



**THE FINAL REPORT AND
FINDINGS OF THE
SAFE SCHOOL
INITIATIVE:**

IMPLICATIONS FOR
THE PREVENTION OF
SCHOOL ATTACKS IN
THE UNITED STATES

UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE AND
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, D. C.
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

by

Bryan Vossekuil
Director
National Violence Prevention and Study Center

Robert A. Fein, Ph.D.
Director
National Violence Prevention and Study Center

Marisa Reddy, Ph.D.
Chief Research Psychologist and Research Coordinator
National Threat Assessment Center
U.S. Secret Service

Randy Borum, Psy.D.
Associate Professor
University of South Florida

William Modzeleski
Associate Deputy Under Secretary
Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools
U.S. Department of Education

Washington, D. C.
June 2004

JOINT MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, AND THE DIRECTOR, U.S. SECRET SERVICE

Littleton, Colo.; Springfield, OR; West Paducah, KY; Jonesboro, AR. These communities have become familiar to many Americans as the locations where school shootings have occurred in recent years. School shootings are a rare, but significant, component of school violence in America. It is clear that other kinds of problems are far more common than the targeted attacks that have taken place in schools across this country. However, each school-based attack has had a tremendous and lasting effect on the school in which it occurred, the surrounding community, and the nation as a whole. In the aftermath of these tragic events, educators, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, parents, and others have asked: "Could we have known that these attacks were being planned?" and "What can be done to prevent future attacks from occurring?"

In June 1999, following the attack at Columbine High School, our two agencies—the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education—launched a collaborative effort to begin to answer these questions. The result was the *Safe School Initiative*, an extensive examination of 37 incidents of targeted school shootings and school attacks that occurred in the United States beginning with the earliest identified incident in 1974 through May 2000. The focus of the *Safe School Initiative* was on examining the thinking, planning, and other behaviors engaged in by students who carried out school attacks. Particular attention was given to identifying pre-attack behaviors and communications that might be detectable—or "knowable"—and could help in preventing some future attacks.

The *Safe School Initiative* was implemented through the Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center and the Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program. The *Initiative* drew from the Secret Service's experience in studying and preventing assassination and other types of targeted violence and the Department of Education's expertise in helping schools facilitate learning through the creation of safe environments for students, faculty, and staff.

This document, the *Safe School Initiative's* final report, details how our two agencies studied school-based attacks and what we found. Some of the findings may surprise you. It is clear that there is no simple explanation as to why these attacks have occurred. Nor is there a simple solution to stop this problem. But the findings of the *Safe School Initiative* do suggest that some future attacks may be preventable if those responsible for safety in schools know what questions to ask and where to uncover information that may help with efforts to intervene before a school attack can occur.

Since it began in June 1999, our partnership has been a tremendous asset to each of our respective agencies and vital to the success of this study. It is our hope that the information we present in this final report is useful to those of you on the front lines of this problem—the administrators, educators, law enforcement officials, and others with protective responsibilities in schools—and to anyone concerned with children's safety. We encourage all of you in your efforts to keep our nation's children safe in school and hope this report helps you in those efforts.



Rod Paige
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education



W. Ralph Basham
Director
U.S. Secret Service

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Bryan Vossekuil
Robert Fein
Marisa Reddy
Randy Borum
William Modzeleski
Washington, D.C.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

THE SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE



Littleton, CO; Springfield, OR; West Paducah, KY; Jonesboro, AR. These communities have become familiar to many Americans as among the locations of those schools where shootings have occurred nationwide in recent years. In the aftermath of these tragic events, educators, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals and parents have pressed for answers to two central questions: "Could we have known that these attacks were being planned?" and, if so, "What could we have done to prevent these attacks from occurring?"

This publication, *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*, is a recent product of an ongoing collaboration between the U. S. Secret Service and the U. S. Department of Education to begin to answer these questions.¹ It is the culmination of an extensive examination of 37 incidents of targeted school violence that occurred in the United States from December 1974 through May 2000.²

The Safe School Initiative

Following the attack at Columbine High School in April 1999, the Secret Service and the Department of Education initiated, in June 1999, a study of the thinking, planning and other pre-attack behaviors engaged in by attackers who carried out school shootings. That study, the *Safe School Initiative*, was pursued under a partnership between the Secret Service and the Department of Education, and implemented through the Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center and the Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program. In its execution, the *Safe School Initiative* drew from the Secret Service's experience in studying and preventing targeted violence and from the Department of Education's expertise in helping schools facilitate learning through the creation of safe environments for students, faculty and staff.

The objective of the *Safe School Initiative* was to attempt to identify information that could be obtainable, or "knowable," prior to an attack. That information would then be analyzed and evaluated to produce a factual, accurate knowledge base on targeted school attacks. This knowledge could be used to help communities across the country to formulate policies and strategies aimed at preventing school-based attacks.

Key features of the *Safe School Initiative* were its focus on "targeted" school violence and its adaptation of earlier Secret Service research on assassination for its examination of incidents of school-based attacks.

¹ This report is an update and expansion of the earlier *Interim Report on the Prevention of Targeted Violence in Schools*, which was released in October 2000. This *Final Report* supercedes the *Interim Report* and should be used and referenced in place of the *Interim Report*.

² See Section I, "INTRODUCTION: THE SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE, Methodology," for a discussion of the approach used by the Secret Service to identify incidents of school-based attacks.

Defining "Targeted" School Violence

The *Safe School Initiative* examined incidents of "targeted violence" in school settings—school shootings and other school-based attacks where the school was deliberately selected as the location for the attack and was not simply a random site of opportunity. The term "targeted violence" evolved from the Secret Service's five-year study of the behavior of individuals who have carried out, or attempted, lethal attacks on public officials or prominent individuals. That study, the Secret Service's *Exceptional Case Study Project* (ECSP), was initiated in 1992 under funding provided by the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice.

The focus of the ECSP study was an operational analysis of the thinking and behavior of those who have assassinated, attacked or tried to attack a national public official or public figure in the United States since 1949. The ECSP defined "targeted violence" as any incident of violence where a known or knowable attacker selects a particular target prior to their violent attack.³ The purpose of the ECSP was to generate a better understanding of attacks against public officials that, in turn, would help Secret Service agents in their investigations of threats toward the president and others they protect and in the prevention of harm to these protected officials.⁴

The ECSP sought to identify what information might be knowable prior to an attack and to better enable intervention before an attack occurred. Findings from the ECSP helped to dispel several myths and misconceptions about assassination.

In addition to the ECSP's particular focus on incidents involving attacks on public officials and prominent individuals, other types of violence in which a victim is targeted specifically include assassinations, stalking, some forms of domestic violence, some types of workplace violence, and some types of school violence. In the case of targeted school violence, the target may be a specific individual, such as a particular classmate or teacher, or a group or category of individuals, such as "jocks" or "geeks." The target may even be the school itself.

The Secret Service Threat Assessment Approach

The findings of the ECSP also led to the Secret Service's development of a more thorough and focused process for conducting threat assessment investigations. As part of its mission, the Secret Service is responsible for protecting the president and vice president of the United States and their families and certain national and

³ Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., & Holden, G. (1995). Threat assessment: An approach to prevent targeted violence. *National Institute of Justice: Research in Action*, 1-7.

⁴ Fein, R., & Vossekuil, B. (1999). Assassination in the United States: An operational study of recent assassins, attackers, and near-lethal approachers. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 44, 321-333.

international leaders, all of whom are referred to as "protectees." The Secret Service provides this protection by means of two distinct yet complementary strategies: the use of physical measures—including magnetometers, armored vehicles, perimeters of armed agents, and canine units—that are designed to both deter potential attacks and serve as protective barriers in the event someone tries to attack; and a second, far less visible component known as threat assessment.

Threat assessment is a process of identifying, assessing and, managing the threat that certain persons may pose to Secret Service protectees. The goal of threat assessment is to intervene before an attack can occur. The threat assessment process involves three principal steps—all before the person has the opportunity to attack:

- identifying individuals who have the idea or intent of attacking a Secret Service protectee;
- assessing whether the individual poses a risk to a protectee, after gathering sufficient information from multiple sources; and,
- managing the threat the individual poses, in those cases where the individual investigated is determined to pose a threat.

The Secret Service considers threat assessment to be as important to preventing targeted violence as the physical measures it employs.

In 1998, the Secret Service established the National Threat Assessment Center, an entity within the Secret Service that is dedicated to continuing efforts agency-wide to better understand and prevent targeted violence, and to share this developing knowledge with other constituencies responsible for public safety and violence prevention. Adaptation of its threat assessment protocols for use in addressing the problem of school-based attacks is the most recent of the Secret Service's initiatives to share this body of knowledge and expertise with other constituencies engaged in developing strategies to address targeted violence issues. In the late 1990s, the Secret Service and the Justice Department's National Institute of Justice joined forces to make information on the Secret Service's threat assessment protocols available to a wider law enforcement audience. *Protective Intelligence & Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Officials*, released in July 1998, offers state and local police officials insights into the elements of carrying out and evaluating the findings of threat assessment investigations.⁵

In addition, since the release of the *Safe School Initiative* Interim Report in October 2000, personnel from the Secret Service and the Department of Education have given over 100 seminars and briefings on the study to thousands of educators, law

⁵ Fein, R. & Vossekuil, B. (1998). *Protective Intelligence & Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Officials*. U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice: Washington, D.C.

enforcement officials, mental health professionals and others across the United States. Several questions and discussion points raised by seminar attendees have been addressed in this final report.

Finally, the Department of Education and the Secret Service currently are completing work on a guide to investigating and responding to threats in schools. The guide is scheduled for publication in 2002. The guide will include recommendations for investigating and evaluating threats and other behaviors of concern in school; address considerations for developing policies and capacity to support threat assessment efforts in schools; and provide suggestions for approaches schools can adopt to foster school environments that reduce threats of targeted violence.

The Prevalence of Violence in American Schools

Public policy-makers, school administrators, police officials, and parents continue to search for explanations for the targeted violence that occurred at Columbine High School and other schools across the country, and seek assurance that similar incidents will not be repeated at educational institutions in their communities. While the quest for solutions to the problem of targeted school violence is of critical importance, reports from the Department of Education, the Justice Department, and other sources indicate that few children are likely to fall prey to life-threatening violence in school settings.⁶

To put the problem of targeted school-based attacks in context, from 1993 to 1997, the odds that a child in grades 9-12 would be threatened or injured with a weapon in school were 7 to 8 percent, or 1 in 13 or 14; the odds of getting into a physical fight at school were 15 percent, or 1 in 7.⁷ In contrast, the odds that a child would die in school—by homicide or suicide—are, fortunately, no greater than 1 in 1 million.⁸ In 1998, students in grades 9-12 were the victims of 1.6 million thefts and 1.2 million nonfatal violent crimes, while in this same period 60 school-associated violent deaths were reported for this student population.⁹

⁶ See, for example, Kaufman, P., et. al. (2000). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2000*. U. S. Department of Education (NCES 2001-017) and U. S. Department of Justice (NCJ-184176): Washington, D. C. Online Vers.: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubinfo.asp?pubid=2001017>; Anderson, M., et. al. (2001). School-associated Violent Deaths in the United States, 1994-1999. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 286, 2695-2702; and, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, Committee on Law and Justice and Board on Children, Youth, and Families. (2001). *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice*. Panel on Juvenile Crime: Prevention, Treatment, and Control. McCord, J., et. al. (Eds.). National Academy Press: Washington, D.C.

⁷ Snyder, H.N., & Sickmund, M. (1999). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 1999 National Report*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Available online at <http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/nationalreport99/index.html>.

⁸ U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice (1999). *1999 Annual Report on School Safety*. Washington, D.C.: Authors.

⁹ Ibid.

The findings of the *Safe School Initiative's* extensive search for recorded incidents of targeted school-based attacks underscore the rarity of lethal attacks in school settings. The Department of Education reports that nearly 60 million children attend the nation's 119,000+ schools.¹⁰ The combined efforts of the Secret Service and the Department of Education identified 37 incidents of targeted school-based attacks, committed by 41 individuals over a 25-year period.¹¹

Nevertheless, the impact of targeted school-based attacks cannot be measured in statistics alone. While it is clear that other kinds of problems in American schools are far more common than the targeted violence that has taken place in them, the high-profile shootings that have occurred in schools over the past decade have resulted in increased fear among students, parents, and educators. School shootings are a rare, but significant, component of the problem of school violence. Each school-based attack has had a tremendous and lasting effect on the school in which it occurred, the surrounding community, and the nation as a whole. In the wake of these attacks, fear of future targeted school violence has become a driving force behind the efforts of school officials, law enforcement professionals, and parents to identify steps that can be taken to prevent incidents of violence in their schools.

Methodology

The Secret Service and the Department of Education began work on the *Safe School Initiative* study in June 1999. Research protocols employed in carrying out and analyzing the findings of this work reflect an adaptation of the ECSP operational approach to examining targeted attacks against public officials and prominent individuals. Researchers used a similar operational focus for the *Safe School Initiative* to develop information that could be useful to schools in better understanding and preventing targeted violence in school settings. The emphasis of the study was on examining the attackers' pre-incident thinking and behavior, to explore information that could aid in preventing future attacks.

For the purposes of this study, an incident of targeted school violence was defined as any incident where (i) a current student or recent former student attacked someone at his or her school with lethal means (e.g., a gun or knife); and, (ii) where the student attacker purposefully chose his or her school as the location of the attack. Consistent with this definition, incidents where the school was chosen simply as a site of opportunity, such as incidents that were solely related to gang or drug trade activity or to a violent interaction between individuals that just happened to occur at the school, were not included.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics (2002). *Digest of Education Statistics 2000*; Washington D.C.: Authors

¹¹ *Supra* note 2.

Under the study's research strategy, each incident of targeted violence was assigned to a study review team comprised of criminal investigators and social science researchers. At least two reviewers were assigned to each incident.

The Secret Service and the Department of Education made every effort to ensure that the *Safe School Initiative* would produce information that would be useful for school administrators, educators, law enforcement officials, and others working with schools. To that end, researchers consulted regularly with experts in the fields of education, school violence, and juvenile homicide, among others, in the course of developing the study design and protocols. Feedback from these various experts was incorporated into the final study design.

The Study Population

Researchers from the Secret Service and the Department of Education initiated their study of targeted school violence with an extensive search for information that would identify incidents of targeted school violence that have occurred in the United States. Beginning with June 2000 and working back in time, researchers explored all relevant, searchable databases maintained in the public domain or available by subscription, such as public news databases and professional publications, to identify incidents meeting the definition of the study population. Researchers also consulted with law enforcement officials and school violence experts to develop leads on incidents of school violence that might meet the criteria for inclusion in the study constituency.

In the end, researchers identified 37 incidents of targeted school violence involving 41 attackers that occurred in the United States from 1974, the year in which the earliest incident identified took place, through June 2000, when data collection for the study was completed.¹² The school-based attacks included in the *Safe School Initiative* represent all of the incidents of targeted school violence meeting the study criteria that Secret Service and Department of Education researchers were able to identify in that time frame.

Sources of Information on Incidents of Targeted School Violence

Information on each incident of targeted school violence identified by Secret Service and Department of Education researchers was drawn principally from primary

¹² It is possible that incidents of targeted school violence other than those identified by *Safe School Initiative* researchers might have occurred prior to the 1974 incident included in the study, or between 1974 and the completion of data collection for the study in June 2000. For example, incidents that met the study definition, but that were not identifiable under the study search strategy, or that were not reported as school-based crimes, would have been unlikely to come to the attention of Secret Service and Department of Education researchers. In addition, incidents of targeted school violence that have occurred since June 2000 were outside the scope of the study.

source materials concerning the incident. These primary source materials included investigative, school, court, and mental health records.

In addition, study researchers conducted supplemental interviews with 10 of the perpetrators of incidents of the school-based attacks identified by the Secret Service and the Department of Education. These interviews provided researchers with further opportunity to examine the incident from the point of view of the attacker and to "walk through the process of the attack" from its conceptualization to its execution. Insights gleaned from these interviews have been used by the Secret Service primarily in training venues to illustrate particular aspects of incidents of targeted school violence.

Coding of Primary Source Materials

Each member of the review team assigned to a particular incident independently answered several hundred questions about each case, entering his or her answers to the questions in a codebook. Review team members were instructed to record information gathered from primary sources as it appeared in those sources, and not to engage in interpretation of facts presented.

Information gathered and reflected in incident reviewers' responses to the coded study questions included facts about:

- the attacker's development of an idea to harm the target, and progression from the original idea to the attack;
- the attacker's selection of the target(s);
- the attacker's motive(s) for the incident;
- any communications made by the attacker about his or her ideas and intent, including any threats made to the target(s) or about the target(s);
- evidence that the attacker planned the incident;
- the attacker's mental health and substance abuse history, if any; and,
- the attacker's life circumstances/situation at the time of the attack, including relationships with parents and other family members; performance in school; and treatment by fellow students.

Information regarding the attacker's demographic characteristics and personal history, including criminal and school history, also were coded. When each reviewer had completed his or her response to the questions, the review team met as a whole to compare responses and produce a single "reconciled" coding of the incident.

Analysis of Responses to the Coded Study Questions

Findings presented in Chapter III of this report reflect researchers' careful analysis of the coded responses to the extensive questionnaire employed in recording information gathered on each of the 37 school-based attacks and 41 attackers that were examined in the *Safe School Initiative*. Researchers were cautious not to overreach in drawing conclusions from this information.

Primary source materials reviewed for the 37 incidents did not provide answers in every case to all of the areas of inquiry covered in the questionnaire. In general, researchers declined to draw a conclusion if information directly responsive to a particular area of inquiry was available for fewer than half of the incidents reviewed.

Moreover, even when answers to a particular coded study question were available for the majority of incidents, these responses collectively did not suggest in all cases a common or shared characteristic. Here again, researchers were cautious not to draw a conclusion in a particular area of inquiry if that conclusion was supported by fewer than the majority of the responses to the subject question.

However, in some cases, researchers believed that the absence of a common or shared characteristic or behavior in the coded responses to inquiries—most notably with respect to the characteristics and behaviors of the attackers—was sufficiently compelling to note those observations as findings as well.

Organization of the Final Report

The remainder of this report is organized into four chapters. Chapter II: "Characteristics of Incidents of Targeted School Violence," presents basic descriptive information about the attacks examined by the *Safe School Initiative*, including incident, target, and victim characteristics. Chapter III: "Findings of the *Safe School Initiative*," describes the conclusions reached by *Safe School Initiative* researchers after careful analysis of the facts and other information collected in the course of the Secret Service's and the Department of Education's study of targeted school violence.

Chapter IV: "Implications of *Safe School Initiative* Findings for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence," will be of particular interest to educators, law enforcement officials, and others who are seeking guidance to inform efforts to address the problem of targeted school violence. In this chapter, the authors focus in on 10 key findings of the *Safe School Initiative* that appear to have implications for

the development of strategies to prevent targeted school violence. These findings specifically concern what information was known—or "knowable"—about these incidents prior to the attack, and that, in turn, might be relevant to efforts to prevent future attacks. Discussion of these key findings also includes consideration of how this information might be applicable to investigating threats and other behavior in schools that may raise concerns.

In the final chapter of this report, Chapter V: "Threat Assessment as a Promising Strategy for Preventing School Violence," the authors offer some concluding observations on how threat assessment protocols might be incorporated into strategies to prevent targeted violence in schools.

Overview of *Safe School Initiative* Findings

The findings of the *Safe School Initiative* suggest that there are productive actions that educators, law enforcement officials, and others can pursue in response to the problem of targeted school violence. Specifically, *Initiative* findings suggest that these officials may wish to consider focusing their efforts to formulate strategies for preventing these attacks in two principal areas:

- developing the capacity to pick up on and evaluate available or knowable information that might indicate that there is a risk of a targeted school attack; and,
- employing the results of these risk evaluations or "threat assessments" in developing strategies to prevent potential school attacks from occurring.

Support for these suggestions is found in 10 key findings of the *Safe School Initiative* study. These findings are as follows:

- Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely were sudden, impulsive acts.
- Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.
- Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.
- There is no accurate or useful "profile" of students who engaged in targeted school violence.¹³
- Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
- Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.

¹³ Here the term "profile" refers to a set of demographic and other traits that a set of perpetrators of a crime have in common. Please refer to "Characterizing the Attacker" in Chapter III and to Reddy et al. (2001), "Evaluating risk for targeted violence in schools" in the Resources section for further explanation of the term "profile."

- Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
- Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
- In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
- Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

CHAPTER II

CHARACTERISTICS OF INCIDENTS OF TARGETED SCHOOL VIOLENCE



The *Safe School Initiative* found that targeted school violence is not a new or recent phenomenon. The earliest case that researchers were able to identify occurred in 1974. In that incident, a student brought guns and homemade bombs to his school; set off the fire alarm; and shot at emergency and custodial personnel who responded to the alarm.

The *Safe School Initiative* identified 37 incidents involving 41 attackers that met the study definition of targeted school violence and occurred between 1974 and the end of the 2000 school year.¹⁴ These incidents took place in 26 states, with more than one incident occurring in Arkansas, California, Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee.¹⁵

Analysis of the study findings identified the following characteristics of incidents of targeted school violence:

- In almost three-quarters of the incidents, the attacker killed one or more students, faculty, or others at the school (73 percent, n=27¹⁶). In the remaining incidents, the attackers used a weapon to injure at least one person at school (24 percent, n=9). In one incident, a student killed his family and then held his class hostage with a weapon.
- More than one-half of the attacks occurred during the school day (59 percent, n=22), with fewer occurring before school (22 percent, n=8) or after school (16 percent, n=6).
- Almost all of the attackers were current students at the school where they carried out their attacks (95 percent, n=39). Only two attackers were former students of the school where they carried out their attacks at the time of those attacks (5 percent, n=2).
- All of the incidents of targeted school violence examined in the *Safe School Initiative* were committed by boys or young men (100 percent, n=41).¹⁷
- In most of the incidents, the attackers carried out the attack alone (81 percent, n=30). In four of the incidents, the attacker engaged in the attack on his own but had assistance in planning the attack (11 percent, n=4). In three incidents, two or more attackers carried out the attack together (8 percent, n=3).

¹⁴ See Appendix B for a list of the dates of the incidents of targeted school violence examined by the Safe School Initiative.

¹⁵ See Appendix A for a list of the locations of the incidents of targeted school violence studied under the Safe School Initiative.

¹⁶ "N" refers to the number of attackers that corresponds to the reported percentage. Unless indicated otherwise, when the finding pertains to total attackers all Ns are out of a total of 41. When the finding pertains to total incidents (i.e., school-based attacks) all Ns are out of a total of 37 incidents.

¹⁷ While all the attackers in this study were boys, it would be misleading to read the findings of this study as suggesting that a girl could not or would not carry out a school-based attack. For example, an incident occurred after the completion of this study in which a girl shot her classmate at a parochial school in Williamsport, Pa. In addition, a well-publicized school shooting that occurred in San Diego, Calif., in 1976 was carried out by a woman. The San Diego incident was not included in this study because the attacker was not a current or former student of the school where she conducted her attack, but, rather, lived across the street from the school.

- Most attackers used some type of gun as their primary weapon, with over half of the attackers using handguns (61 percent, n=25), and nearly half of them using rifles or shotguns (49 percent, n=20).¹⁸ Three-quarters of the attackers used only one weapon (76 percent, n=31) to harm their victims, although almost half of the attackers had more than one weapon with them at time of the attack (46 percent, n=19).

Target and Victim Characteristics

Perpetrators of incidents of targeted school violence chose a range of targets for their attacks, including fellow students, faculty and staff, and the school itself. These incidents were usually planned in advance and for most part included intent to harm a specific, pre-selected target, whether or not the attacker's execution of the incident, in fact, resulted in harm to the target.

Target and victim characteristics identified by the *Safe School Initiative* were:

- In over half of the incidents (54 percent, n=22), the attacker had selected at least one school administrator, faculty member, or staff member as a target. Students were chosen as targets in fewer than half of the incidents (41 percent, n=15).
- In nearly half of the incidents, the attackers were known to have chosen more than one target prior to their attack (44 percent, n=16).
- Most attackers had a grievance against at least one of their targets prior to the attack (73 percent, n=30).¹⁹
- In almost half of the incidents (46 percent, n=17), individuals who were targeted prior to the attack also became victims (i.e., individuals actually harmed in the attack). However, other individuals at the school, who were not identified as original targets of the attack, were injured or killed as well. Among these non-targeted individuals, over half were other students (57 percent, n=21) and over one-third (39 percent, n=16) were school administrators, faculty, or staff.

¹⁸ These percentages include all weapons used (i.e., discharged) in the attack, and therefore total more than 100 percent.

¹⁹ For the purposes of this study, "grievance" was defined as "a belief that some other person or organization is directly or indirectly responsible for injury or harm to self and/or someone whom the subject cares about."

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS OF THE SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE



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