

LEARNING LESSONS FROM AVERTED OF VIOLENCE IN

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Every year, acts of violence are prevented in schools by students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, school resource officers, and others in the community. What have we learned from these averted acts of school violence, and how can those lessons help other schools protect our children and their staffs?

AVERTED ACTS OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

The Police Foundation—a national non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to improving policing through innovation and science—has initiated a project, with funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the National Institute of Justice, to study “averted acts of school violence.” The project is based on the concept of “near miss,” which has been used to inform the business practices in the aviation, fire, and medical professions. The near miss concept holds that for every incident that occurs, there are significantly more averted incidents. These averted incidents contain invaluable information regarding the strengths or potential weaknesses of current policies, procedures, training and methods.

The Police Foundation has built a national database to record incidents of averted and/or completed acts of school violence. The national database collects and analyzes data regarding averted incidents to identify best, and more importantly, “next” practices to prevent and respond to acts of violence in our schools.

DEFINITION OF AVERTED SCHOOL VIOLENCE

The Police Foundation defines 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 Police Foundation only collects incidents

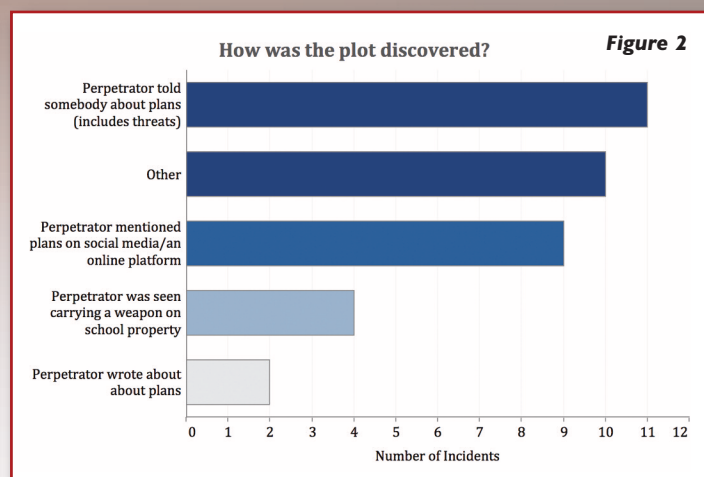
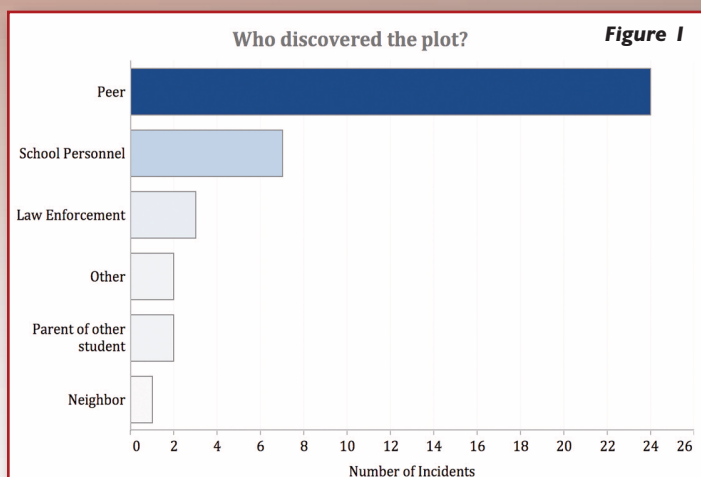
that occurred in the United States after the Columbine tragedy in 1999.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LESSONS WE HAVE LEARNED?

Police Foundation subject matter experts and school representatives have reviewed approximately 41 incident reports that have been entered into the averted school violence database. These averted incidents were identified primarily from open source news stories and court documents. The Police Foundation also develops incident reports on completed acts of school violence, and is currently working with subject matter experts to review these reports and provide lessons learned before entry into the database. The Police Foundation has conducted preliminary analysis on the 41 averted school violence incident reports. To date, the team has identified the following lessons learned:

- Schools and law enforcement must have a strong, pre-established relationship and open lines of communication before an attack occurs.
- Students who hear threats of violence from other students should take them seriously and report them to school or other authorities immediately. Based on our preliminary study, in over half of the open source incidents we studied, students were the first to discover another student’s plans for school violence. (See Figure 1)
- Students should be trained not only to recognize threats of violence, but also recognize signs for suicide or depression.
- Parents should monitor their child’s social media accounts and remain aware of their general Internet use for any concerning searches or violent material.

ACTS SCHOOLS



- Parents should take their children's threats of violence seriously and seek assistance from law enforcement, mental health professionals, and other service providers.
- Parents should keep all guns in a locked and secure location if they are in the home.
- School personnel and SROs should strive to develop and maintain rapport with students so they are aware of students who are bullied, feel excluded, depressed, or challenged in other ways so they can connect them to services.
- Schools must continuously update and practice their emergency communication systems and response plans.
- Schools should have a plan in place for timely communication of incidents to parents.
- Potential perpetrators of violence frequently use social

media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and even Snapchat to openly discuss their violent plans or thoughts, or to express disdain for a school/situation. (See Figure 2)

- Schools, particularly universities and higher education, should be aware that financial distress can be a trigger for violence.
- Schools should notify all staff when a student is suspended or expelled. That student should not be allowed back on campus the same day of the suspension or expulsion.
- Schools should direct safety concerns through a team to review the concerns, not just one single person.
- Schools must be vigilant at entrance locations and have sufficient staff to process and observe individuals entering the school.



BENEFITS OF SUBMITTING AND VIEWING ASV REPORTS

By submitting and viewing ASV reports, you can both improve school safety in your school district as well as help other school safety professionals across the country to improve safety in their districts. The database has a number of specific benefits both to the report submitters, and to the individuals who review the report library:

- Averted and carried out school attacks can provide insights into the effectiveness of existing school safety efforts nationwide.
- The ASV incident report library contains valuable information related to school security, averted attackers, successful discovery and prevention of attacks, lessons learned, and recommendations.
- ASV incident reports can help prevent future violence when relevant lessons learned and recommendations are implemented into the policy, procedure and training of those who are engaged in school safety.
- ASV reporting is anonymous, and submitted reports are additionally scrubbed to remove any identifying information about the school, perpetrator, or report submitter.
- We can provide aggregate regional, state-level or other analysis of ASV incidents, if such information was provided in the reports submitted, however the state will not be published in the public ASV report form.

ASV REPORTING PROCESS

The online incident report form is broken into various categories. The main categories contain questions related to basic school information and security, information about the averted or carried out attack, information about the perpetrator or potential perpetrator, and a section to identify lessons learned from how the incident was handled.

The documentation section allows the report submitter to attach any relevant documents if applicable. While we encourage report submitters to answer as many questions as possible to allow for the most robust data collection and analysis, all questions in the form are optional. If report submitters do not feel comfortable providing incident data, we still encourage them to complete the lessons learned and recommendations section. These recommendations and lessons learned can still play an important role in helping other schools prevent acts of violence. Lessons learned and recommendations can cover any aspect of the attack or averted attack- from physical school safety mechanisms, to safety drills and procedures, to the level of communication that played a role as the incident was addressed or prevented.

As previously mentioned, the report form can be filled out anonymously. We only suggest providing basic contact information if the submitter is unable to complete the form in one sitting and wants to be able to return to the same question form.

Once a form is submitted, school safety subject matter experts remove identifying information as necessary, and provide additional lessons learned and/or recommendations. Subject matter experts have backgrounds in counseling psychology, campus security and law enforcement, risk management, and threat assessments. Experts have additionally conducted previous research on averted and carried out attacks.

During the review process, the report form is NOT available publicly on the website. Only after review by subject matter experts and the Police Foundation will the report be published in the report library at www.asvnearmiss.org. In fact, when the scrubbed version of a report is completed, that version overwrites and permanently deletes the originally submitted report. Had the originally submitted version contained any identifying information, it is permanently deleted. Reports are searchable and categorized by fields such as type of school, means of plot discovery, types of weapons acquired by the perpetrator, date of the attack or planned attack, and more.

CONCLUSION

The Averted School Violence database holds great promise in informing school safety policies, procedures and practices through a robust library of incidents, lessons learned and best practices. By carefully analyzing the incidents recorded in the database and the lessons learned, SROs, school administrators, teachers and parents can strengthen current programs and identify next practices to ensure the safety and security of our schools.

The Police Foundation needs you to help expand the data collected, and thereby grow the lessons learned to benefit you, your department, or school. If you have been involved in an averted act of violence, you can complete an incident report form at www.asvnearmiss.org. The website is mobile-device friendly.

For more information on the Averted School Violence project, contact: Sarah Solano, ssolano@policefoundation.org, 202-833-1469.