



KEY FINDING – 1

Incidents of targeted violence at school *rarely* are sudden, impulsive acts.

Students who engage in school-based attacks typically did not “just snap” and then engage in impulsive or random acts of targeted school violence. Instead, the attacks examined under the *Safe School Initiative* appeared to be the end result of a comprehensible process of thinking and behavior: behavior that typically began with an idea, progressed to the development of a plan, moved on to securing the means to carry out the plan and culminated in an attack. This is a process that potentially may be knowable or discernible from the attacker’s behaviors and communications.

To the extent that information about an attacker’s intent and planning is knowable and may be uncovered before an incident, some attacks may be preventable. However, findings from the *Safe School Initiative* suggest that the time span between the attacker’s decision to mount an attack and the actual incident may be short. Consequently, when indications that a student may pose a threat to the school community arise in the form of revelations about a planned attack, school administrators and law enforcement officials will need to move quickly to inquire about and intervene in that plan.



KEY FINDING – 2

Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack. In most cases, those who knew were other kids-friends, schoolmates, siblings, and others. However, this information rarely made its way to an adult.

First and foremost, this finding suggests that students can be an important part of prevention efforts. A friend or schoolmate may be the first person to hear that a student is thinking about or planning to harm someone. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, those who have information about a potential incident of targeted school violence may not alert an adult on their own. Schools can encourage students to report this information in part by identifying and breaking down barriers in the school environment that inadvertently may discourage students from coming forward with this information. Schools also may benefit from ensuring that they have a fair, thoughtful and effective system to respond to whatever information students do bring forward. If students have concerns about how adults will react to information that they bring forward, they may be even less inclined to volunteer such information.

In addition, this finding highlights the importance in an inquiry of attempts to gather all relevant information from anyone who may have contact with the student. Efforts to gather all potentially relevant pieces of information, however innocuous they may appear on their own, from all individuals with whom the student has contact may help to develop a more comprehensive picture of the student's ideas, activities and plans. In the end, investigators may find that different people in the student's life have different pieces of the puzzle.



KEY FINDING – 3

Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.

This finding underscores the importance of *not waiting* for a threat before beginning an inquiry. The *Safe School Initiative* found that most attackers in fact did not threaten their target directly and some made no threat at all. Instead, other behaviors and communications that may prompt concern, such as hearing that a child is talking about bringing a gun to school, are indicators that the child may pose a threat and therefore should prompt the initiation of efforts to gather information.

School administrators should respond to all students who make threats. The lack of response could be taken by the threatener as permission to proceed with carrying out the threat. In the end, however, it is important to distinguish between someone who *makes* a threat-tells people they intend to harm someone-and someone who *poses* a threat-engages in behaviors that indicate an intent, planning or preparation for an attack. Those conducting inquiries should focus particular attention on any information that indicates that a student *poses* a threat, regardless of whether the student has told a potential target he or she intends to do them harm.



KEY FINDING – 4

There is no accurate or useful profile of students who engaged in targeted school violence.

The demographic, personality, school history, and social characteristics of the attackers varied substantially. Knowing that a particular student shares characteristics, behaviors, features or traits with prior school shooters does not help in determining whether that student is thinking about or planning for a violent act.

The use of profiles in this way likewise is not an effective approach to identifying students who may pose a risk for targeted school violence at school or for assessing the risk that a particular student may pose for a school-based attack, once a particular student has been identified. Reliance on profiles to predict future school attacks carries two substantial risks: (1) the great majority of students who fit any given profile of a “school shooter” will not actually pose a risk of targeted violence; and, (2) using profiles will fail to identify some students who in fact pose a risk of violence but share few if any characteristics with prior attackers.

Rather than trying to determine the “type” of student who may engage in targeted school violence, an inquiry should focus instead on a student’s *behaviors and communications* to determine if that student appears to be planning or preparing for an attack. Rather than asking whether a particular student “looks like” those who have launched school-based attacks before, it is more productive to ask whether the student is engaging in behaviors that suggest preparations for an attack, if so how fast the student is moving toward attack, and where intervention may be possible.



KEY FINDING – 5

Most attackers engaged in some behavior, prior to the incident, that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.

Several key findings point to the fact that kids send signals-both directly and indirectly-to others regarding their problems. The boys who engaged in the targeted school violence examined by the *Safe School Initiative* were not “invisible” students. In fact nearly all of these students engaged in behaviors-prior to their attacks-that caused concern to at least one person, usually an adult, and most concerned at least three people.

This finding highlights the range of behaviors in a student’s life that may be noticeable and that could prompt some additional probing by a caring adult. A student’s family, teachers, friends and others may have information regarding aspects of a student’s behavior that has raised concern. As was true in some of the incidents covered in this study, individuals in contact with the attacker may have observed something of concern about that student’s behavior, but not of sufficient concern for them to notify anyone in a position to respond.

Educators and other adults can learn how to pick up on these signals and make appropriate referrals. By inquiring about any information that may have prompted some concern, an investigator may be able to develop a more comprehensive picture of the student’s past and current behavior, and identify any indications that the student is intent on or planning to attack. However, discretion should be exercised in determining whom to talk about the student, so as not to alienate or stigmatize the student of concern. A significant challenge facing schools is to determine how best to respond to students who are already known to be in trouble or needing assistance.



KEY FINDING – 6

Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Many had considered or attempted suicide.

Many students, not just those who engaged in school-based attacks, experience or perceive major losses in their lives. Most students who face a significant loss, or who have difficulty coping with such a loss, are not going to be at risk for a school-based attack. However, information that indicates a student is facing or having trouble dealing with a significantly difficult situation may indicate a need to refer the student to appropriate services and resources.

In cases where there is concern about the possibility that a student may engage in targeted violence, attention should be given to any indication that a student is having difficulty coping with major losses or perceived failures, particularly where these losses or failures appear to have prompted feelings of desperation and hopelessness. An inquiry also should anticipate changes in the life of a troubled student, and consider whether these changes might increase-or decrease-the threat the student poses.

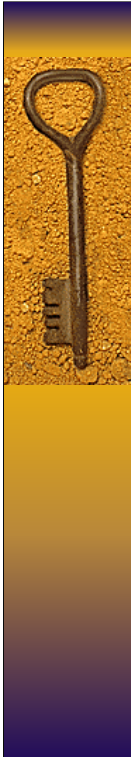


KEY FINDING – 7

Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.

Bullying was not a factor in every case, and clearly not every child who is bullied in school will pose a risk for targeted violence in school. Nevertheless, in a number of the incidents of targeted school violence studied, attackers described being bullied in terms that suggested that these experiences approached torment. These attackers told of behaviors that, if they occurred in the workplace, likely would meet legal definitions of harassment and/or assault.

The prevalence of bullying found in this and other recent studies should strongly support ongoing efforts to reduce bullying in American schools. Educators can play an important role in ensuring that students are not bullied in schools and that schools not only do not permit bullying but also empower other students to let adults in the school know if students are being bullied.



KEY FINDING – 8

Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.

Access to weapons among some students may be common. However, when the idea of an attack exists, *any* effort to acquire, prepare or use a weapon or ammunition may be a significant move in the attacker's progression from idea to action. Any inquiry should include investigation of and attention to weapon access and use and communications about weapons. Attention should also be given to indications of any efforts by a student to build a bomb or acquire bomb-making components.

The large proportion of attackers who acquired their guns from home points to the need for schools and law enforcement officials to collaborate on policies and procedures for responding when a student is thought to have a firearm in school. In particular, schools should be aware of the provisions of the Federal Gun-Free Schools Act, which requires that all schools expel students who bring a gun to school and should report all violations to local law enforcement officials.



KEY FINDING – 9

In many cases, other students were involved in the attack in some capacity.

This finding highlights the importance of considering what prompting or encouragement a student may receive from others in his life that influences his intent, planning or preparations for a potential attack. Any investigation of potential targeted school violence should include attention to the role that a student's friends or peers may be playing in that student's thinking about and preparations for an attack. It is possible, that feedback from friends or others may help to move a student from an unformed thought about attacking to developing and advancing a plan to carry out the attack.



KEY FINDING – 10

Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most attacks were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention and most were brief in duration.

The short duration of most incidents of targeted school violence argues for the importance of developing preventive measures in addition to any emergency planning for a school or school district. The preventive measures should include protocols and procedures for responding to and managing threats and other behaviors of concern.