 percent of the cases studied, the attackers had engaged in some behavior prior to the attack that caused others—school officials, parents, teachers, law enforcement, or other students—to be concerned.
- In 81 percent of the cases studied, at least one person had information that the attacker was thinking about or planning the school attack.
- In 59 percent of the cases studied, more than one person had information about the attack before it occurred.
- In the vast majority of cases (93 percent of the total cases studied), the person who knew was a peer—a friend, schoolmate, or sibling. (Vossekuil et al. 2004)

The Bystander Study was conducted by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education to identify the reasons why young people do not report their concerns about potential targeted school violence. (Pollack, Modzeleski, and Rooney 2008) Many of the identified impediments to reporting can be successfully addressed, at least in part, by the preventive strategies cited earlier.

Current research carried out by the National Police Foundation (2019) with funding from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) indicated that in approximately 60 percent of the cases reviewed in the national Averted School Violence (ASV) database, it was a peer who discovered and reported plots to commit targeted school violence. (Daniels 2019) This finding once again demonstrates the efficacy of strategies designed to increase bystander reporting of concerning behavior.

Our goal has been and continues to be zero casualties from school shootings. To achieve that goal, public safety and educational institutions have expended vast resources on target hardening, drills, and procedures designed to reduce law enforcement response time. These efforts will and should continue.

This report offers evidence that focusing our attention and resources on prevention can help us further in attaining the goal of zero school or campus shootings. To reach this goal it will be incumbent on all of us to identify best practices and success stories and to share lessons as widely as possible.

Background

In the aftermath of the Sandy Hook mass casualty school shooting in December 2012, Congress created the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative (CSSI) and appropriated \$75 million to the U.S. Department of Justice to enhance school safety and security. With CSSI funding, the COPS Office entered into a cooperative agreement with the National Police Foundation (NPF) to create and maintain the national Averted School Violence (ASV) database.

The overarching purposes of the ASV initiative are to

- identify the number of planned school attacks that are averted;
- identify the critical factors that, alone or in combination, contribute to the successful prevention of school attacks.

Answers to these questions are critical for school and law enforcement executives to make informed policy, operations, training, and procurement decisions. However, based on statutory language, the CSSI was limited to supporting K–12 school safety and security.

A 2014 Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) study of active shooter incidents in the United States identified 160 incidents between 2000 and 2013 and noted that the frequency of these events was increasing year over year in that period. Thirty-nine of the incidents took place in educational settings, 12 of which were institutions of higher education (IHE). The incidents taking place at IHEs resulted in 60 fatalities and 60 wounded. The highest death toll was at Virginia Tech in April 2017, where 32 people lost their lives and an additional 17 were wounded. (Blair and Schweit 2014)

School violence, particularly mass shooting events, is covered extensively by the media. This coverage includes detailed information about the victims and their families, the school community and the defendant's background, demographics, and any ascribed motivations. The community is processing grief and attempting to understand a senseless event. On the other hand, the public generally does not have knowledge of planned attacks that could have been equally catastrophic but were averted.

It is reasonable to expect that the same process used to study averted attacks at K–12 schools would result in valuable lessons for IHEs. It is not enough for college and university law enforcement, public safety executives, and campus administrations to be guided by anecdotes

suggesting potential value in behavior threat assessment teams, anonymous tip lines, and social media monitoring. What is needed is hard evidence to inform their policy, operations, training, and procurement decisions, including evidence that answers the following questions:

- How many potential mass casualty attacks have been averted at IHEs?
- What were the critical factors that allowed campus officials to successfully intervene and stop the attacks?
- Were there missed opportunities to intervene earlier on the individual's pathway to violence?

Based on these considerations, the COPS Office made an award to the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) in September 2018 to expand the ASV database to include averted attacks at colleges and universities.

For more information about the ASV database visit www.avertedschoolviolence.org.

Case Studies

The NPF and IACLEA define an averted school violence incident 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, before any injury or loss of life occurred. The ASV database includes only incidents that occurred in the United States after the tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in 1999.

Cases are submitted by education officials, law enforcement, mental health professionals, and other school and campus safety stakeholders. On a continuous basis, NPF and IACLEA staff receive open-source alerts about potential attacks that were averted. Regardless of source, all cases are assessed to determine if sufficient, credible information is available to establish means, opportunity, motive, and intent to carry out an act of targeted school or campus violence. Because intent is sometimes difficult to prove conclusively, the totality of circumstances are reviewed in each case and a preponderance of the evidence standard is applied in deciding whether a case will be published in the ASV database.

It is important to note that once a case is published in the ASV database, the name of the educational institution or facility is not included. Also, personally identifiable information about the person submitting the case is scrubbed before the case is included in the database.

The following eight case studies describe planned targeted violence at colleges and universities that were averted through the actions of the potential attackers' peers, law enforcement, school administrators, and other campus safety stakeholders. Each case is followed by an enumeration of the lessons learned from that case. A compilation of lessons learned is provided at the end of this report.

The cases reported in this paper represent a diverse group of colleges and universities in terms of region, geographic setting, and demographics. They include two- and four-year public and private institutions of higher education. While some of these cases involved a limited number of specific individuals being targeted, all had the potential for mass casualties had the perpetrators' planned targeted violence been executed.

These cases can also be reviewed at www.avertedschoolviolence.org.

Community College Student Threatens Administrators

In March 2017, an administrator at a community college confronted a student over inappropriate comments he had reportedly made to other students in the campus library. The student was placed on a behavior contract and probation for 30 days, but during this time, the inappropriate comments continued, this time directed at staff. The administrator requested a second meeting, but the student refused and instead launched a stream of emails and voice mails threatening the administrator. He also sent a letter to the local municipal police department threatening the campus administrator. The police department notified the administrator and recommended that she obtain an emergency protection order, which she did. The college also applied for and was granted an injunction against the student.

In August 2018, in response to continuing threats, the (now former) student was taken into custody for an emergency 72-hour mental health evaluation. While taking him into custody, law enforcement officers seized a firearm, high capacity magazines, and specialized ammunition designed for increased penetration.

In November 2018, following a continuation of the threats, the local police department attempted to obtain another court hold for mental health evaluation, but it was denied. The municipal police department then obtained an arrest warrant charging the former student with stalking police officers. During the service of this warrant, the former student shot and killed a deputy U.S. Marshal.

The chief of police at the community college stated his belief, based on the facts in this case, that there is a high probability the administrator and others at the college would have been harmed by the former student were it not for actions taken by law enforcement to intervene.

Lessons learned:

- Ongoing and close coordination between the college administration, the campus police department, and the mental health unit of the local police department appears to have kept the student's behavior from escalating from threats and stalking to extreme violent behavior until the last encounter when a deputy U.S. Marshal was killed while serving an arrest warrant on the student. Steps were being taken continuously to manage this student's aberrant behavior.

- The court protection order obtained by the college administrator and the injunction granted to the college appears to have diverted his threatening behavior away from the college and afforded a measure of protection to the campus community.
- Students identified a threat and reported it to school officials, and the college administration reacted immediately and in a measured way.
- Seemingly minor incidents can escalate into a significant grievance for some individuals.
- It is not clear from available sources how this individual obtained the firearms in his possession or whether attempts were made to have him placed on the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICBCS) “no purchase” list based on his involuntary mental health hold.
- It is imperative that campus or community-based behavior threat assessment and management teams continue to monitor individuals temporarily removed from the community who then return.

College Student Solicits Other Students for Help Acquiring Gun Parts

Four students at a public university reported to campus police that another student offered to pay them \$500 to allow gun parts to be mailed to their P.O. boxes. The suspect was purchasing gun parts with gift cards to eventually assemble a fully automatic Uzi, according to one witness and police. Several classmates had been to shooting ranges with the suspect. When asked by a fellow student if he was planning a school shooting, the suspect responded, “Oh no, don’t worry. I’m not going to shoot you.” The suspect confided in another witness that the firearm would not be used for hunting or recreational purposes.

Investigation by the campus police revealed that the student had been released on bail from two criminal cases in his home state, both involving vandalism by use of a firearm. In one of these cases the suspect used a hammer and shotgun to disable security cameras at his high school. When confronted by a community member, he fled the scene and was later found trying to bury a shotgun, gorilla mask, and gloves.

As a condition of his pretrial release in his home state, the suspect was prohibited from possessing or attempting to obtain firearms. Once notified by campus police, the suspect’s bail was revoked and he was extradited to his home state and incarcerated.

Although a clear intent to carry out a mass casualty attack at the university was not established (no written plan was discovered), campus police believe there was a “high probability of violence involving this student.”

Lessons learned:

- Gun parts can be purchased with relative anonymity by using gift cards and shipping to post office boxes not tied to the purchaser.
- Promoting “See Something, Say Something” is a basic and essential school violence prevention tool. Familiarize all members of the campus community (students, faculty, and staff) with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- The campus police department took the students’ reports seriously and conducted a thorough investigation that led to the suspect’s bail revocation.
- Consider including a discussion of the illegality of “straw purchases” in safety orientation presentations conducted by the campus police department.
- Consider requiring students to self-report felony arrests regardless of where they occur.
- Establish and maintain a behavior threat assessment and management team to address concerning behaviors.
- Resources and community culture permitting, field an anonymous reporting system.
- It is unclear from available sources whether this individual was placed on the NICBCS “no purchase” list consistent with his conditions of release in his home state.

Student Making Explosives, Has Firearms in Dorm Room

Municipal law enforcement along with campus public safety officers responded to a dorm on the campus of a private university for a report of a suicidal subject who had made references to committing a mass shooting or bombing. An unloaded firearm was discovered in the student’s dorm room, and he was taken to a hospital for a mental health evaluation. Further investigation revealed that the student had given additional firearms and ammunition to a suitemate the previous night. These weapons included an AK-47 rifle and a Keltech 9mm carbine.

The student confirmed witness statements that he had been constructing improvised explosive devices (IED) with PVC pipe and black powder from fireworks and ammunition and detonating them at off-campus locations. The student told police that if he was going to commit a mass casualty attack, he would use explosives because they are easy to conceal and easy to synchronize and inflict mass chaos and mass damage.

A note left by the student in the common area of his dorm said, "The maniacal side of my brain is a fun little guy that wants to inflict mass casualties on society." In a separate note he wrote that one side of his brain "genuinely hates and actively wants to murder every single human I come across as well as those I've never seen in my life."

The student was later found mentally fit to stand trial.

Lessons learned:

- Relationships between campus public safety officials (sworn and nonsworn) and local law enforcement are critical and should be used to quickly assess the credibility of all threats and take preventive action.
- Fellow students were aware of the assault-style weapons possessed by subject and that he was making and triggering IEDs, but this information was not shared with school officials and law enforcement.
- Promoting "See Something, Say Something" is a basic and essential school violence prevention tool. Familiarize all members of the campus community with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- Resources and community culture permitting, field an anonymous reporting system.
- Review policies on weapons in dorm rooms and educate all students on these policies.

Former College Student Threatens Retaliation

Nine years after graduating, a former student of a small liberal arts college began sending a series of threatening emails to a staff member at the college. The emails escalated in intensity and were accompanied by YouTube videos showing the student with weapons.

In the emails, the student complained about a disciplinary action taken against him by the college for marijuana possession. He states his belief that college employees "never liked me" and describes being repeatedly fined for residence hall violations and accused of stealing

another student's belongings. In another email he says that he "may be coming for a campus visit very soon" and warns that he has "nothing to lose." The student threatens, "Perhaps I will come back and put your little campus on the map." The former student talks about how a killing spree would be better than taking his own life, which his father had done. He praises gunmen from previous mass shootings.

In a particularly alarming message, he sends a video of himself with a shotgun slung over his shoulder as he talks about going to a college campus and shooting students or shooting at police officers. He states, "If you're going to go on a killing spree, you might as well do it equally. I've given a lot of thought about this. Who do you kill? I've come to the conclusion you just shoot everyone."

When police took the former student into custody he was unemployed and living in his mother's home. They found several loaded rifles and shotguns in the home. Neighbors report having called the police on the student numerous times as he would lash out in anger over the slightest perceived disrespect and damage property. There is some evidence that the student physically abused his mother. He was charged with felony criminal threats.

Lessons learned:

- Relationships between campus public safety officials (sworn and nonsworn) and local law enforcement are critical and should be used to quickly assess the credibility of all threats and to take preventive action.
- While witnessing or engaging in domestic violence is not alone a predictor of future targeted violence, there is some evidence of an association between negative home life factors and adverse outcomes for children and young people.
- Seemingly minor incidents can escalate into a significant grievance for some individuals.
- Resources and community culture permitting, field an anonymous reporting system.

Student with Guns in Dorm Plotted Attack for More Than One Year

A student at a private university reported to campus public safety officials (nonsworn) that a fellow student had guns in his dorm room. The subject was contacted by campus public safety and the municipal law enforcement agency serving the campus, and two guns were found in his dorm room—a pistol and a shotgun—along with ammunition.

While being interrogated by law enforcement, the subject indicated he had been plotting to carry out a mass casualty shooting for 20 months with a specific plan and timeline. He chose this particular state to attend college because of its less rigorous gun purchase requirements. The subject purchased the weapons found in his dorm room approximately two weeks before his arrest.

He further admitted to being fascinated with mass casualty shootings and had watched videos of other attacks. The subject's motive was revenge for being treated, in his view, as an outcast. A high school classmate reported that this individual exhibited concerning behavior previously.

The student was arrested and expelled from the university. An involuntary mental health hold and evaluation was ordered by the court.

Lessons learned:

- Promoting "See Something, Say Something" is a basic and essential school violence prevention tool. Familiarize all members of the campus community with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- Relationships between campus public safety officials (sworn and nonsworn) and local law enforcement are critical and should be used to quickly assess the credibility of all threats and to take preventive action.
- The municipal law enforcement agency serving this campus appears to be familiar with the college environment and working with the nonsworn campus public safety agency.

International Student Amasses Weapons Accessories

In 2018, an international student who had recently sought psychiatric care for suicidal thoughts and for feeling like he might lose control and commit acts of violence attempted to purchase an AR-15 from a local gun store. The owner refused to sell the weapon based on erratic statements made by the student regarding his intended use of the weapon and his unfamiliarity with its operation. The student had taken gun safety courses and obtained a hunting license the day before his attempted purchase. The hunting license would allow him to possess weapons despite his noncitizen status.

The gun store owner followed the student to the parking lot and copied down his license plate number, which he reported to the police. Law enforcement officers identified the student and his address but were unable to locate him because he left the country with friends on spring

break. At this point there was insufficient evidence to obtain a search warrant, but authorities did place the student on the NICBCS “no purchase” list that prohibited him from buying guns from stores based on his recent psychiatric care.

While the student was out of the country, an alarm went off at his apartment. Maintenance workers entering the apartment discovered ammunition and notified police. With this new information, a search warrant was obtained and executed on the student’s apartment, where law enforcement officers discovered two scopes for rifles, used targets from a gun range, ammunition of various sorts, a shotgun shoulder carrier, and a laser scope and light.

The same day the search warrant was executed, friends traveling with the student reported concerning statements he was making to the university. He confided that the reason he wanted to buy guns and a bulletproof vest was not to go hunting but because he might do something extreme in the future. Although a crime had not been committed, the university and law enforcement worked together to obtain an involuntary psychiatric hold order and revoked the student’s status, which invalidated his visa. Upon his return to the United States, the student was taken into custody by federal agents and deported.

In messages sent to a friend, the student said his “dark side” had pushed him to buy a gun, bulletproof vest, and other weapons and accessories. The student stated, “I might use the gun to cause trouble. I have been preparing.” When the friend begged him not to kill children or her he responded, “You’re the only one I don’t want to kill.”

While the student had been unsuccessful in his attempts to acquire a firearm, his actions made clear that he was intent upon doing so.

Lessons learned:

- Promoting “See Something, Say Something” is a basic and essential school violence prevention tool. Familiarize all members of the campus community with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- Resources and community culture permitting, contact gun store owners in your jurisdiction to familiarize them with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- Resources and community culture permitting, field an anonymous reporting system.
- If an international student poses a substantiated threat, the student visa system may serve as a vehicle for addressing the threat.

Student Imprisoned after Planning to Attack University with Explosives

In 2016, a student was charged criminally for assaulting a fellow student and banned from campus. The assault included choking.

In early 2018, law enforcement and fire and emergency medical services were called to the student's off-campus apartment for reports of a noxious odor. Inside the apartment, investigators found IEDs, including fuse cords, a homemade detonator, and metal pipes. On the student's computer were instructions and videos demonstrating how to make IEDs. The password protecting the computer was "McVeigh," which the student falsely told law enforcement was his mother's maiden name but which in fact seemed to refer to Timothy McVeigh, the perpetrator of the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The student also had in his possession a map of the university tunnel system with specific sites circled.

The student pleaded no contest to second-degree reckless endangerment and possession of improvised explosives. During the sentencing hearing, the prosecutor argued forcefully that the student was plotting to attack the campus and pointed to emails the student had sent expressing violent ideation. The student stated, "I never want to return to the headspace I was in."

The student was sentenced to two years in prison.

Lessons learned:

- Promoting "See Something, Say Something" is a basic and essential school violence prevention tool. Familiarize all members of the campus community with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- Seemingly minor incidents can escalate into a significant grievance for some individuals.
- Relationships between campus public safety officials (sworn and nonsworn) and local law enforcement and other first responders are critical and should be used to quickly assess the credibility of all threats and to take preventive action.
- While witnessing or engaging in domestic violence is not alone a predictor of future targeted violence, there is some evidence of an association between negative home life factors and adverse outcomes for children and young people.

- In addition to assessing threats and facilitating the sharing of information, behavior threat assessment and management teams can provide continuous monitoring of students and others exhibiting concerning behaviors who have been removed from the community, but may return.

Student Pulls Fire Alarm to Ambush Students in Dormitory

In 2013, a student at a large public university had not enrolled for spring semester and the university was in the process of removing him from his dorm room. Given that the student had recently lost a portion of his employment income and appeared to have nowhere to move, the university was taking an empathetic approach to the removal process instead of abruptly forcing him out.

During the month preceding his attack, the student developed a detailed plan for carrying out a mass casualty attack. He planned to cross off items on a detailed list as he completed them with the final item on the list being “give ‘em hell.”

On the night he carried out the plan, he pulled a fire alarm in his dorm at midnight and intended to ambush students as they evacuated. After pulling the alarm, the student returned to his dorm room to retrieve an assault-style rifle before stepping back into the hallway. As another student exited his dorm room, the perpetrator raised his rifle toward him. The second student retreated to his dorm room and called 911. The perpetrator went back into his own dorm room and committed suicide as law enforcement officers began arriving on scene to answer the fire alarm and the 911 call. Much of this activity was captured on surveillance video.

Responding law enforcement officers found the rifle with a 110-round drum magazine affixed to it in the perpetrator’s dorm room along with additional drum magazines, 1,000 rounds of ammunition, a handgun, and homemade bombs. Waiting for him in the university mailroom were two 22-round clips for the assault rifle, a sling for that weapon, and a training DVD on how to use its laser and shoot it.

The perpetrator’s roommates reported never seeing him with weapons but indicated that he was a loner who didn’t make eye contact or verbally communicate. His online persona was, however, entirely different. Online he is described as being funny and having many friends. One online acquaintance described playing Final Fantasy XI with the perpetrator for up to 14 hours per day.

Further investigation revealed a long history of conflict with his family, including one episode resulting in a domestic violence complaint being made against the perpetrator. His parents were divorced, and he evidently was in continuous conflict with his father.

Lessons learned:

- Promoting “See Something, Say Something” is a basic and essential school violence prevention tool. Familiarize all members of the campus community with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- While witnessing or engaging in domestic violence is not alone a predictor of future targeted violence, there is some evidence of an association between negative home life factors and adverse outcomes for children and young people.
- Resources and community culture permitting, field an anonymous reporting system.
- Resources and community culture permitting, adopt a defensive social media alert system.
- Resources and community culture permitting, contact gun store owners in your jurisdiction to familiarize them with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- Fire alarms create a unique challenge during evacuations for potential active shooter events. Campus public safety officials must plan and train for this scenario.
- Campus public safety officials are encouraged to review their mailroom screening procedures consistent with federal and state laws and university policies.

Lessons Learned: Compilation

Implementation of the lessons learned contained in this report will depend on a number of factors. Resources, community culture, state laws, and campus policies must be considered before translating these lessons learned into planning, training, procurement and operational actions. In addition, it is important to gain input and buy-in from campus safety stakeholders.

- Seemingly minor incidents can escalate into a significant grievance for some individuals.
- Promoting “See Something, Say Something” is a basic and essential school violence prevention tool. Familiarize all members of the campus community (students, faculty, and staff) with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- Relationships between campus public safety officials (sworn and nonsworn) and federal, state, and local law enforcement and other first responders are critical and should be used to quickly assess the credibility of all threats and to take preventive action.
- Individuals exhibiting concerning behavior who have been indicted or convicted of a felony offense, or have been involuntarily committed to a mental health institution should be reported to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICBCS) for placement on the “no purchase” list.
- Resources and community culture permitting, field an anonymous reporting system.
- Resources and community culture permitting, adopt a defensive social media alert system that ensures privacy rights.
- Resources and community culture permitting, contact gun store owners in your jurisdiction to familiarize them with indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.
- Consider including a discussion of “straw purchases” in safety orientation presentations.
- Review policies on weapons in dorms and educate all residential students on these policies.
- Consider requiring students to report felony arrests for crimes of violence regardless of where they occur.
- While witnessing or engaging in domestic violence is not alone a predictor of future targeted violence, there is evidence of an association between negative home life factors and adverse outcomes for youth.

- In addition to assessing threats and facilitating the sharing of information, behavior threat assessment and management teams can provide continuous monitoring of students and others exhibiting concerning behavior who have been removed from the community, but might return. Further, they can help ensure that students, faculty and staff receive behavioral or mental health services in the community if those services are not available on campus.
- If an international student poses a substantiated threat of violence, the student visa system may serve as a vehicle for addressing the threat.

Conclusion

The cases described in this report and others in the ASV database establish an evidentiary basis in support of the proposition that targeted school and campus violence can be prevented. All of us at the COPS Office, the NPF, and IACLEA hope the information in this report is useful to you. We encourage you to use these lessons learned to inform your policy, training, procurement, and operational decisions. In addition to the lessons learned, the fact patterns described in this report may assist you in preparing for community violence prevention presentations and designing tabletop exercises.

Mark Sullivan, the 22nd Director of the U.S. Secret Service, recently stated in the introduction to a major report that in order to protect our communities we must “collaborate fearlessly.” (Verton and Sullivan 2020) Indeed, we must. A cogent argument can be made that the single biggest impediment to preventing targeted school or campus violence is communication and the lack of information-sharing between entities that ultimately have the same mission: to keep our young people safe.

The ultimate success of this report will be its use in starting discussions and promoting timely and actionable information sharing among all campus public safety stakeholders.

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About the Author

Jeff Allison served as a Trooper with the Maryland State Police and as a field training officer and juvenile detective with the Aurora (Colorado) Police Department before beginning his 30-year career with the U.S. Department of Justice. For the last 11 years of his DOJ career, Jeff served as the Special Adviser for Campus Public Safety in the Office of Partner Engagement at FBI Headquarters. Following the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Jeff represented the FBI on a DOJ intra-agency working group responsible for implementing the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative. Through the working group, Jeff provided leadership and advocacy for creation of the national Averted School Violence database.

Jeff now serves as a Special Adviser with the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators. In this role he is responsible for expansion of the ASV database to include colleges and universities. Jeff also serves as the chairperson for the COPS Office School Safety Working Group.

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 National Police Foundation, in partnership with the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA), has expanded the Averted School Violence (ASV) database to provide a platform for sharing information about averted incidents of violence in elementary and secondary schools as well as higher education campuses. This report examines eight case studies of incidents in which planned violence targeting institutions of higher education was averted by the potential attackers' peers, school administrators, and other campus safety stakeholders including law enforcement. Each case includes a discussion of lessons learned from examining the potential attackers' intentions and the actions of those who averted the attack.



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