

# Averted School Violence (ASV) Database 2021 Analysis Update



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

**NATIONAL  
POLICE  
FOUNDATION**

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# Letter from the Acting Director of the COPS Office

Colleagues:

The COPS Office and the National Institute of Justice provided funding to the National Police Foundation (NPF) to develop the Averted School Violence (ASV) database, which collects information on school attacks—completed and averted—with the goal of mitigating and ultimately preventing future injuries in educational institutions. In 2019, the COPS Office and the NPF published a pair of reports examining data from the database: one a comparison of averted attacks on schools with a similar number of attacks that were carried out, and the other an analysis only of averted attacks.

Since the publication of those reports, the ASV database has continued to grow and now contains more than three times as many cases of averted incidents of school violence as it did in 2019. This report compares the 120 new cases to the 51 cases in the original sample in an ongoing effort to provide as much information as possible to schools, law enforcement, and communities to enhance school security and protect our children.

Our schools must be safe and supportive learning environments. On behalf of the COPS Office, we thank everyone who has submitted reports to the ASV database and who works every day with students of all ages to make a difference in their communities. 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 the National Police Foundation for their work on the ASV database and these publications on averted school violence.

Sincerely,



Robert E. Chapman  
Acting Director  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

# Letter from the President of the National Police Foundation

Dear colleagues,

Since the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, targeted school attacks—particularly those involving firearms—have increased in frequency and lethality, posing a vexing challenge for policy makers, law enforcement officials, school administrators, mental and physical health practitioners, parents, students, and the communities in which the attacks are perpetrated.

With funding support from the COPS Office, the National Police Foundation, in collaboration with school safety subject matter experts and numerous national and state-level organizations, developed the Averted School Violence (ASV) database as a free resource to serve practitioners and organizations involved in school safety. The ASV database is an online library of completed and averted school violence narratives from across the country, containing incident-level information and lessons learned.

The rationale behind developing the ASV database is that while there are numerous studies of completed school attacks, fewer studies have been done on averted attacks, leaving a gap in knowledge. Furthermore, practitioners suggest and open source research supports that averted attacks happen with greater frequency than completed attacks and contain invaluable insights into the strengths or potential weaknesses of school safety systems or practices, which if recognized and addressed early can prevent or mitigate future attacks.

There are now more than 230 cases in the ASV database: more than 170 averted incidents and more than 60 carried-out attacks. This report reflects a comprehensive analysis of 170 averted attacks in the database. The vast majority of averted attacks occurred in suburban public high schools with school populations ranging from 500–1,000 students. In the vast majority of attacks, one suspect—typically a current student—planned to carry out the attack. A significant life changing or traumatic event occurred prior to the planned attack. Reasons for planning the attack were most often tied to hating people, revenge seeking, and bullying. In almost all of the cases, peers

discovered the planned attack and reported it to some combination of parents, school officials, and law enforcement. Firearms, specifically handguns, were the primary weapon to be used in the averted attacks.

The report concludes that positive school environments that provide violence prevention programs, foster trust among students and staff, provide support to all students, and encourage early intervention for students with behavioral challenges are key to averting school attacks. In many cases, targeted school attacks can be prevented by persons who recognize the indicators of violence and report their concerns to school and law enforcement officials directly or through anonymous reporting systems.

Multidisciplinary behavioral threat assessment teams are the foundation of early identification and intervention. In addition, carefully selected, well trained, and properly equipped school resource officers provide an important resource in the prevention and response to school attacks.

In the end, efforts to prevent school attacks must be a “whole of community” effort in which school administrators, teachers, and staff; school-based and community mental health providers; law enforcement; and parents and students see something, say something, and do something to identify and extend resources to students in need of our help before they hurt themselves or others.

The National Police Foundation would like to thank the COPS Office for its support of the national Averted School Violence database, a project that has undoubtedly saved the lives of our children, teachers, staff, and school administrators.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Burch', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jim Burch  
President  
National Police Foundation



# Introduction

**ALTHOUGH MASS VIOLENCE ATTACKS AT SCHOOLS ARE STATISTICALLY RARE,** their impact far exceeds their occurrences in the communities in which they occur and across the nation. The U.S. Departments of Justice, Education, and Homeland Security have dedicated considerable resources to enhancing school security and preventing these attacks, as well as to studying and understanding mass casualty attacks and the perpetrators who carry them out. There has also been a growing body of literature on completed school-based mass violence attacks from multidisciplinary perspectives including child development and psychology, sociology, and criminology. This combined literature has contributed much to the overall understanding of perpetrators of school-based violence, the types of schools at which attacks are more likely to occur, the social conditions surrounding school attacks, and other variables that contribute to completed school attacks.

The number of completed attacks is far outnumbered by incidents in which an attack was planned or was almost carried out but was averted thanks to the actions of persons in the school or in the community. Individually, these incidents may be dismissed or only have a short-term localized impact because they did not achieve their goal, because they did not meet the requirements for a school to document the incident, or because of underreporting in the media. While there have been a handful of studies conducted to identify common ways in which planned attacks were discovered, who intervened to prevent a likely attack, and the extent to which students reported potential planned attacks to authorities, there remains a considerable gap in the school violence literature surrounding averted attacks and what lessons can be learned from them regarding school safety and security.

To address this need, in 2014, two U.S. Department of Justice offices—the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ)—provided funding to the National Police Foundation (NPF) to develop and maintain an

Averted School Violence (ASV) database.<sup>1</sup> The ASV database collects, analyzes, and publishes averted and completed acts of school violence that have occurred since the April 20, 1999 attack on Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. The data are drawn from open source media articles as well as from law enforcement, school officials, and others entering reports directly into the ASV database.

The ASV database serves as a resource to law enforcement, schools, mental health professionals, and others involved in preventing school violence by sharing lessons learned regarding the way planned attacks were identified and prevented. In 2019, the NPF conducted a preliminary analysis of 51 cases of averted school violence in the ASV database to identify basic information about the schools involved, the perpetrators and suspects, the weapons, and the

plots and incidents.<sup>2</sup> Also in 2019, the NPF conducted a comparison of 51 averted and 51 completed school attacks from the ASV database to identify important similarities and differences between the types of incidents.<sup>3</sup>

There are now more than 230 cases in the ASV database: more than 170 averted attacks and more than 60 completed attacks. With more than three times the number of averted cases as there were when the 2019 preliminary analysis was conducted, this report leverages the data from the additional cases to conduct similar analyses; compare the findings from the new cases to the initial 51 averted cases; and provide overarching lessons learned and recommendations that can be leveraged by school administrators, law enforcement, and communities to enhance school safety and security.

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1. "Our Mission," Averted School Violence, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.avertedschoolviolence.org/>.
  2. Jeffrey A. Daniels, *A Preliminary Report on the Police Foundation's Averted School Violence Database* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2019), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0871>.
  3. Peter Langman and Frank Straub, *A Comparison of Averted and Completed School Attacks from the Police Foundation's Averted School Violence Database* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2019), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0870>.

# Data Analysis

## **DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL ANALYSES WERE CONDUCTED ON THE 120 CASES**

entered into the ASV database between February 2018 and August 2020. Analyses were conducted using the same information as in the 2019 preliminary analysis: basic information about each case, followed by descriptions of the schools in which the attacks were averted, how the plots were discovered, what actions were taken to avert the potential incident, and what weapons the perpetrators planned to use.

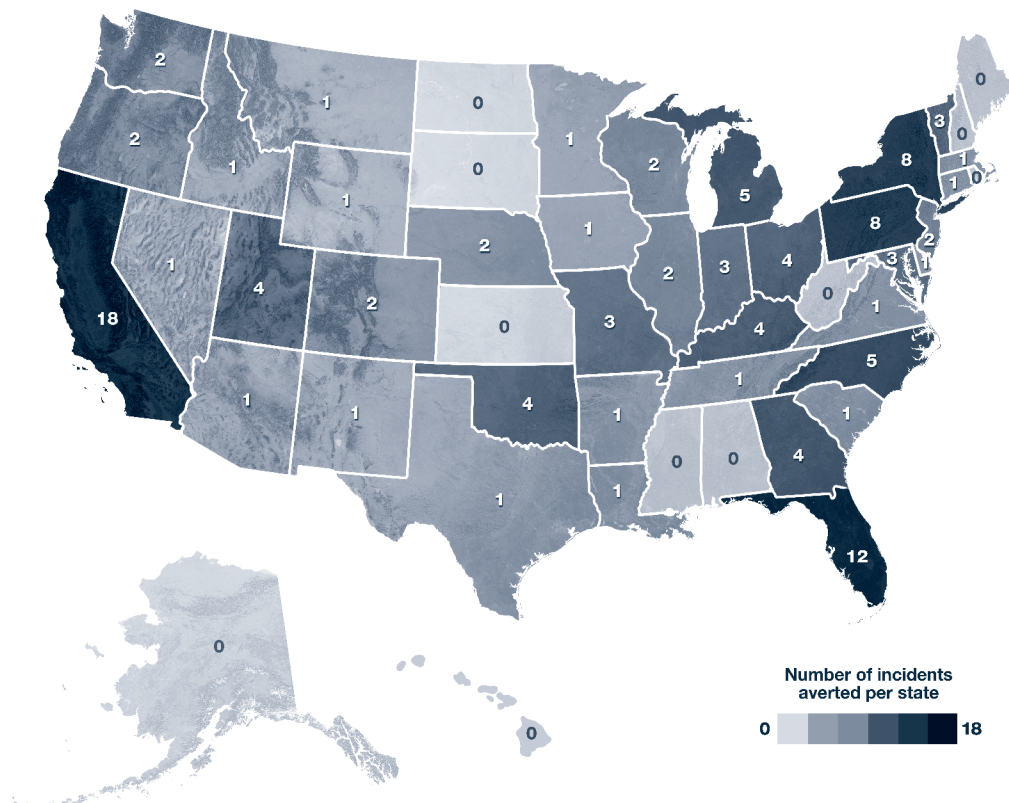
### **Basic information**

The information used to develop 112 (93.3 percent) of the 120 additional reports on averted incidents analyzed for this publication was identified by NPF staff and project subject matter experts from open sources, school websites, and court records. The remaining eight reports (6.7 percent) were entered by a law enforcement officer or school administrator directly involved in the averted incident.

### **School information**

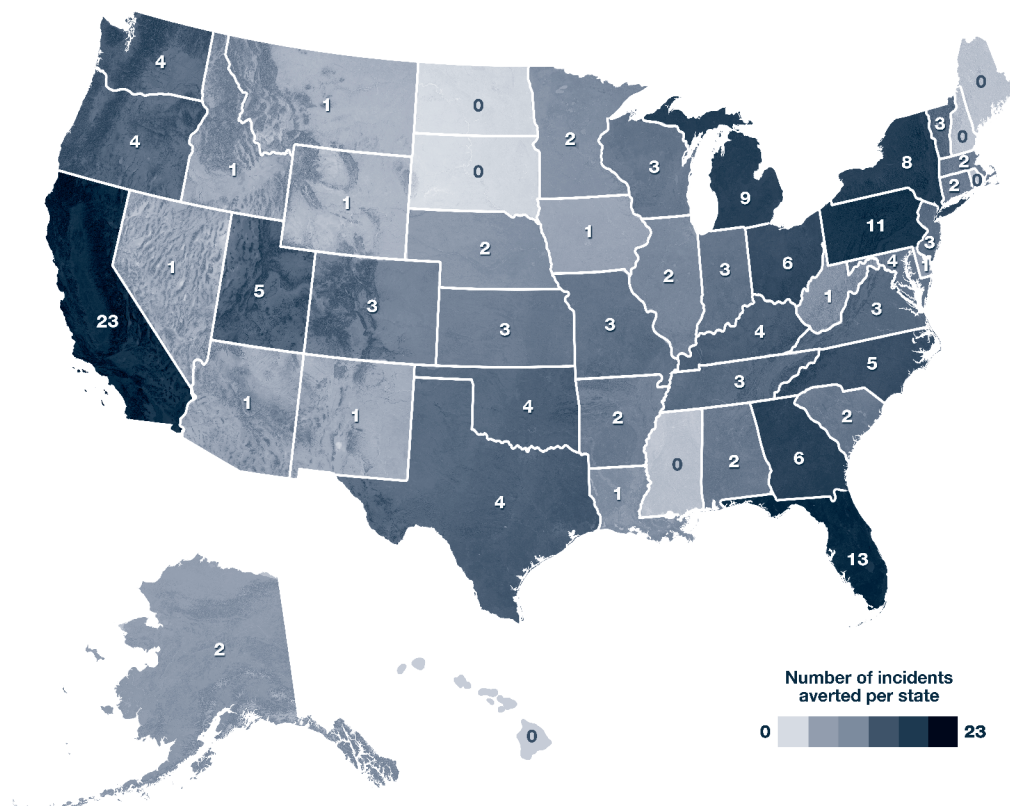
As shown in figure 1 on page 4, averted school violence incidents analyzed for this publication occurred in 39 states throughout the United States. (The 51 incidents in the initial dataset occurred in 27 states.) As is to be expected with a larger sample, there were more states in the present dataset (22) than in the initial dataset (14) with more than one averted incident. In the present dataset, California had 18 averted incidents, Florida 12, New York 8, Pennsylvania 8, Michigan 5, North Carolina 5, Georgia 4, Kentucky 4, Ohio 4, Oklahoma 4, Utah 4, Indiana 3, Maryland 3, Missouri 3, Vermont 3, Colorado 2, Illinois 2, Nebraska 2, New Jersey 2, Oregon 2, Washington 2, and Wisconsin 2. Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming each had one averted incident. Figure 1.1 on page 4 shows the distribution of incidents in the two sample sets combined.

**Figure 1.** Distribution of new sample of ASV incidents (n=119)\*



\* There was one submission in which the state was unknown.

**Figure 1.1.** Distribution of combined samples of ASV incidents (n=170)

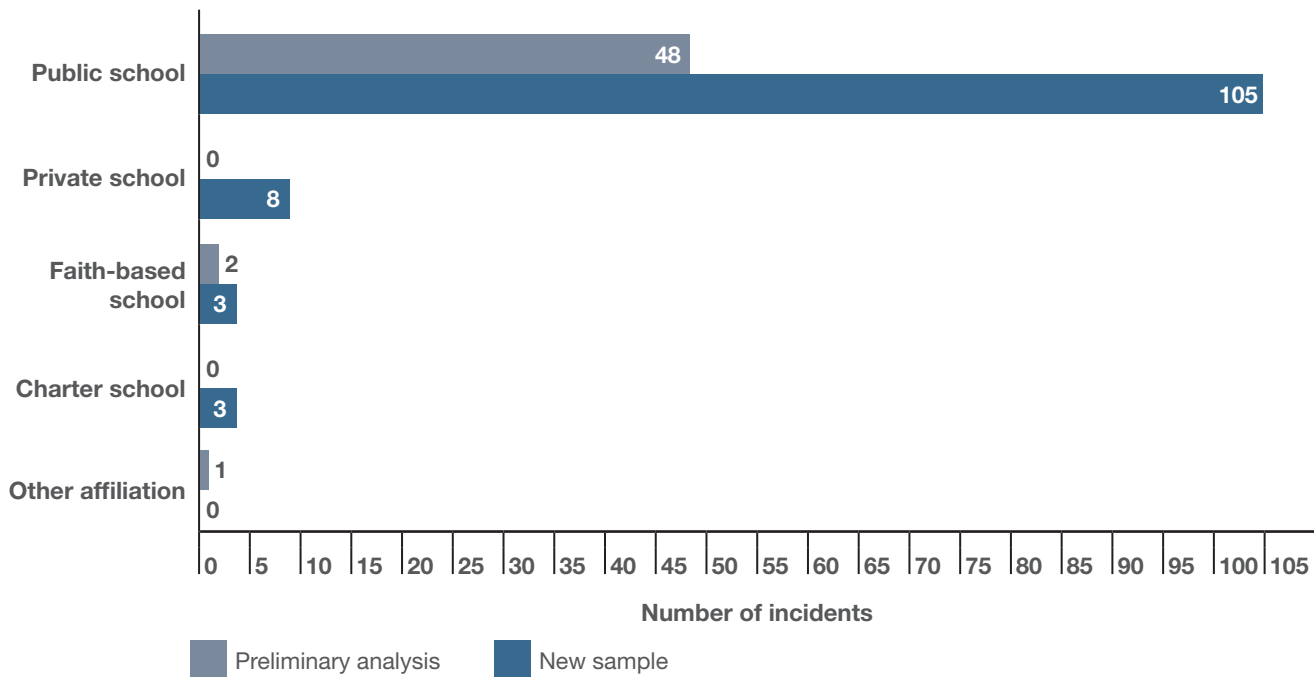




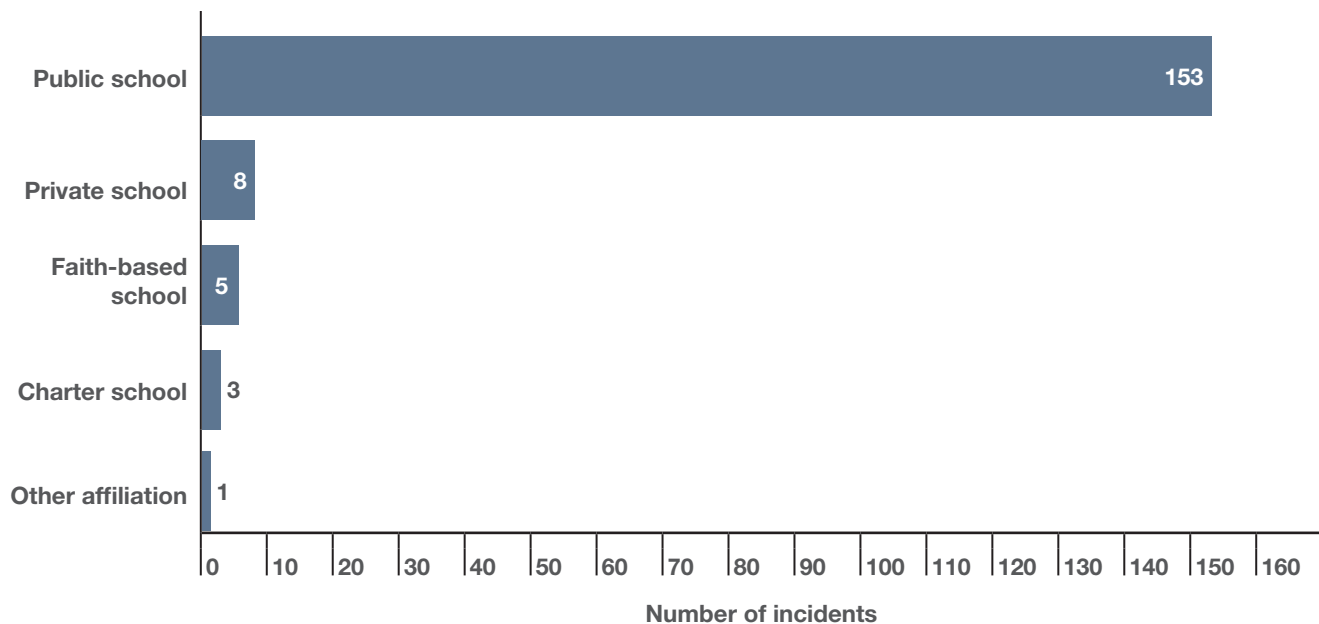
As shown in figure 2, of the 120 new averted school incidents, 105 (87.5 percent) occurred in public schools, eight (6.7 percent) in private schools, three (2.5 percent) in charter schools, and three (2.5 percent) in faith-based schools.<sup>4</sup> This is similar to the

finding in the preliminary analysis that the overwhelming majority (94.1 percent) of averted school attacks occurred in public schools. Together, figure 2.1 shows the types of schools where violent incidents were most commonly averted.

**Figure 2. Types of schools where violent incidents were averted in both samples of ASV incidents**



**Figure 2.1. Types of schools where violent incidents were averted in combined samples of ASV incidents (n=170)**

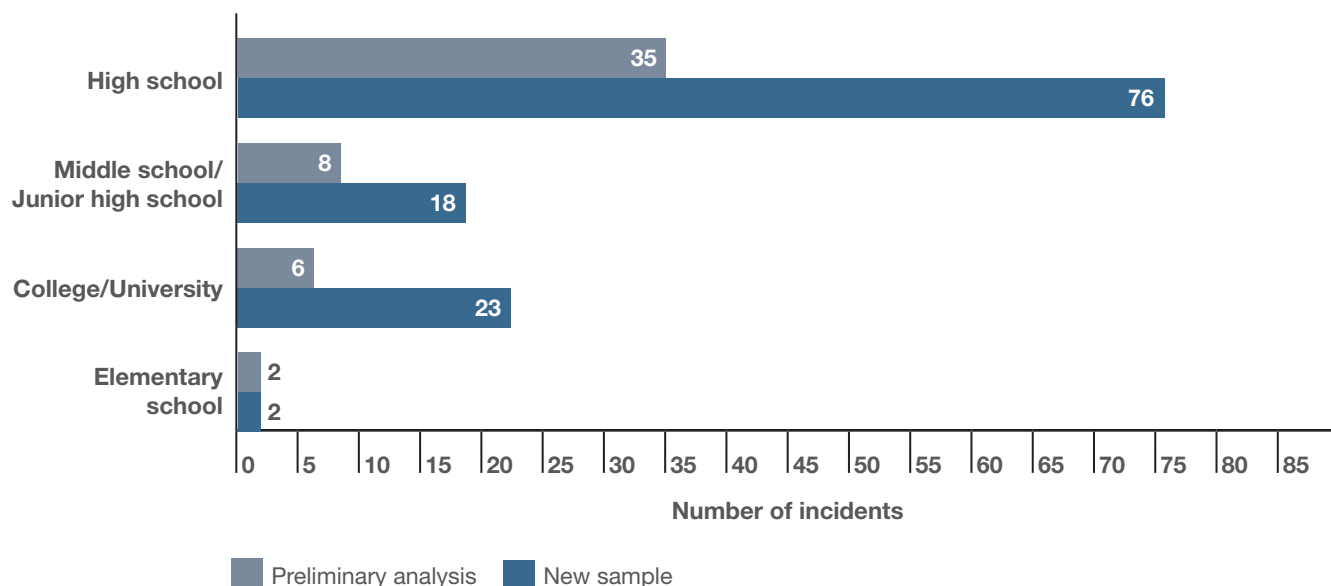


4. There was one submission in which the school type was not listed.

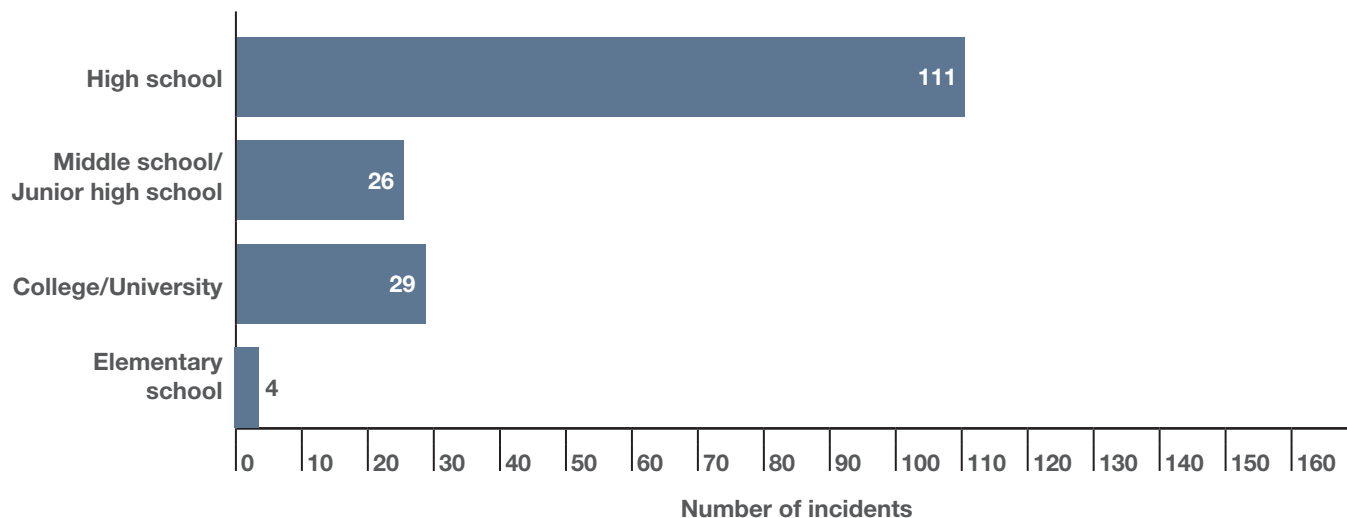
Furthermore (see figure 3), as in the preliminary analysis (see figure 3), attacks were most frequently averted at high schools (63.3 percent, n=76) in the new sample. However, whereas the preliminary analysis had only 11.8 percent of averted incidents (n=6) at college or university campuses, in the new sample colleges and universities accounted for 19.2 percent (n=23) of the averted incidents. Meanwhile, middle schools and junior high schools accounted for 15.7

percent of the averted incidents (n=8) in the preliminary analysis but 15.0 percent (n=18) of the averted incidents in the new sample. Elementary schools were the intended target of averted incidents in 3.9 percent of incidents (n=2) in the preliminary analysis and 1.7 percent of incidents (n=2) in the additional sample.<sup>5</sup> Together, figure 3.1 shows education levels of schools where violent incidents were most commonly averted.

**Figure 3. Education level of schools where violent incidents were averted in both samples of ASV incidents**



**Figure 3.1. Education level of schools where violent incidents were averted in combined samples of ASV incidents (n=170)**

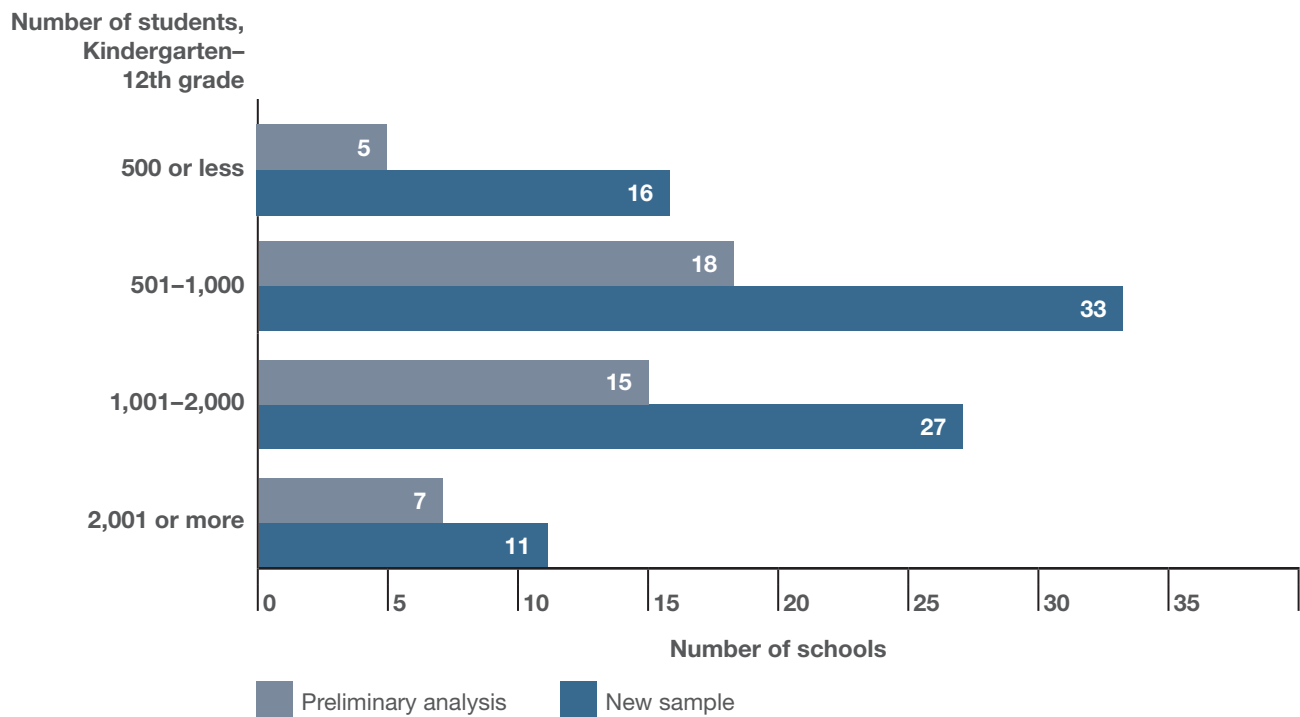


5. There was one submission where the education level was missing.

Figure 4 (which continues on page 8) presents the numbers and percentages for the size of the student body at the schools where the violent incidents were averted. Similar to the preliminary analysis, a plurality of incidents from the new sample (27.5 percent, n=33) were averted at K–12 schools with student

bodies of between 501 and 1,000 students, and there was only one averted incident (0.8 percent) at a college or university with a student body of 1,000 or fewer.<sup>6</sup> Together, figure 4.1 on page 9 shows the combined size of the student body at schools where violent incidents were most commonly averted.

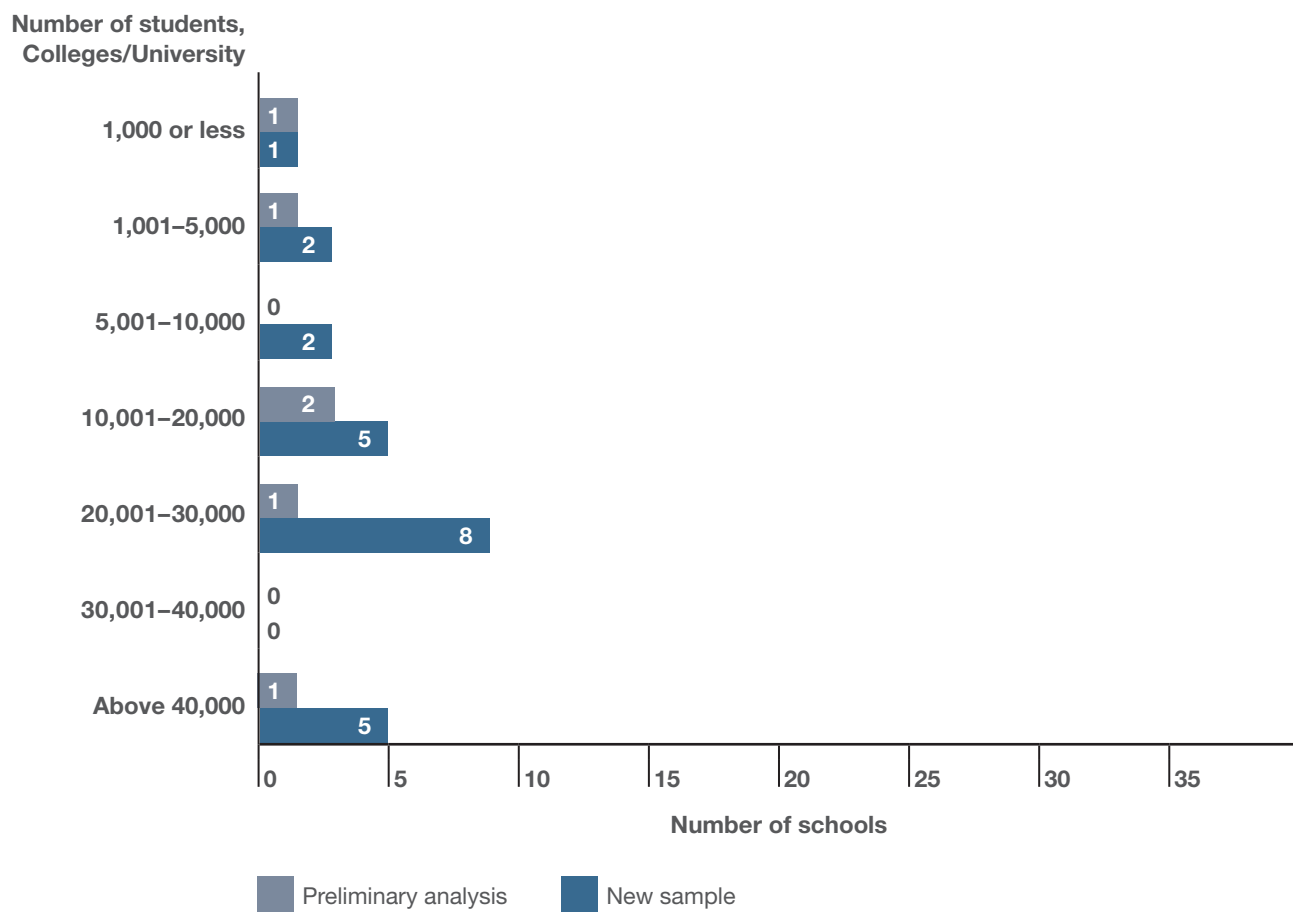
**Figure 4. Size of student body at schools where violent incidents were averted in both samples of ASV incidents**



*cont'd on pg. 8*

6. There were nine K–12 submissions in which the size of the student body was unknown and one K–12 submission in which this information was not entered.

**Figure 4.** Size of student body at schools where violent incidents were averted in both samples of ASV incidents *cont'd from pg. 7*





**Figure 4.1.** Size of student body at schools where violent incidents were averted in combined samples of ASV incidents (n=161)

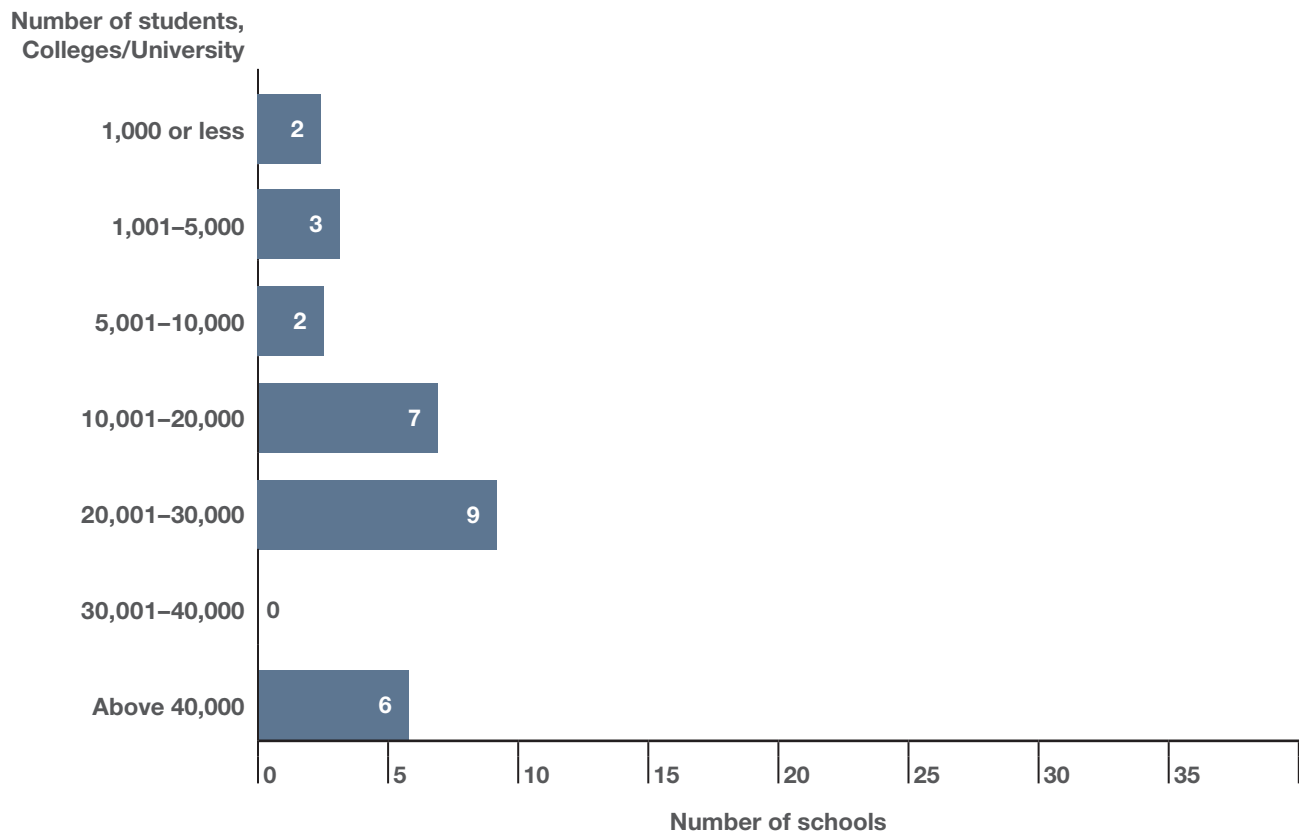
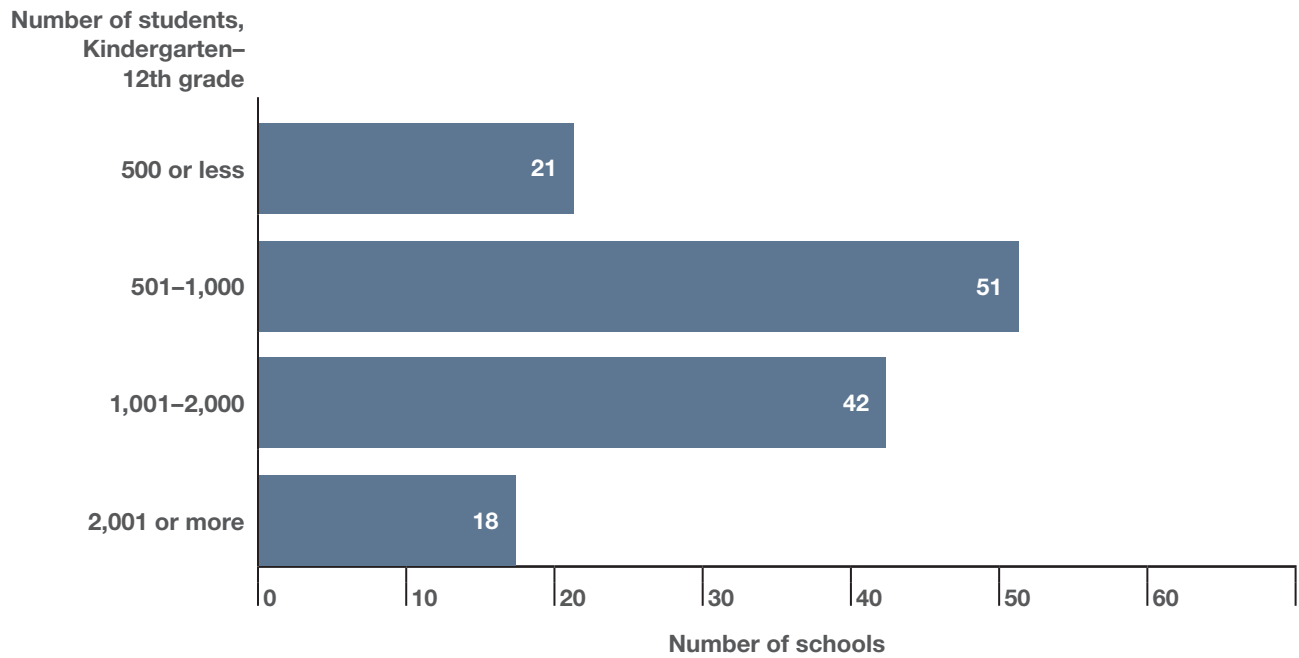
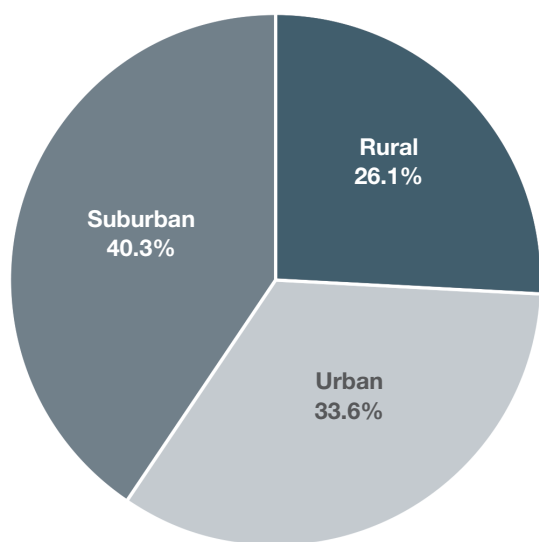


Figure 5 presents the community population classifications of the schools that were involved in the new sample of averted violent incidents. Suburban schools were still the most common intended targets, but at a much lower rate (40.0 percent, n=48, down from 68.6 percent in the initial sample). In addition, while the percentage of rural schools involved in averted incidents (25.8 percent, n=31) stayed approximately the same as in the preliminary analysis (25.5 percent), the percentage of urban schools increased from 5.9 percent in the initial sample to 33.3 percent (n=40) in the new sample of averted school violence reports.<sup>7</sup> Together, figure 5.1

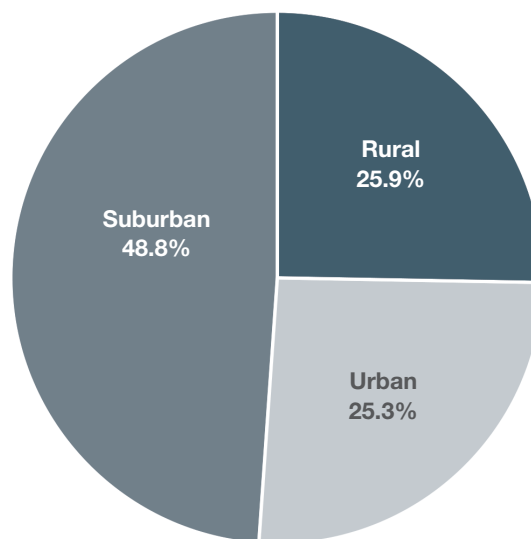
shows the combined population classifications of communities where violent incidents were most commonly averted.

Together, figures 2 through 5.1 suggest that the model averted school violence incident from the 120 additional cases is similar to the model from the preliminary analysis: a public high school, with a student body between 501 and 2,000 students, in a suburban community. However, these figures—especially when added to figure 1—also continue to demonstrate that threats and planned violent attacks can occur in any state, in any community, and at any grade level.

**Figure 5.** Population classification of communities where incidents of school violence were averted in new sample of ASV incidents (n=119)



**Figure 5.1.** Population classification of communities where incidents of school violence were averted in combined samples of ASV incidents (n=170)



7. There was one submission where the population classification was missing.

## Counselors

The ASV case submission form asks about the presence of at least one counselor at the school. Most schools did have at least one counselor at the time of the averted incident. Of the 120 cases in the new sample, 81.7 percent of the schools (n=98) had a counselor at the time and it was unknown in 17.5 percent of cases (n=21). None of the cases indicated that there were no school counselors at the time of the averted incident.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the overwhelming majority of schools having at least one counselor during the time of the averted incident, it is difficult to tell in many cases whether the

counselor(s) engaged with the suspect(s) in the incidents. In only 9.2 percent (n=9) of the 120 averted cases in the new sample was it noted that the counselor(s) engaged with the suspect(s), while in 84.7 percent of cases (n=83) it was unknown. It was only noted in 6.1 percent of the cases (n=6) that the school did have at least one counselor but they did not engage with the suspect(s).

## Security systems

The ASV case submission form presents a number of physical security measures and protocols that are common at K–12 schools and college and university campuses, and for each reported case there was no

**Table 1. Common security measures used by schools where potential attacks were averted in both samples of ASV incidents**

Security measure	ASV schools where measure was used (N)		ASV schools where measure was used (%)	
	Preliminary analysis	New sample	Preliminary analysis	New sample
Behavior threat assessment team	0	17	0.0	14.2
Blue Light security system	0	12	0.0	10.0
Controlled access to buildings during school hours	9	29	17.6	24.2
Controlled access to grounds during school hours	7	6	13.7	5.0
Locked entrance or exit doors	5	22	9.8	18.3
Locker checks	5	6	9.8	5.0
School police department	1	17	2.0	14.2
School staff monitoring hallways	6	8	11.8	6.7
Security cameras used to monitor the school	14	32	27.4	26.7
Security officers or police officers at/in school	30	55	58.8	45.8
Students required to go through metal detectors	0	1	0.0	0.8
Teachers and staff required to wear badges/ID	2	9	3.9	7.5
Visitors must be escorted into building	1	3	2.0	2.5
Visitors required to sign in	8	15	15.7	12.5
Visitors required to wear badges/ID	7	13	13.7	10.8
Other	6	6	11.8	5.0
No security measures reported	—*	39*	—*	32.5*

\* Among the schools included in the new sample, 39 did not appear to have any security measures in place. However, it is important to note that the individuals reporting these cases may have been unable to obtain information on the schools' security features through open sources. Data are not available on the number of schools without security measures from the sample in the preliminary analysis.

8. There was one submission in which the indication of whether or not there was at least one counselor was missing.

limit to the number of security measures that could be selected. Whereas in the preliminary analysis more than half of the schools involved had a security officer or a police officer at the school as the primary security measure, in the new sample there was no single security measure that was in use by more than half of the schools (however, security officers or police officers at the school were still the primary security measure). Interestingly, 5.0 percent of schools (n=6) reported controlling access to school grounds during school hours—less than in the preliminary analysis (13.7 percent, n=7). Also, despite many security experts continuing to recommend that students be required to go through metal detectors, only one school (0.8 percent) in the new sample—and none of the schools in the preliminary analysis—had students go through a metal detector.

When “Other” is selected, respondents are asked to indicate what security measure(s) are not accounted for in the provided checklist that were in place at the school when the incident was averted. One person

noted that their school has a School Safety Committee that meets monthly to address safety issues concerns, and one noted that their school has a 25-member Safety and Discipline Committee. Another noted that not only teachers and staff but also students are required to wear badges/ID. In addition, one respondent noted that all students are required to use clear backpacks, while another noted that students are not allowed to carry backpacks at all during the day and must store them in lockers. One respondent noted that their school has a non-sworn campus public safety agency and relies on the local municipal police department for law enforcement services.

### Response training

The ASV case submission form also identifies five response protocols or trainings that are increasingly common at K–12 schools and college and university campuses, and for each reported case there was no limit to the number of protocols or trainings that could be selected.

**Table 2. Common protocols or trainings used by schools where potential attacks were averted in both samples of ASV incidents**

Response protocol or training	ASV response protocol or training (N)		ASV response protocol or training (%)	
	Preliminary analysis	New sample	Preliminary analysis	New sample
Active shooter trainings	4	19	7.8	15.8
All hazards drills	3	29	5.9	24.2
CIT trainings	0	2	0.0	1.7
Evacuation drills	2	12	3.9	10.0
Lockdown drills	5	20	9.8	16.7
Other	5	2	9.8	1.7



When “Other” is selected, respondents are asked to indicate what response protocol(s) or training(s) are not accounted for in the provided checklist that were in place at the school when the incident was averted. One respondent noted that their school had only fire drills at the time of the averted incident and the other respondent noted that the school had an emergency action plan.

## Suspect information

This section provides information about the alleged suspects in the averted school violence incidents.<sup>9</sup> Information about the suspects involved in the new sample of averted cases includes their age at the time of the discovery of the plan, their gender, their race or ethnicity, and their affiliation with the targeted school. In addition, whether the suspects exhibited any warning signs or behaviors—such as researching, increasingly pathological preoccupation with a cause or other acts of violence, an increase in the frequency or variety of notable activities related to the target, and communication to a third party of the intent to do harm—was assessed, as well as additional warning signs and characteristics. The ASV

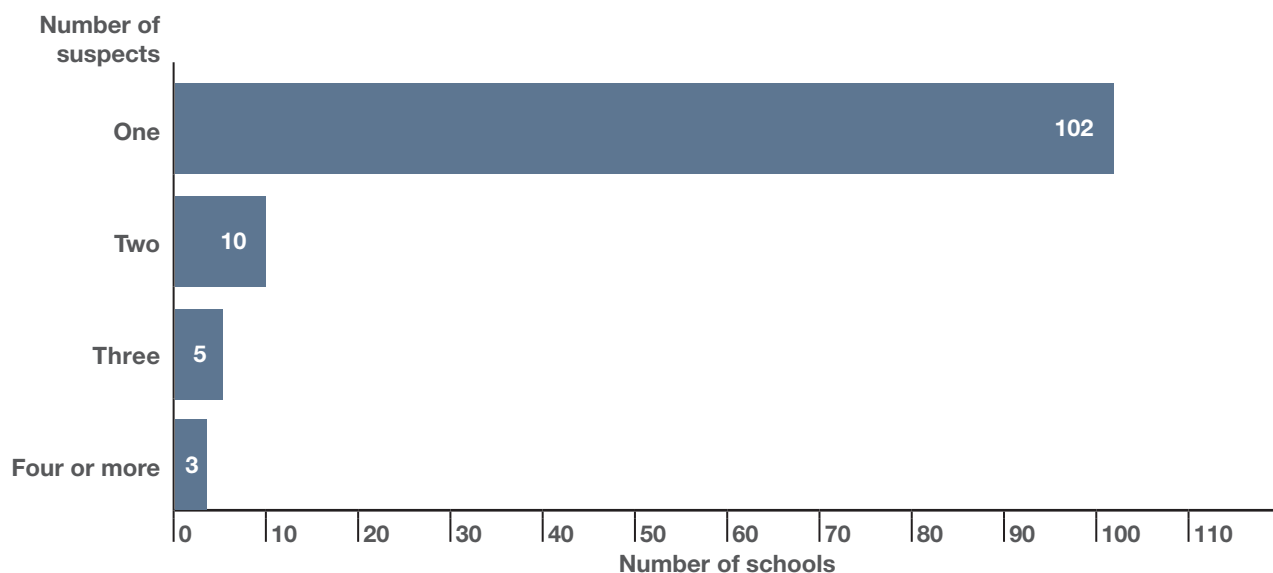
case submission form also collects information regarding mental health and substance use, life-changing or traumatic experiences, involvement with the criminal justice system, engagement with violent media or written materials, and admitted reasons for planning the attack. Involvement in bullying—as a bully, bullied target, or both—was also assessed. It is also important to note that suspects involved in planning school-based violent attacks are not only current or former students, as will be supported by some of the information that follows.

As figure 6 on page 14 demonstrates, the overwhelming majority (85.0 percent,  $n=102$ ) of planned but averted incidents of school-based violence involved only one suspect. The next-largest percentage of cases (8.3 percent,  $n=10$ ) involved a pair of suspects, followed by cases involving three suspects (4.2 percent,  $n=5$ ). In the new sample, only 2.5 percent ( $n=3$ ) involved four or more suspects. Together, figure 6.1 on page 14 shows the number of suspects involved in planning school-based violence that were ultimately averted.

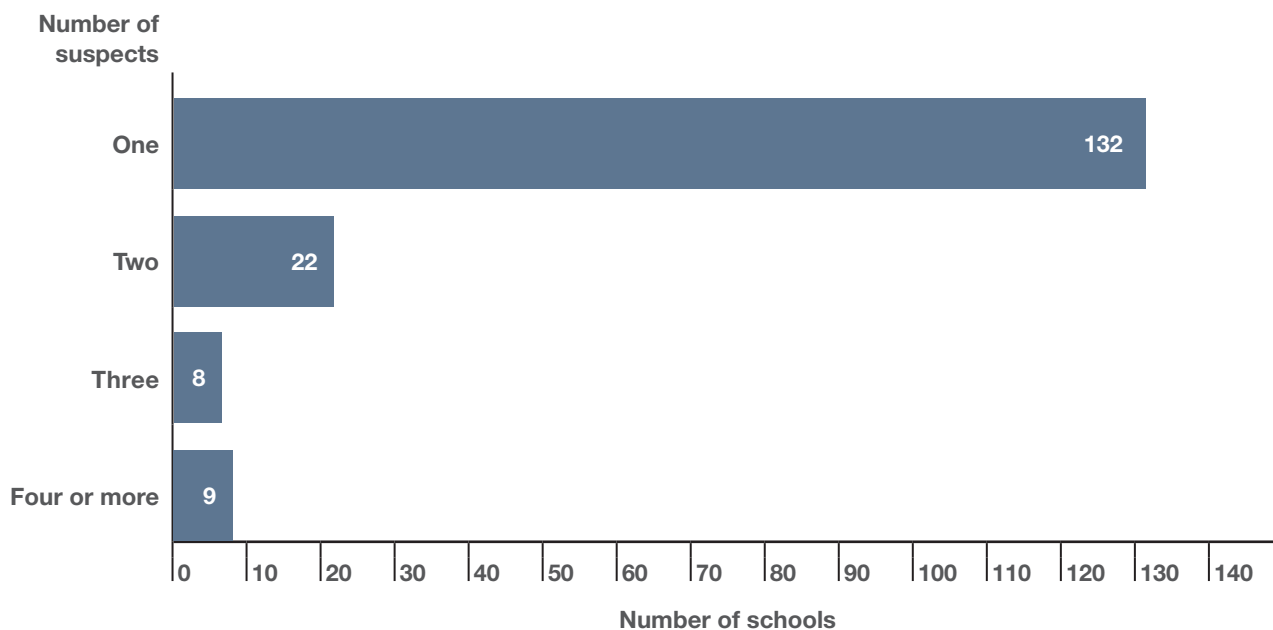
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9. The “Plotter information” section of the preliminary report only addressed information about lone or primary plotters, because of low sample sizes and the presumption that the primary plotter was the “mastermind” of the plot. With more cases and the desire to understand more about all suspects involved in planning school-based violence, this section treats all suspects as equal and includes information about all of them. Therefore, some figures have combined information.

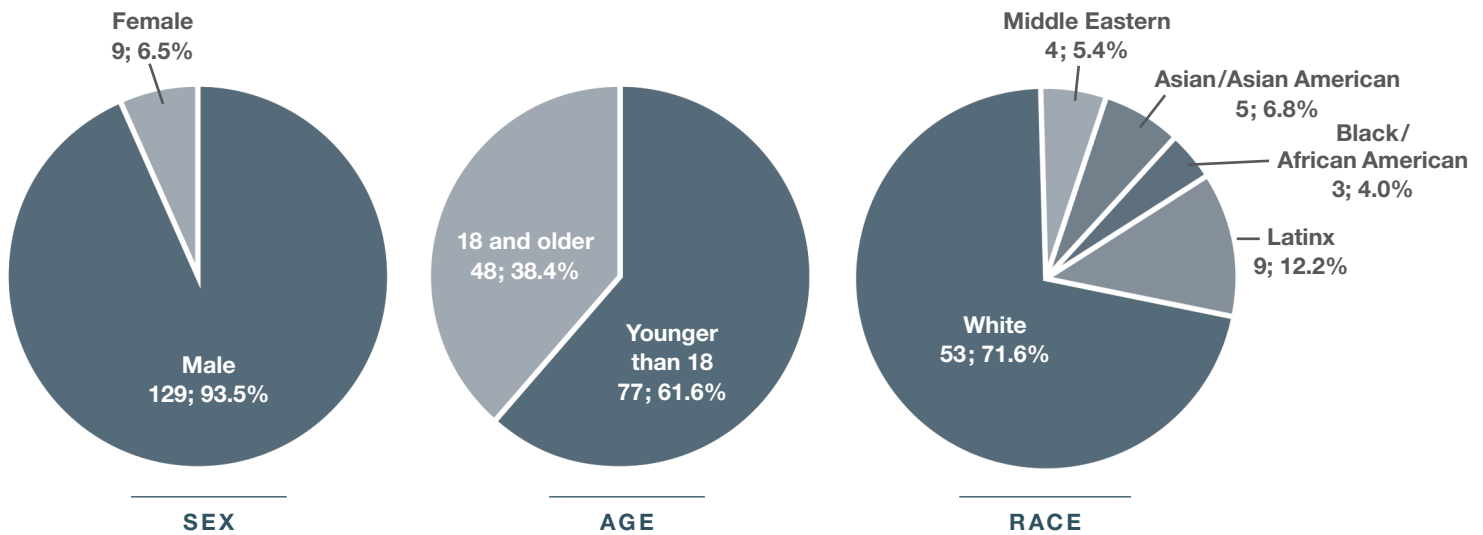
**Figure 6.** Number of suspects involved in plotting attacks in new sample of ASV incidents (n=120)



**Figure 6.1.** Number of suspects involved in plotting averted attacks in combined samples of ASV incidents (n=171)



**Figure 7.** Demographics of suspects involved in plotting attacks in new sample of ASV incidents



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

Figure 7 shows the demographic information of the suspects involved in the 120 cases in the new sample of averted attacks. The majority (93.25 percent,  $n=129$ ) of the suspects were male and nine (6.5 percent) were female (of 138 total, as 11 of the 149 suspects' genders were unknown), which is consistent with the preliminary report data (94.1 percent male and 5.9 percent female). Ages of suspects—at the time the incident was uncovered and averted—ranged from 12 to 62, with the most common age

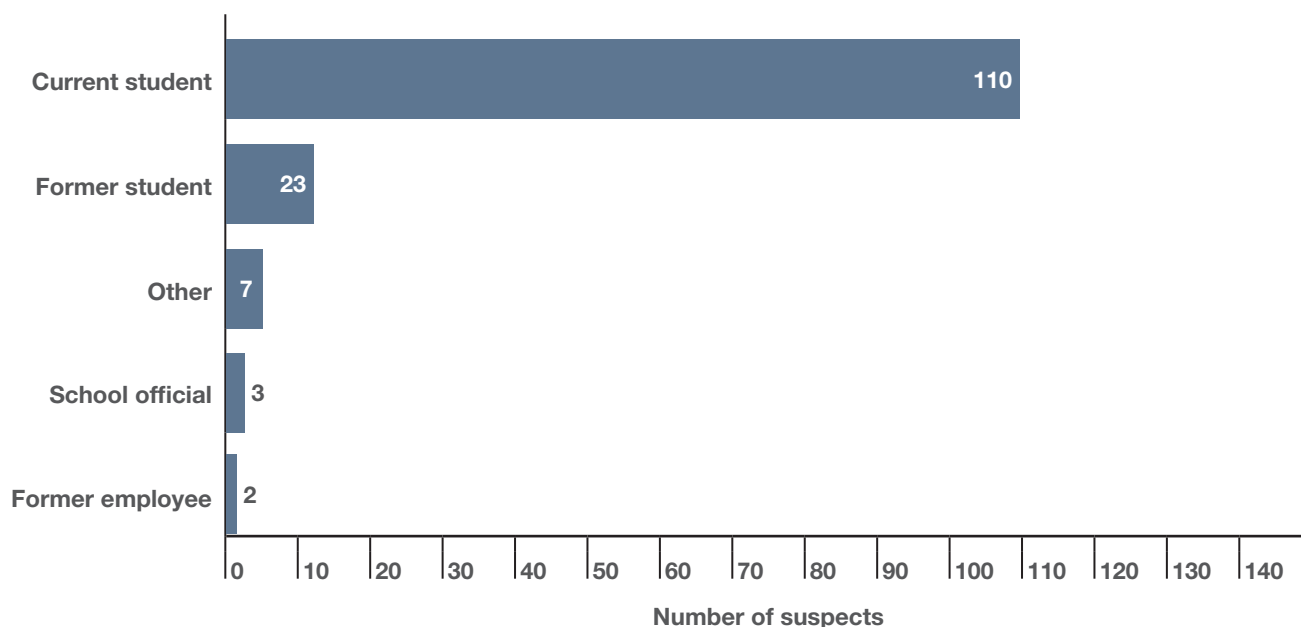
range being 14 to 18 years old (72.8 percent,  $n=91$ ) (of 125 total, as 24 of the 149 suspects' ages were unknown) and an average age of 18.6 years old. Racial or ethnic identities are unknown or were not provided in the cases of 75 of the 149 suspects. Of the other 74 suspects, 53 were identified as White, nine as Latinx, five as Asian or Asian American, four as Middle Eastern, and three as Black or African American.<sup>10</sup> Overall, the “typical” suspect is a lone White male approximately 18 years of age.

10. The ASV submission form allows for multiple selections, so it is possible that (for example) each of the three Black suspects was also identified as Latinx, with an additional six of nine Latinx suspects being identified with another race or ethnicity (or not). The total of Latinx, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Black suspects identified is 21, so even if each of those suspects was identified as partly one of those races or ethnicities and partly White, there would be an additional 32 White suspects not identified with any other race or ethnicity.

As shown in figure 8, a large majority of the averted attacks were being planned by students who were currently enrolled at the school they were plotting to attack (75.9 percent, n=110) or former students (15.9 percent, n=23).<sup>11</sup> Current school officials accounted for 2.1 percent of suspects (n=3) and former employees at the schools they targeted for 1.4 percent (n=2). The remaining suspects (4.8 percent, n=7) had no known prior affiliation with the targeted school.

The ASV case submission form collects information about specific categories of warning signs each suspect may have exhibited during their planning and allows for multiple selections. Table 3 on page 17 provides each behavior and the number of times it was selected in the new sample of cases. As is discussed in the Plot Discovery section, communicating to a third party the intent to do harm through an attack is one of the most common warning signs.

**Figure 8. School affiliation of suspects in new sample of ASV incidents (n=145)**



11. There were four suspects whose prior affiliation or nonaffiliation with the school was unknown. Therefore, the percentages are based on n=145.

**Table 3. Warning signs of suspects in new sample of ASV incidents**

Behavior	Suspects (n)
Directly communicated threat. The communication of a direct threat to a third party beforehand. A threat is a written or oral communication that implicitly or explicitly states a wish or intent to damage, injure, or kill the target or individuals symbolically or actually associated with the target.	62
Energy burst. An increase in the frequency or variety of any noted activities related to the target—even if the activities themselves are relatively innocuous—usually in the days or weeks before the attack.	9
Fixation. Any behavior that indicates an increasingly pathological preoccupation with a cause, other acts of violence, violent persons/subjects, their grievances, or their effects.	43
Identification. Any behavior that indicates a “warrior mentality,” is closely associated with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia, identifies with previous attackers or assassins, or identifies oneself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system.	12
Last resort. Evidence of a “violent-action imperative” or “time imperative.” Increasing desperation or distress through words or actions. The subject feels trapped, with no other alternative than violence.	10
Leakage. The communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target through an attack.	100
Novel aggression. An act of violence that appears unrelated to any targeted violence pathway warning behavior committed for the first time. Such behaviors may be engaged to test the ability of the subject to actually do the violent act.	2
Pathway. Any behavior that is part of research, planning, preparation, or implementation of an attack.	105

The ASV case submission form also collects information about specific characteristics each suspect may have exhibited during their planning and allows for multiple selections. Table 4 provides each characteristic and the number of times it was selected in the new sample of cases.

The ASV case submission form also collects information related to whether each suspect was ever formally treated for a mental illness or developmental disorder and whether each suspect suffered from addiction or substance use—whether formally diagnosed or not. The status of a formal diagnosis of mental illness or developmental disorder was entered for 20 of the suspects. Of those 20, there were 18 suspects who were formally treated for a mental illness / developmental disorder and two who were not. Of the 18 suspects identified as having had formal diagnoses, there were eight about whom more

information was provided: (1) One had schizophrenia and (2) one was evaluated for potentially having schizophrenia after being arrested; (3) one was diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and a “real sense of social awkwardness;” (4) one was diagnosed with Antisocial Personality Disorder and Bipolar 1; (5) one was diagnosed with depression and suicidal thoughts or actions; (6) one was diagnosed with a learning disability; (7) one was diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Reactive Attachment Disorder; and (8) one was diagnosed during the pre-trial but had not been diagnosed before.

With respect to addiction and substance use, information was entered with respect to 12 suspects: Five suspects were reported to have suffered from addiction or substance use and six were not. Of the five suspects identified as having had addiction or substance use issues, more information was provided

**Table 4. Characteristics of suspects in new sample of ASV incidents**

Characteristic	Suspects (n)
Impaired social or emotional functioning	21
Depressed mood	21
Disregard for authority or rules	16
Social withdrawal or isolation from peers	15
Easily enraged	14
Lacking empathy, guilt, remorse	14
Does not take responsibility for consequences	7
Hypersensitivity (to criticism, failure, etc.)	7
Extreme narcissism	4
Other	7
None of the above	1
Unknown	67

about all of them: (1) One used methamphetamines, (2) one used marijuana, (3) one used alcohol, (4) one used alcohol and controlled substances, and (5) one used cannabis and other unknown drugs.

Information about involvement in bullying was entered for 25 suspects. Of those, 12 suspects had been bullied before their planned attack was averted, and eight had been involved in bullying—as a bully—in addition to participating in planning an act of school-based violence. Five of the 22 suspects were not involved in bullying.

In the new sample of cases, information was entered about life-changing or traumatic experiences with respect to 18 suspects. There were 13 suspects who had such experiences and five who had not. Of the 13 suspects who had experienced a life-changing event or traumatic experience, two experienced loss of a job or other financial issues; one experienced loss of a job or other financial issues and was harassed; one personally experienced a breakup, separation, or divorce; one reported that things were bad at home and they just wanted to end it all; one

had their biological father recently pass away; one struggled with substance use and their father died by suicide; one was homeless; and one had a partner who was hospitalized.

In the new sample of averted cases, information was entered about previous involvement with the criminal justice system with respect to 48 suspects. Of those, 26 were previously officially known to the criminal justice system either as an offender or as a victim, and 22 were not. For the suspects who had previous offenses, some included threatening to assault another person, burglary, previously having a weapon on educational property, carrying a concealed weapon and altering serial numbers on a firearm, drug possession, stalking, vandalism, an domestic violence.

One of the common perceptions of individuals who commit school-based violence is that they frequently engage with violent media, entertainment, and written materials. In the new sample of averted cases, information was entered with respect to 40 suspects on this topic: 39 had engaged with violent media, and

**Table 5. Suspects' reasons for the planned attack in new sample of ASV incidents**

Reason	Averted School Violence Suspects (n)
Hates people	17
Grudge/Seeking revenge	17
Bullying	8
Resentment	5
Paranoid delusions / command hallucinations	2
Rivalry	1
Envy	0
Did not provide a reason	44
Other	25



one had not. Although multiple selections were allowed, violent social media and websites were the most common form of violent media engaged with by suspects (n=19), followed by violent stories and journals (n=8) and video games (n=6).

The ASV case submission form also collects information about specific reasons each suspect gave for planning their attack and allows for multiple selections. Table 5 on page 21 provides each reason and the number of times it was selected in the new sample of cases.

The final suspect information that the ASV case submission form collects is whether each suspect told or threatened anyone directly and overtly about their school violence plans—other than co-conspirators—prior to the discovery of the plot itself. Information about prior direct and overt threats was entered with respect to 93 suspects, of whom 72 told or threatened someone and 21 did not.

## Event information

The ASV case submission form collects considerable data about each incident of averted school violence, including a summary of the incident, how it was averted, who was involved in reporting the plan before it could come to fruition, and the behaviors of the individuals allegedly involved in planning the attack. The ASV case submission form also collects information on the weapon or weapons the suspect or suspects intended to use in each of the alleged incidents, as well as information about how they obtained those weapons.

### Time between plot discovery and aversion

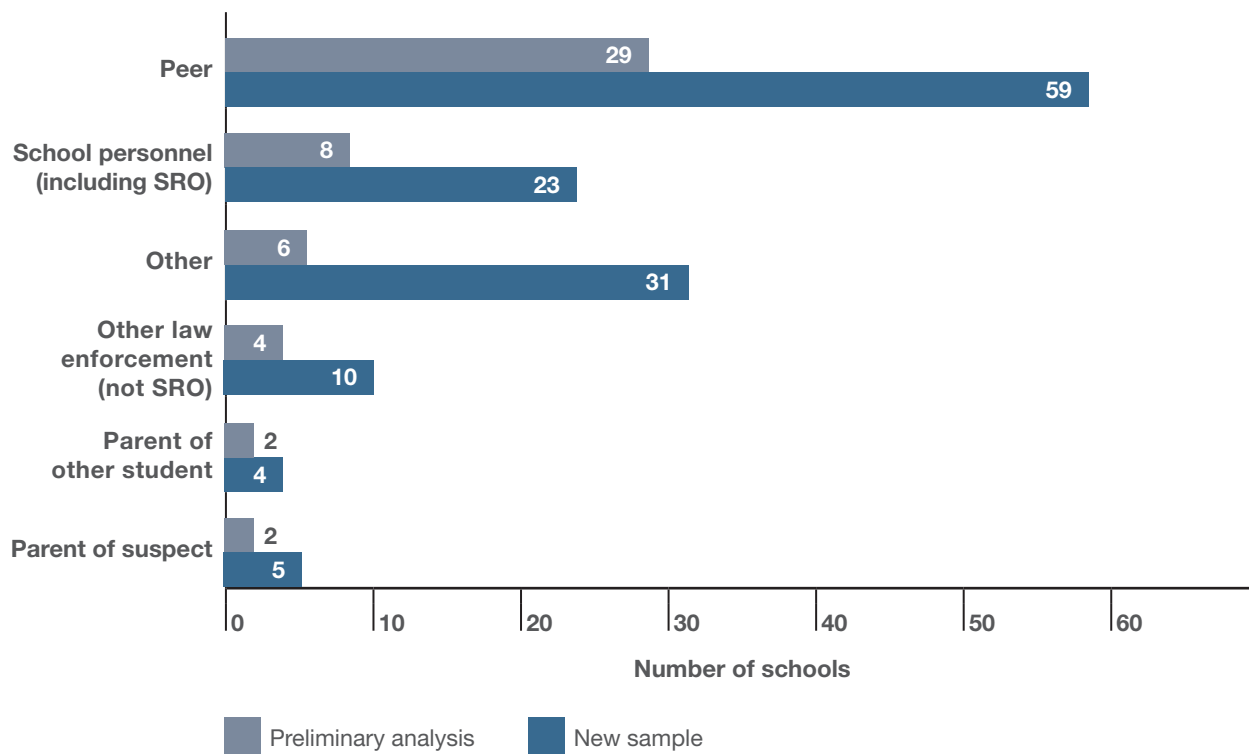
In 115 of the 120 cases in the new sample, the report included the number of days between when the plot was discovered and when it was averted. Of those 115, in an overwhelming majority of the cases (73.0 percent, n=84), the date that the plot was discovered

and the date that it was averted were the same. In an additional 21.7 percent of cases (n=25) cases, less than seven days passed between when the plot was discovered and when it was averted. In 3.5 percent of cases (n=4), between eight days and two weeks passed between discovery and aversion. In 0.9 percent of cases (n=1) 18 days passed between discovery and aversion, and in 0.9 percent of cases (n=1) 122 days passed between discovery and aversion.

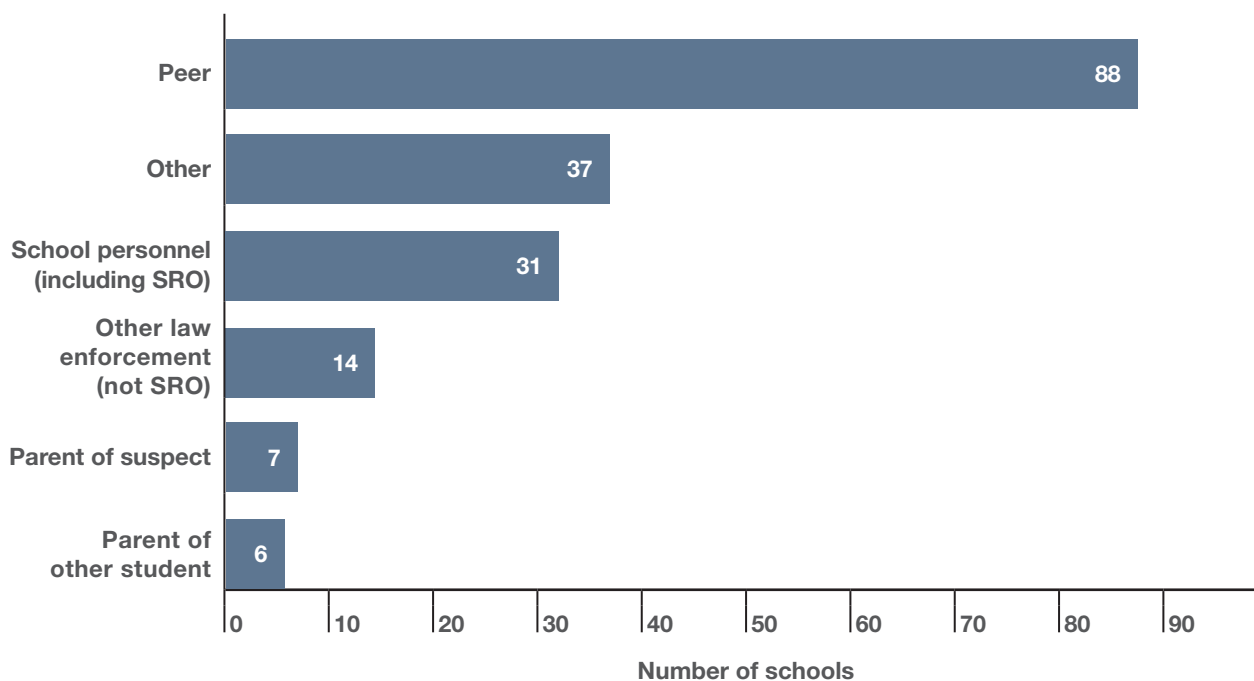
### Who discovered the plot

As demonstrated in figure 9 on page 21, plans of school violence attacks are generally uncovered by people in a small number of categories closely associated with the school. While it is possible for multiple people to discover a single plot (and the ASV submission form allows multiple selections), the majority of potential school violence incidents were initially discovered and reported by peers of the suspect(s). School personnel—including an administrator (6 cases), school resource officer (SRO) (5 cases), teacher (4 cases), counselor (2 cases), other faculty or staff member (6 cases)—were also key personnel in discovering plots in 23 of the cases in the new sample. Other law enforcement—not including SROs—initially discovered a potential incident of school violence in 10 cases. A parent or guardian of the suspect (5 cases) or parent or guardian of another student (4 cases) were also involved in discovering potential plots of school violence. Other individuals—including neighbors (2 cases), bystanders (2 cases), coworkers and supervisors (2 cases), social media followers (6 cases), close relatives (6 cases), doctors and clinicians (3 cases), gun store employees (2 cases), or other connections (8 cases)—were also responsible for uncovering some of the potential plots in the new sample. Together, figure 9.1 on page 21 shows the people who most commonly initially discovered the plot for averted incidents of school violence.

**Figure 9.** Who discovered the plot in both samples of ASV incidents



**Figure 9.1.** Who initially discovered the plot in combined samples of ASV incidents

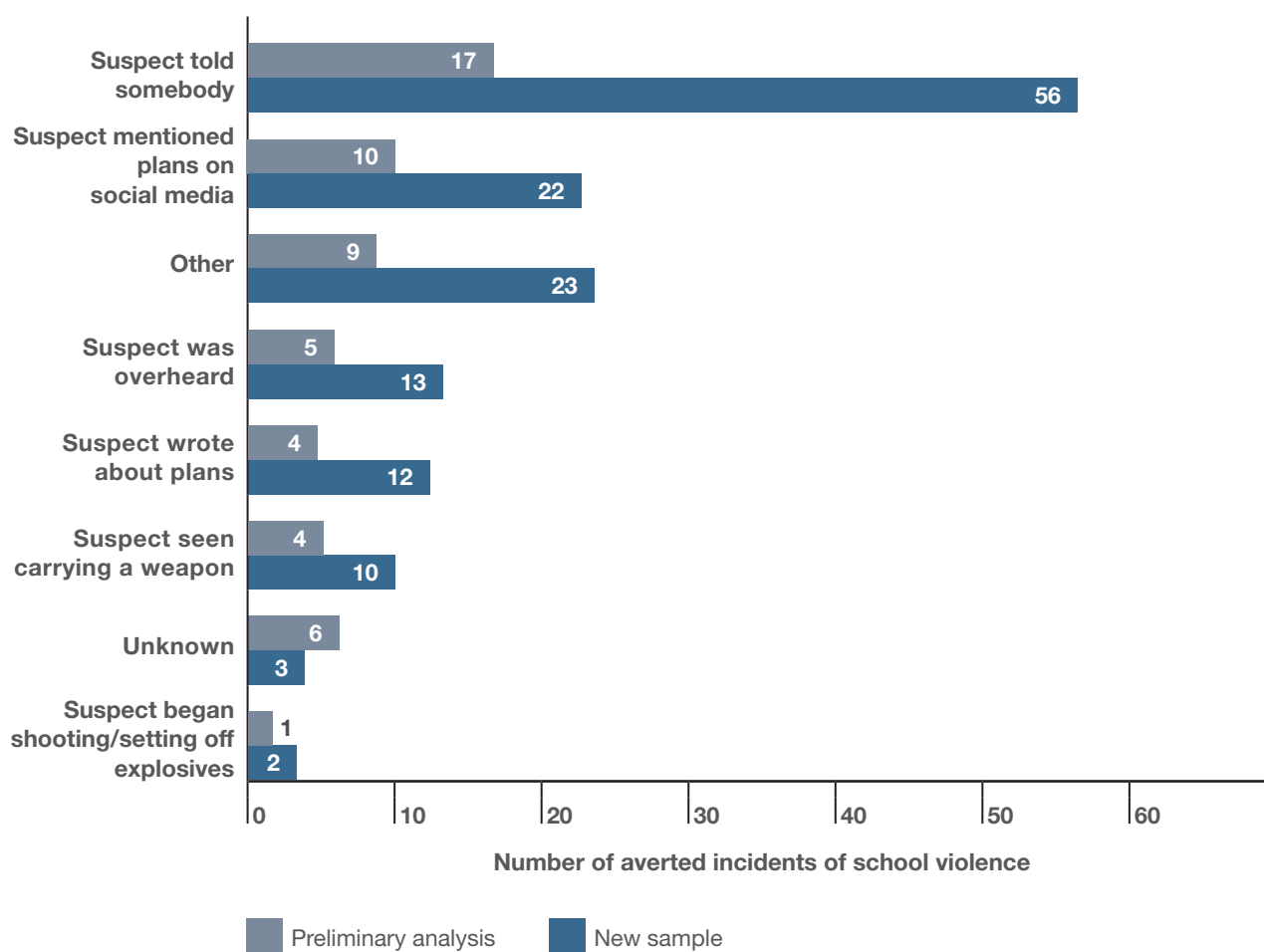


## Plot discovery

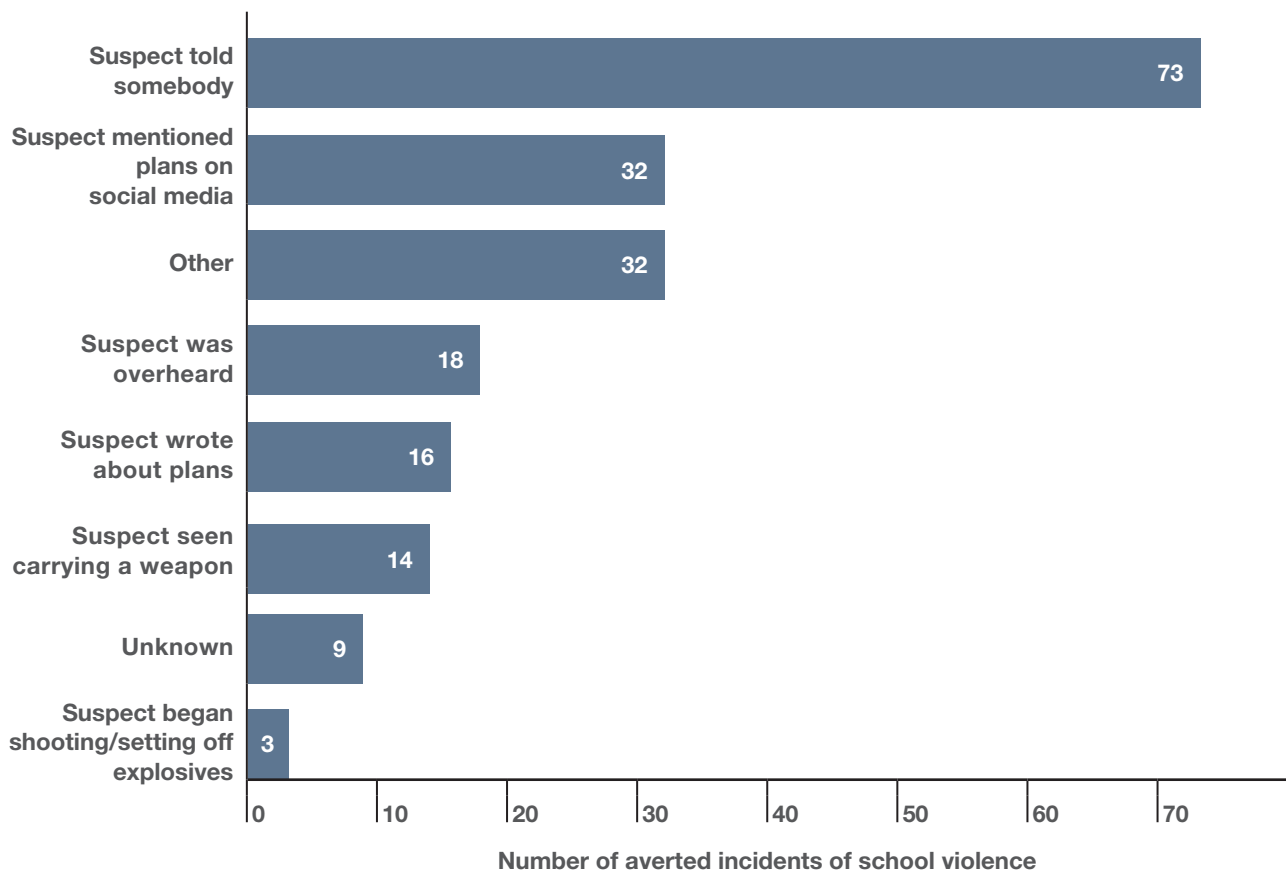
As displayed in figure 10, averted school violence attacks were discovered in a handful of ways. While it is possible for a single incident to be discovered multiple ways, of the cases in the new sample the largest number of potential school violence plots (56 cases) were initially discovered by at least one suspect telling another person—frequently a peer—of their plan, who then reported it to a school administrator, SRO, or other law enforcement. In 13 cases, at least one suspect was overheard talking about their plans and reported what they heard to a school administrator, SRO, or other law enforcement. Closely related to

verbally telling someone, in 22 cases at least one suspect posted about their plan on social media. An additional 12 plots were discovered after at least one suspect wrote about their plans and someone found the note or saw them typing about it somewhere other than social media. In 10 cases, the potential attack was averted when the suspect was seen carrying a weapon, and in two cases the incident was averted after the suspect began shooting or setting off explosives. Together, figure 10.1 on page 23 shows the most common ways plots of averted incidents of school violence were discovered.

**Figure 10.** Method of plot discovery of averted incidents of school violence



**Figure 10.1.** Discovery of plots in combined samples of ASV incidents

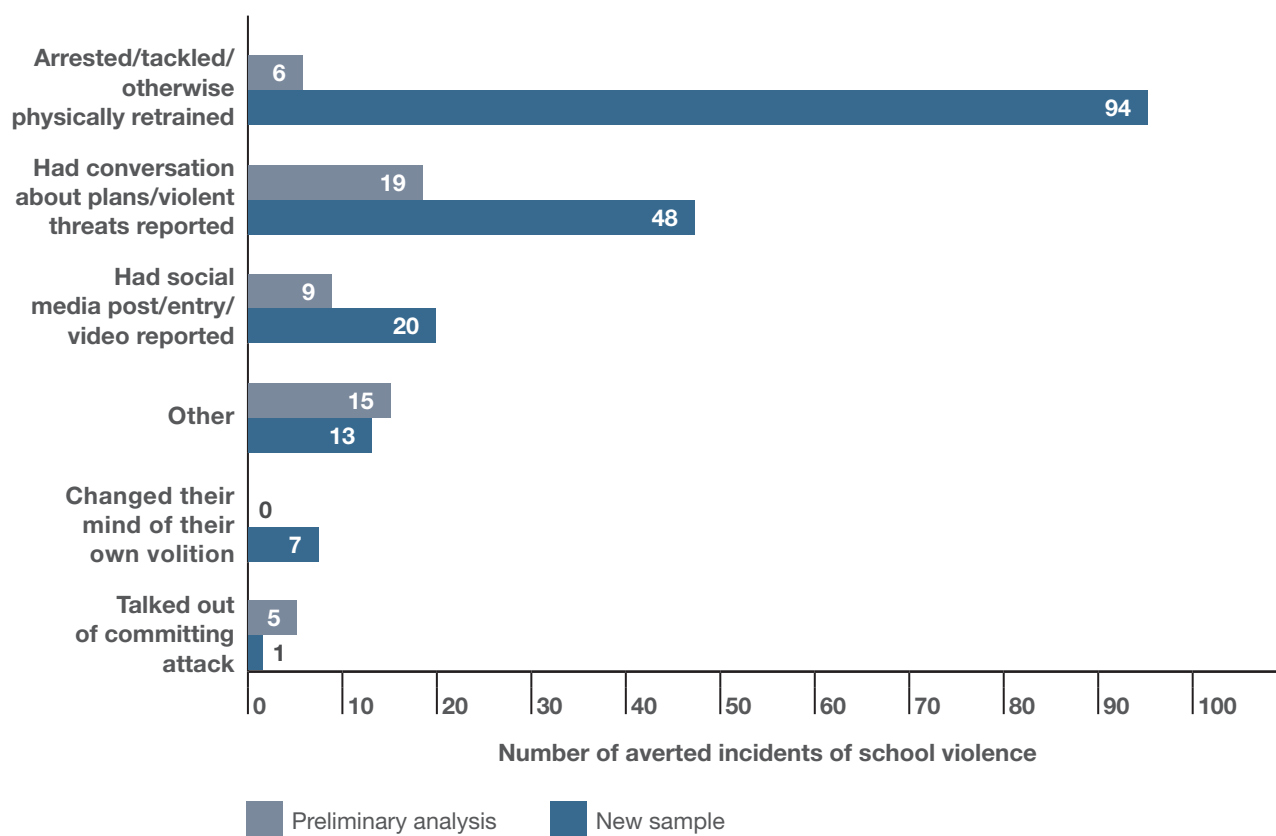


### How the incident of school violence was averted

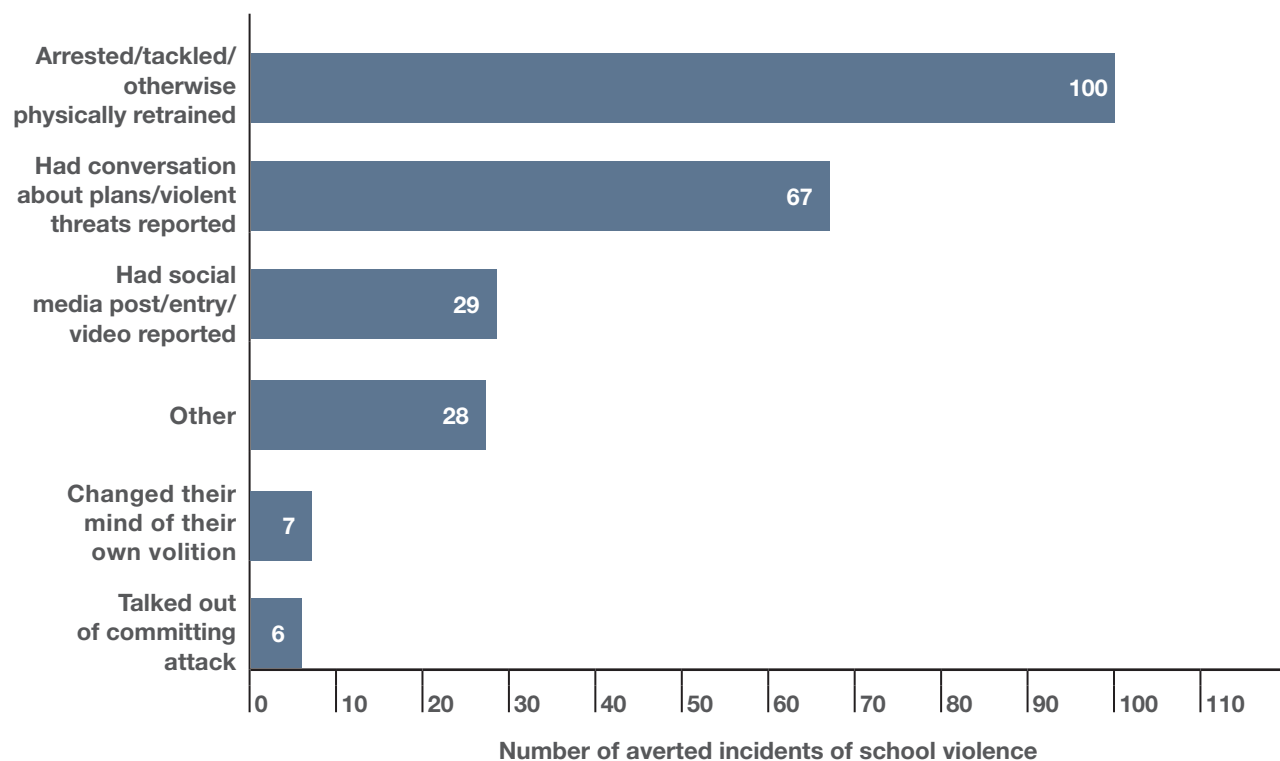
The ASV case submission form collects data regarding how the planned school violence incident was ultimately averted in each case. As displayed in figure 11, the largest number of cases (94) in the new sample were averted with the arrest, tackle, or other physical restraint of the alleged suspect or suspects involved in the plot. In addition, in 48 cases, the potential incident of school violence was averted when the suspect had their conversation—most

commonly with a peer—reported. Closely related to verbally telling someone, in 20 cases, the incident was averted when at least one of the suspects had their social media post, entry, or video reported. Seven suspects changed their mind of their own volition and in one instance, the alleged suspect was talked out of committing their attack. The “Other” category was also selected for 13 cases. Together, figure 11.1 on page 25 shows the most common ways plots of potential incidents of school violence were averted.

**Figure 11.** How the incident of potential school violence was averted in both samples of ASV incidents



**Figure 11.1.** How the incident of potential school violence was averted in combined samples of ASV incidents

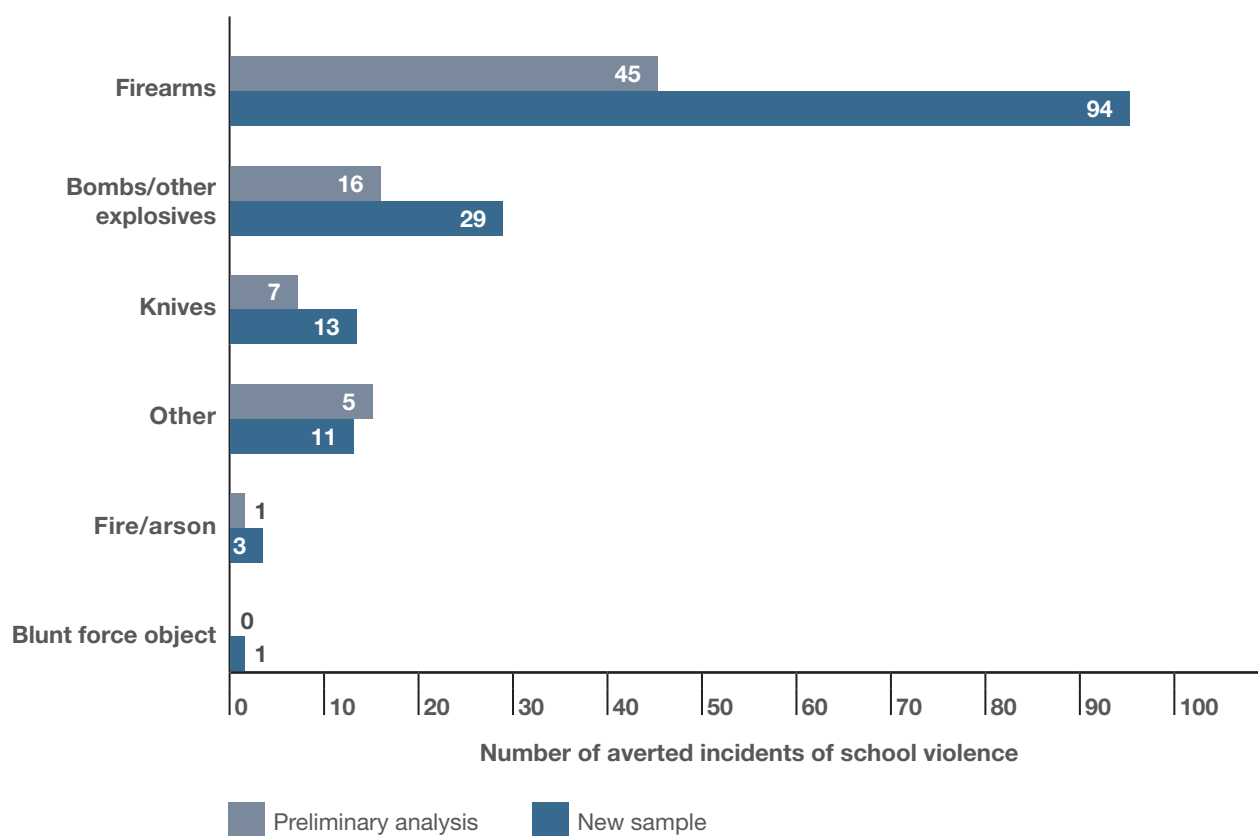


## Weapons

The ASV case submission form collects data regarding the types of weapons suspects in each case of averted school violence intended to use. Of the 120 cases in the new sample, 113 identified what types of weapons the suspects allegedly intended to use, but in some of the cases, the suspect intended to use more than one type of weapon (for example, they intended to use a bomb or other explosive device as a distraction for shooting). As displayed in figure 12, the most common weapons included firearms,

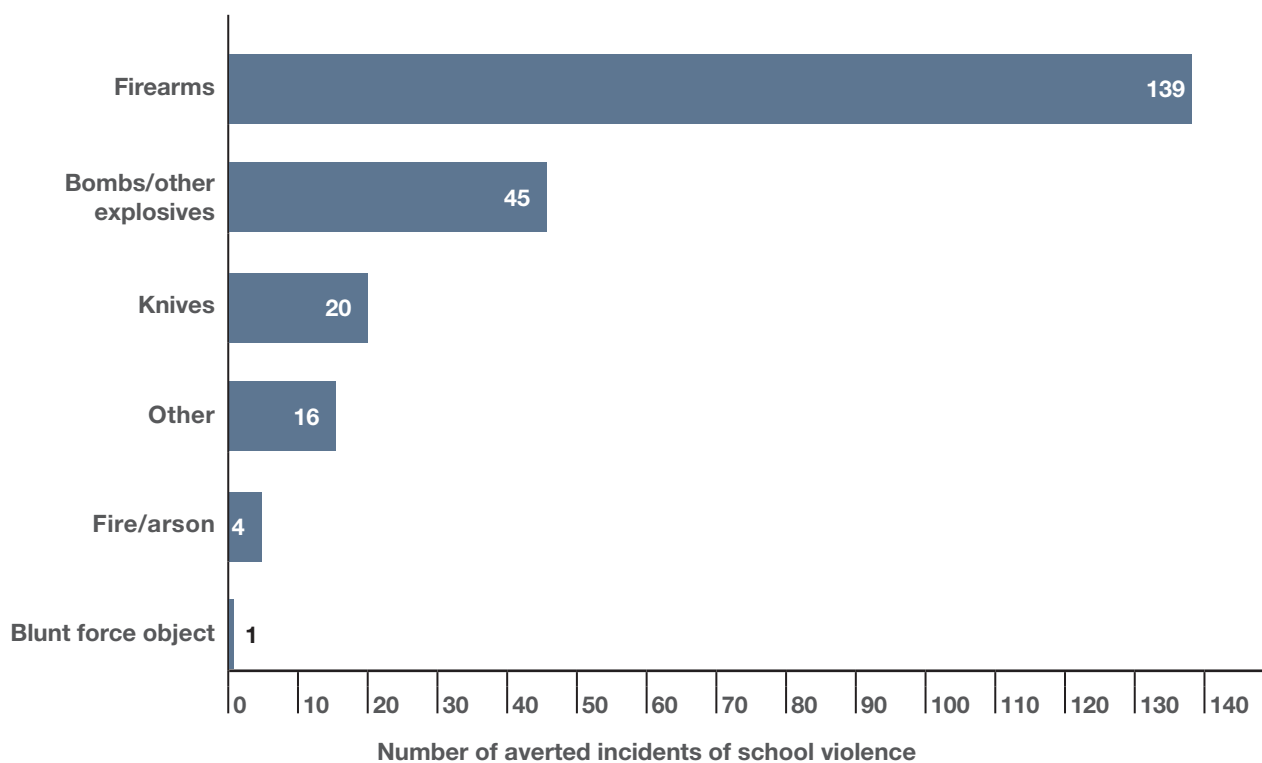
knives, bombs and other explosive devices, and fire. Firearms (94) were the most common intended weapon. Suspects intended to use bombs and other explosive devices in 29 cases and knives in 13 cases. Three cases allegedly involved setting a fire or arson, and one suspect allegedly intended to use a blunt force object as a weapon. Together, figure 12.1 on page 27 shows the most common weapons suspects allegedly intended to use in potential incidents of school violence.

**Figure 12.** Weapons intended for use in both samples of ASV incidents





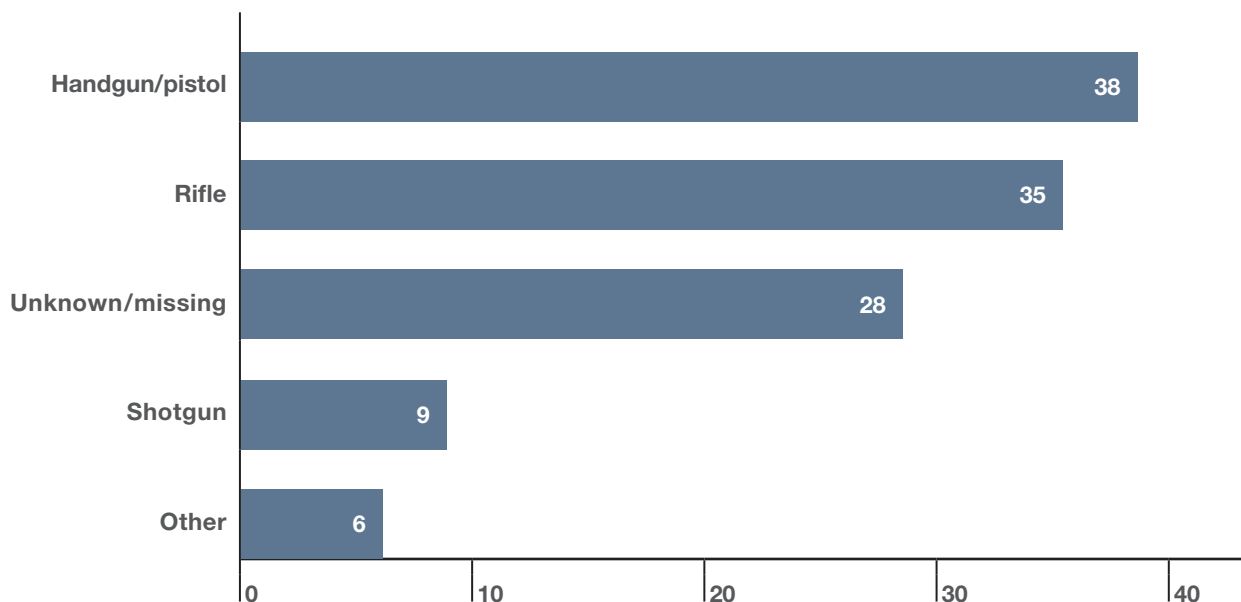
**Figure 12.1.** Weapons intended for use in combined samples of ASV incidents



Further analysis was conducted of the 94 cases in the new sample where firearms were included in the weapons suspects allegedly intended to use. Of those 94 cases, the type of firearm was specified in 89 cases. A total of 116 firearms were identified,

meaning that in some of the cases the suspect or suspects intended to use more than one type of firearm. As displayed in figure 13, handguns or pistols (38 cases) and rifles (35 cases) were the most common weapons.

**Figure 13.** Firearms intended for use in new sample of ASV incidents



# Lessons Learned

**IN ADDITION TO THE QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS** from the 120 cases in the new sample—and the 171 total cases—of school violence attacks that were averted, there is a series of important overarching lessons learned that emerged from the data.

**Educate all members of the school community on indicators of potential self-harm and targeted violence and how to report concerning behavior.**

As identified in the analysis, in many cases the suspects had an affiliation with the school that was the intended target of their planned violent attack. Peers played a significant role in initially discovering the potential school attacks (88 of the 171 total cases). In 31 cases, school personnel—including administrators, faculty and staff, and SROs—were also identified as initially discovering the planned attack. In addition, parents of peers and parents of alleged suspects were involved in identifying potential attacks.

The importance of educating the school community about how to report concerning behavior is further emphasized by research conducted by the U.S. Secret Service on prior knowledge of potential school-based violent attacks, which showed that at least one other person was aware of the attacker's plan in approximately 81 percent of incidents and more than one person was aware in 59 percent of incidents.<sup>12</sup> In addition, research conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on completed active shooter incidents in the United States between 2000 and 2015 in prekindergarten through grade 12 (pre-K–12) school settings, identified that the shooter was a student at the targeted school in 20 of the 30 cases (66.7 percent).<sup>13</sup>

Together, these data suggest that it is extremely important to educate all members of the school community—including administrators, faculty and staff, students, parents and guardians—on the indicators of potential self-harm or violence directed at others as well as

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12. William S. Pollack, William Modzeleski, and Georgeann Rooney, *Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent a Targeted Attack* (Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service, 2008), [https://rems.ed.gov/docs/DOE\\_BystanderStudy.pdf](https://rems.ed.gov/docs/DOE_BystanderStudy.pdf).

13. J. Pete Blair and Katherine W. Schweit, *A Study of Active Shooter Incidents, 2000–2013* (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014), <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1.pdf/view>; Katherine W. Schweit, *Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2014 and 2015* (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016), [https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/activeshooterincidentsus\\_2014-2015.pdf/view](https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/activeshooterincidentsus_2014-2015.pdf/view).

how concerning behavior should be reported. Members of the school community—particularly peers—are likely to be attuned to and aware of suspicious behaviors and comments made by classmates and have demonstrated success in reporting suspicious behaviors after being educated about them. For example, anonymous reporting systems have been shown to be effective in providing students—and other members of the school community—to report potential targeted violence and other concerning behaviors.<sup>14</sup>

**Relationships are critical to assessing the viability of all threats and taking necessary preventative action.**

Many of the potential incidents of school violence were initially discovered by a member of the school community. These cases were then averted after law enforcement personnel were notified and the alleged suspects were arrested. Relationships between stakeholders in a positive and supportive school environment can greatly impact the aversion of a violent incident. In many cases, the time between when the incident was discovered and when it was averted was minimal.

Peers are the ones who initially discover plans of school violence in many of the cases included in the ASV database. Therefore, it is important for school officials to ensure that every adult—administrator, faculty, staff, or SRO—work to develop strong relationships with students so that students feel comfortable reporting concerns about possible threats.

While some school administrators may be concerned about the restrictions of communicating with law enforcement based on the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), it is important to note that sharing information about potential threats or general concerns about school safety is not prohibited by that law. Also, these relationships can help establish protocols and processes for identifying, addressing, and averting potential threats as well as proactively communicating with staff, faculty members, parents and guardians.

**Behavioral threat assessment teams are a critical tool.**

Behavioral threat assessment teams are a critical tool in quickly assessing threats and taking the actions necessary to address them. Every report of a threat or potential suspicious activity must be acted upon as if it is a serious and credible threat, until it has been investigated and determined to no longer be credible. While there may be false negatives—cases in which reports are deemed to not be credible—it is important to err on the side of caution, especially to ensure that students continue to feel safe making reports.

It is also critical that there be a multidisciplinary team in place to whom information can be referred and that can conduct analysis and take appropriate actions to connect persons to services well before an attack is being planned. Behavioral threat assessment teams staffed by school administrators, teachers, mental health practitioners, and law enforcement provide an opportunity to identify the appropriate resources and interventions to assist students pre-crisis within the school, family, and community environments.

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14. School Safety Working Group, *Ten Essential Actions to Improve School Safety* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2020), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0891>.

**Alleged suspects may be motivated by a range of things from seemingly insignificant incidents to a desire to emulate previous mass attackers.**

Alleged suspects of school violence are driven to the precipice of committing a violent attack by a range of motivations. In some cases, a change in their personal life (such as their parents getting divorced or a breakup with a significant other) or academic life (such as a disciplinary incident or significant change in grades) can be the impetus for planning a mass violence attack. In other cases, anniversaries of other high-profile mass casualty attacks can have significance and serve as motivation for those planning school violence. Similarly, there is some research pointing to a school shooting “contagion effect,” in which the immediate aftermath of student suicides or a completed school violence attack motivates others to attempt to carry out an attack.

These data suggest, that there is no “profile” of a school attacker but rather a complex set of personal and environmental factors that influence a person’s decision to commit an act of violence. It is clear that additional research is necessary to identify not only the factors that contribute to mass violence attacks but also promising intervention strategies and practices.

**School resource officers, security personnel, and law enforcement play a critical role in preventing school attacks.**

Amidst the national and local discussions regarding the role of law enforcement in the communities they serve and in educational environments, it is important to recognize the role that public safety officers play in providing mentorship, adult role models, and security

in schools. Carefully selected, well-trained school-based public safety personnel provide an important resource in the prevention and response to school attacks. K–12 schools as well as colleges and universities should endeavor to engage school administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students regarding the role that law enforcement and security personnel will play in creating safe and secure learning environments.

Information collected, analyzed, and reported via the ASV database is critical to improve school safety. Protecting students and school personnel is a community responsibility that can be maximized with information sharing, transparency, and collaborative communication. The ASV database mission is to encourage individuals to share their stories and lessons learned from ASV incidents to prevent future injuries and fatalities in educational institutions. The lessons learned can be used to inform future school policy and safety procedures. The lessons learned will help to save lives through interventions before a school violence event occurs.

# About the National Police Foundation

The **National 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 National 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 National Police Foundation online at [www.policefoundation.org](http://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 and the COPS Training Portal.
- Almost 500 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- 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, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.





The National 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 database 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. A preliminary report (Daniels 2019) analyzed 51 averted incidents of school violence to begin to improve our understanding of averted school attacks. This report analyzes an additional 120 averted incidents of school violence, expanding the knowledge base and further developing lessons learned as our understanding grows of how school attacks are planned, discovered, and thwarted.



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

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