POLICY BRIEF

What We Know About Foiled and Failed Mass School Shootings

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SYNOPSIS

This research brief will explore what we know about foiled and failed mass school shootings—referring to incidents and plots that resulted in zero victim casualties. Findings will illustrate the common mass school shooting perpetrator and incident characteristics, as well as what contributed to these attacks being thwarted. Actionable takeaways based on the research will illustrate future strategies for prevention and intervention including leakage and warning signs, as well as situational crime prevention.

THIS ANALYSIS DEFINES THE FOLLOWING:

Completed Mass Shooting:
An incident involving four or more fatalities.

Attempted Mass Shooting:
An incident involving less than four deaths, but at least one victim casualty (fatality or injury).

Failed Mass Shooting:
An incident that was set in motion and stopped during the incident.

Foiled Mass Shooting:
A plan that was set in motion and stopped before the incident began.

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WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT FOILED AND FAILED MASS SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

Tragic gun violence incidents in schools—including Columbine High (1999), Sandy Hook Elementary (2012), Marjory Stoneman Douglas High (2018), and Robb Elementary (2022)—have made mass school shootings one of the greatest social and political concerns of the 21st century.[1] Although these events are rare relative to other forms of school violence and gun violence at large, their negative impact on the emotional well-being of students, teachers, parents, and society cannot be understated. To address this concern, much academic research has been directed at understanding mass school shootings as a subtype of the public mass shooting phenomenon. Public mass shooting research has largely focused on completed incidents involving four or more victim fatalities.[2] Despite these advancements, current research often excludes relevant cases that are characterized by mass shooting *intent*—resulting in fewer than four fatalities.[3] In other words, research thus far has largely overlooked foiled and failed mass school shootings: incidents that are planned (foiled) or initiated (failed) but never manifest into an attempted or completed shooting (i.e., involving gunshot casualties).

There are a variety of ways that mass school shootings may be foiled or fail. Some mass school shooting plots are foiled before an offender can progress past the planning and preparation stage into actualized attack initiation.[4] For example, in 2019, a 19-year-old student was planning to carry out a mass shooting at his university.[5] He had been studying previous mass shootings for over a year so he could learn how to complete his attack. He purchased two firearms a week before his intended attack; however, his plot was foiled by fellow students who reported him to campus security after seeing the guns. During a search of his dorm room, police found ammunition and detailed plans (including a timeline) for completing his attack in addition to the firearms. In the end, the other students' recognition of this potential threat and notification to school officials and police lead to the prevention of this mass school shooting attack.

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In other situations, initiated mass school shootings may fail due to the rapid response of potential victims and guardians at the scene.[6] For example, in 2018, a 19-year-old student arrived at his high school with a semiautomatic rifle, intending to commit a mass shooting during graduation rehearsal in the gymnasium.[7] At the entrance of the gymnasium, however, the offender ran into a wrestling coach and opened fire, alerting students, faculty, and the school resource officer (SRO), all of whom responded quickly. Students and faculty engaged in lockdown procedures and the SRO pursued the shooter out of the building. Ultimately, the offender's intentions failed, as he was the only casualty during the attack after being shot and injured by the SRO.

This research brief explores what we know about both foiled and failed mass school shootings—referring to plots and incidents that resulted in zero victim casualties. These thwarted mass shootings—whether foiled or failed—are the ideal outcomes of a planned mass shooting. They are particularly useful for determining effective strategies to prevent incidents or intervene before innocent victims are harmed.

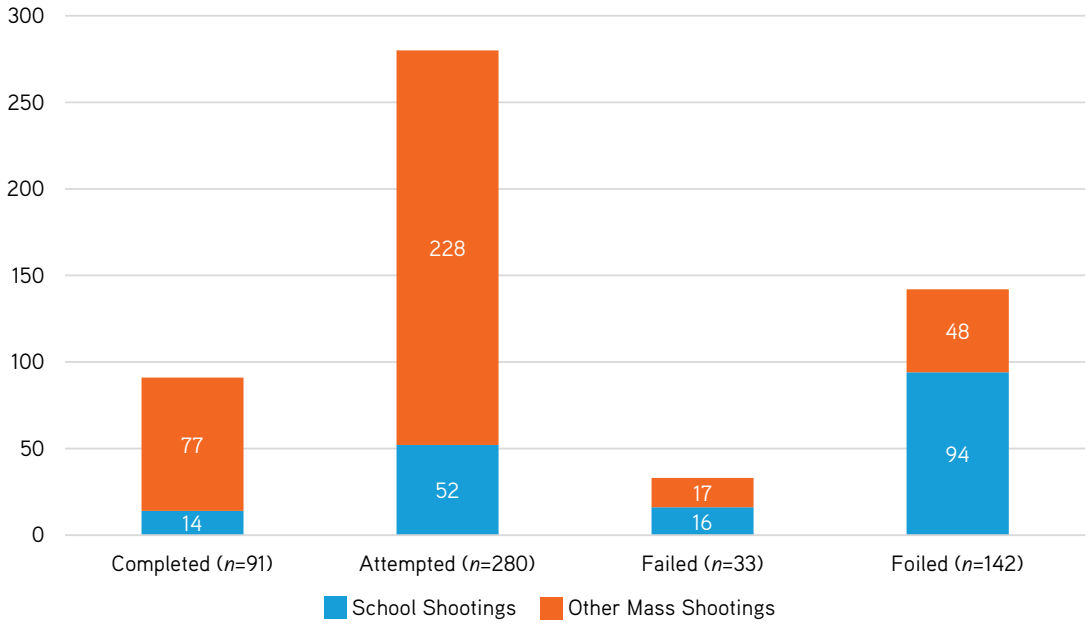
Mass School Shooting Outcome Data

This research brief utilizes data from Jason R. Silva's recent examination of completed, attempted, failed, and foiled mass shootings occurring in the United States between 2000 and 2019.[8] In this study, a mass shooting is defined as:

> "A gun violence incident carried out (or intended to be carried out) by one or two offenders, in one or more public or populated locations, within a 24-hour period. The offender needed to kill, attempt to kill, or intend to kill at least four victims. At least some of the victims (or intended victims) needed to be chosen at random or for their symbolic value."[9]

According to these four outcome categories, a *completed mass shooting* refers to an incident involving four or more fatalities. An *attempted mass shooting* refers to an incident involving less than four deaths, but at least one victim casualty (fatality or injury). A *failed mass shooting* refers to an incident that was set into motion and stopped during the incident. In other words, the incident progresses beyond the preparation stage (meaning it was not pre-operationally foiled) and the shooter successfully arrives at and opens fire (or tries to open fire) on their intended target(s). During the arrival, event, and resolution of the shooting, however, they did not incur any victim casualties. A foiled mass shooting refers to a plan that was set into motion and stopped before the incident began. In other words, the offender's plan did not fail during the incident, as they were thwarted before they could try and shoot victims at their intended target.[10]

FIGURE 1. Number of Mass Shooting Incidents Involving School Locations

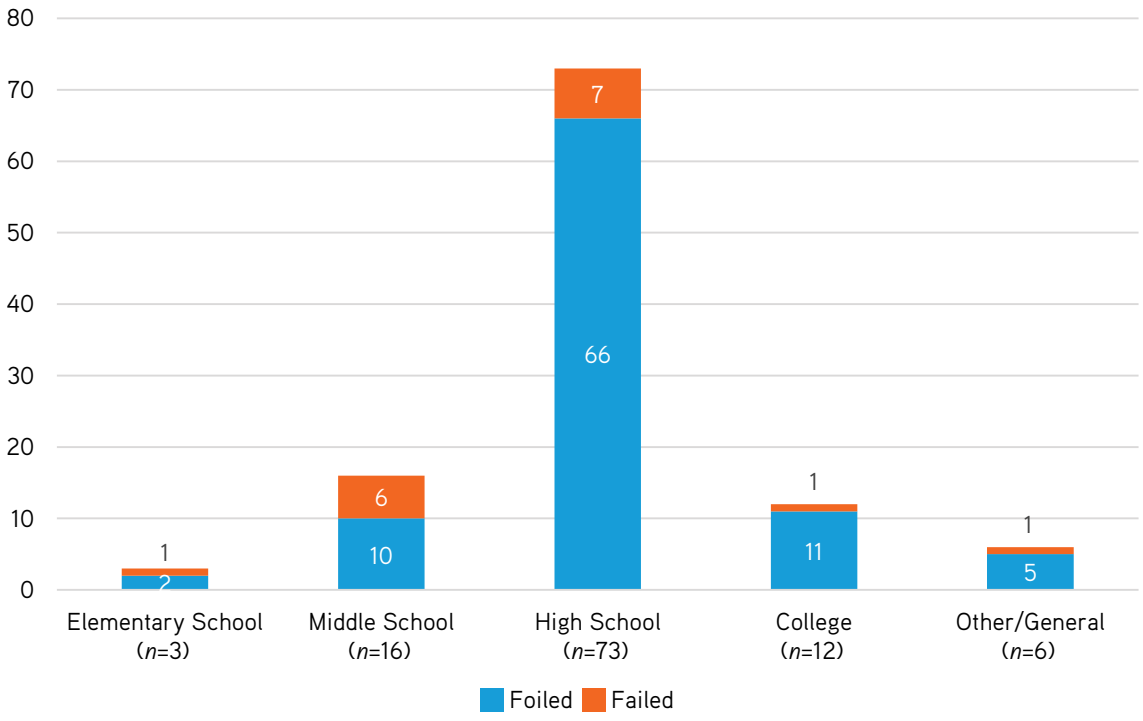


Schools were the most common target (*n* = 176) for all mass shootings (*n* = 546), accounting for one-third of incidents (Figure 1). This highlights the need to identify intervention techniques to thwart a potential attack or interrupt one in progress at these school locations to help reduce the impact to the school and broader communities. Importantly, the chances of completing a mass school shooting became less likely (in comparison to non-mass school shootings) when progressing through each of the four outcome stages: foiled (66 percent), failed (48 percent), attempted (19 percent), and completed (15 percent). To this end, all foiled (*n* = 94) and failed (*n* = 16) mass shootings involving school targets are examined in this brief. For further context, some comparisons with attempted (*n* = 52) and completed (*n* = 14) mass school shootings are also discussed.

School Shooting Locations

As shown in Figure 2, high schools were the most common target for thwarted mass school shootings, accounting for two-thirds of all foiled and failed incidents. The remaining incidents involved middle schools (15 percent), colleges (11 percent), and elementary schools (3 percent). This corresponds to school shootings in general, with research indicating high schools are more often the location of non-mass gun violence as compared to other types of schools.[11] Previous research, however, finds that school shootings at elementary schools tend to be more lethal than in other school locations and are more likely to be perpetrated by adult offenders.[12] The latter was also the case in foiled and failed mass school shootings, which all involved adult offenders with no connection to the school. A review of the data also finds that completed and attempted mass school shootings were largely similar in location-based percentages (i.e., high schools were more commonly targeted than middle schools and elementary schools), although completed mass school shootings involved more college attacks (43 percent).

FIGURE 2. Number of Foiled and Failed Mass School Shootings by School Type (*n* = 110)

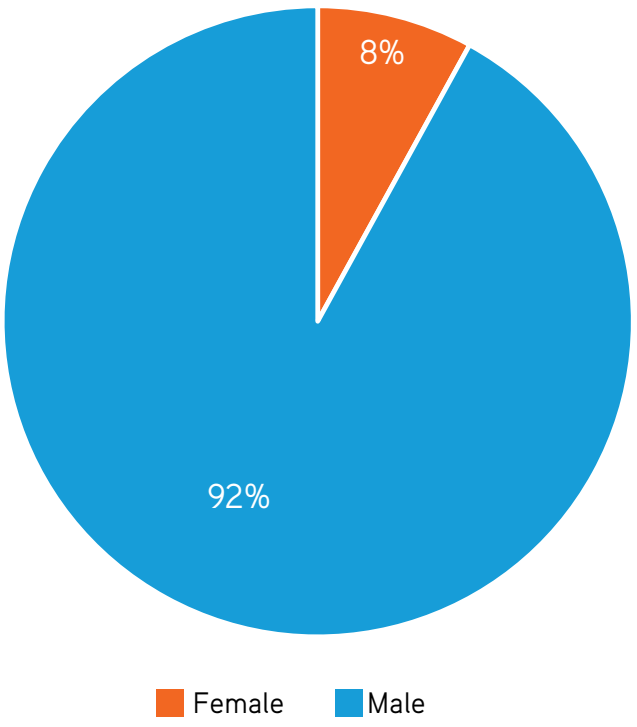


School Shooting Offenders

The 110 foiled and failed mass school shooting incidents had 137 associated offenders, with 27 incidents involving two offenders. None of the failed mass school shootings had more than one offender: all co-offender incidents were foiled plots. Similarly, in the post-Columbine era (2000-19), only one attempted mass school shooting involved co-offenders, and none of the completed incidents involved co-offenders. While these data are correlational, they suggest that plots with more than one offender are more likely to be foiled. Co-offenders may risk being overheard or noticed by teachers and other students when discussing or organizing their planned attack together, thereby increasing the chances of foiling these plots before they can progress past planning.

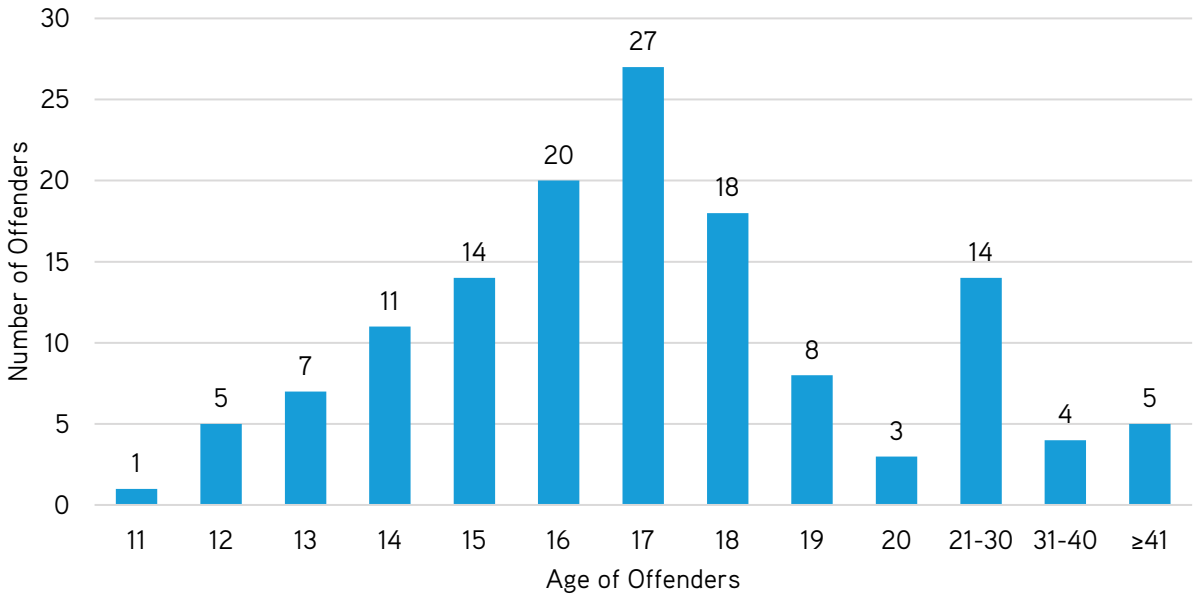
As shown in Figure 3, foiled and failed offenders were overwhelmingly male (92 percent), corresponding to public mass shooting demographics in general.[13] Nonetheless, 8 percent of offenders being female is higher than the percentage of attempted (1 percent) and completed (0 percent) mass school shooting offenders. Interestingly, all the thwarted female offender incidents were foiled plots, and half of these female offenders were involved in co-offender incidents, most often alongside a male. Understood together, these findings indicate females are substantially less driven to plan and initiate mass school shooting attacks, and when they do, in some cases, this may be due to male coercion.[14] This also aligns with broader research on female violence, which finds that females who engage in violence more often use personal weapons (e.g., hands, feet, or teeth) or knives, and only when they co-offend with males are they likely to use guns.[15]

FIGURE 3. Foiled and Failed Mass School Shootings by Offender's Sex (*n* = 137)



As shown in Figure 4, nearly half of all foiled and failed offenders were between the ages of 16 and 18. This aligns with high schools being the most common target (Figure 2) and current students being the most common offenders (Figure 5). Nearly two-thirds of all thwarted offenders were under 18-years-old, and 83 percent of offenders were under the age of 21. On average, thwarted mass school shooting offenders were younger (foiled mean age = 19; failed mean age = 21) than attempted (mean age = 24) and completed (mean age = 26) shooters. This suggests the life experience that comes with age may play a role in the ability to avoid apprehension during planning, as well as incurring casualties during attack initiation. Older offenders are also more commonly former students or they have no connection to the school, making it difficult for traditional school-based channels to detect leakage. Even when older offenders are current students—such as during completed college incidents—the number of students at colleges (versus elementary, middle, and high schools) is often much larger. This likely makes it easier for offenders to avoid detection during planning and preparation, as it is easier to go unnoticed in such a large community setting.

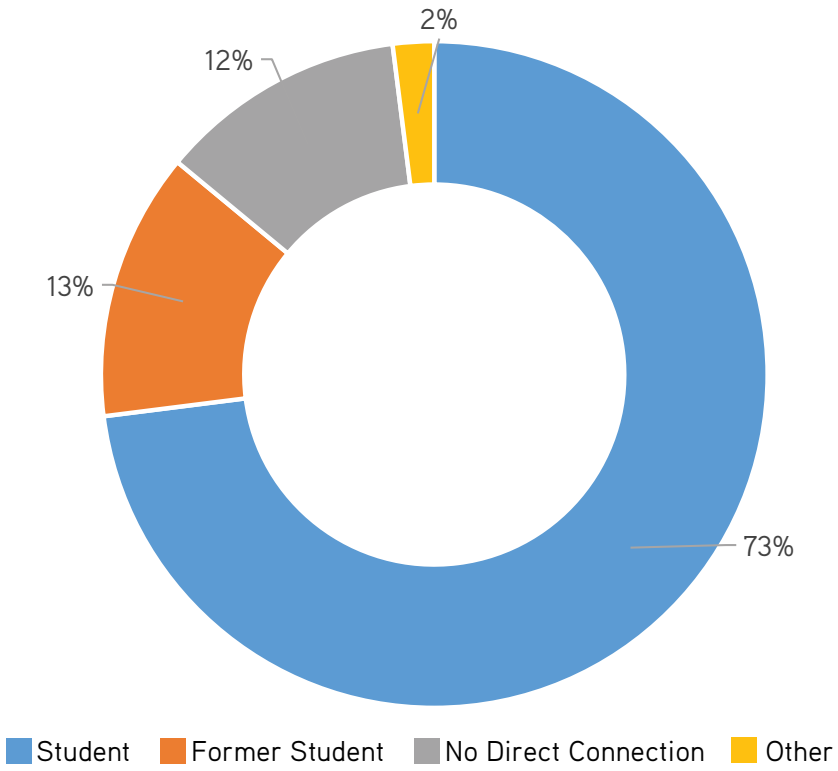
FIGURE 4. Foiled and Failed Mass School Shootings by Offender's Age (*n* = 137)



Threats largely came from those connected to, and subsequently familiar with, the school location. Figure 5 displays the offenders' relationships to the targeted school, showing a clear majority (73 percent) were currently enrolled students. Another 13 percent of offenders were former students, who had familiarity with the school layout and procedures. Only 12 percent of offenders had no apparent connection to the school; even still, three of these offenders were involved in co-offender plots with students or former students (and thus were still somewhat connected to the school). This suggests most threats against schools are either completely internal, stemming from students, or partially internal, with student/outsider co-offenders. With this

insight, it is important to consider how these threats are foiled, and how incidents fail, by examining the mechanisms of obstruction.

FIGURE 5. Foiled and Failed Mass School Shootings by Offender's Connection to the School (*n* = 137)



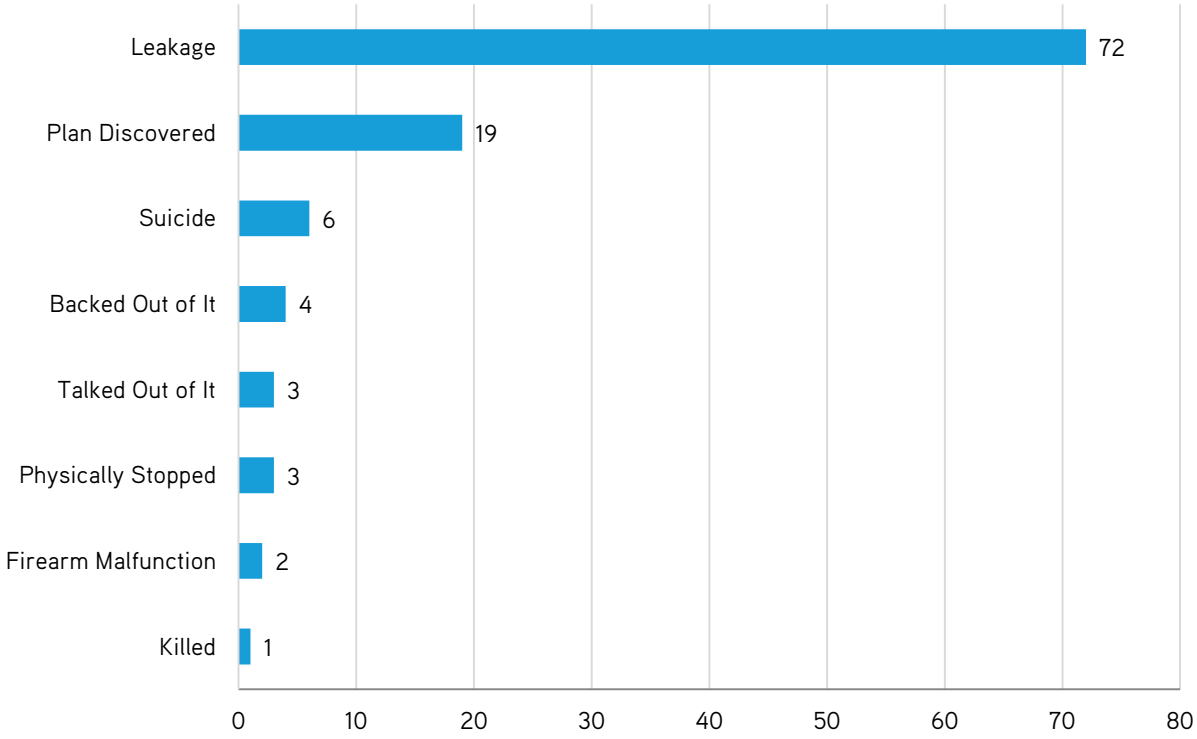
Mechanisms for Prevention

Overall, foiled mass school shooting plots (*n* = 94) were substantially more common than failed mass school shootings (*n* = 16). All the failed mass school shootings involved a single offender, indicating mass school shooting plots with more than one offender are far more likely to be preoperationally foiled. While there were 16 failed mass school shootings, only 12 offenders got the chance to fire their guns, and only six offenders were able to fire more than two bullets.

Figure 6 illustrates the primary methods that prevented any casualties during these foiled mass shooting plots and failed mass shooting incidents. The majority (66 percent) of incidents were prevented because of offenders' verbal or written leakage of violent intent, followed by a plan being discovered by someone due to suspicious offender behavior or planning materials being noticed (17 percent). In three incidents, the offender was talked out of completing the shooting, and in four cases, the offender backed out of the attack after starting it. In six incidents, the offender died by suicide before they could incur any casualties. In two incidents, the firearm malfunctioned and prevented the individuals from continuing with their plans. In three incidents, the

offender was physically stopped by someone on the scene. Finally, the offender was killed in one incident. These findings offer valuable implications for preventing future mass school shootings, including identifying and reporting leakage and warning signs of mass violence, changing offenders' minds, and using crime prevention and security techniques to safeguard schools.

FIGURE 6. How the Mass School Shooting was Prevented (*n* = 110)



Policy Implications

Understanding Leakage and Warning Signs

Most mass school shooters do not just suddenly "snap" and start killing people. Offenders may be involved in weeks, months, or even years of interest, fantasizing, planning, and preparation before their shooting incident.[16] This means there is often an extended period of opportunity for threat assessment, intervention, and prevention. Importantly, during this time offenders frequently engage in leakage and other identifiable warning signs of violent intent—often termed "red flags." For example, a 13-year-old boy's mass school shooting plot was foiled after students overheard him threatening to shoot students and staff members.[17] These students notified their teachers and administrators, who immediately notified the police. After searching the boy's home, the police found a list of intended targets and a hand-drawn layout of the school, as well as an AR-15 rifle and 100 rounds of ammunition. In general, leakage is defined as any verbal or written intent to potentially engage in a mass shooting.[18] It can be intentional and explicit, or it can involve vague allusions to violence and

death. However, leakage is often easiest to interpret when it appears as a direct threat or statement of intent.

Importantly, the high rate of foiled co-offender incidents suggests the presence of additional offenders increases the chances of thwarting a mass school shooting. In other words, the communication required for planning an attack between two shooters would likely increase the chances of leakage and a plot being discovered. This is especially relevant in school settings, where students are potentially more aware of their peers' behaviors and discussions than parents or teachers. For example, two 16-year-old boys were overheard by a fellow student discussing plans to shoot up their high school and they described their planned attack as being bigger than Columbine.[19] The person who overheard the discussion secretly took a photo of the students and informed the SRO about the potential threat. Investigators discovered the boys had recently researched previous school shootings as well as strategies for obtaining firearms.

As noted, advance discovery of an individual's planned attack has also led to the prevention of mass school shootings. For instance, one 19-year-old offender's planned college shooting was discovered by a drugstore photo clerk after the offender developed pictures of himself surrounded by guns.[20] The clerk immediately notified the police, and after searching his home, the police found massive amounts of writings and a 19-minute audiotape detailing his plot to kill as many people at the college as possible in emulation of the Columbine High School shooters. The clerk noticed the warning signs and prevented this attack, which the offender planned to carry out just one day later. This emphasizes the value of informing the public about the different forms of warning signs to help discover potential mass school shooting offenders' plans. These warning signs could include a constellation of concerning behaviors, such as past violent threats or actions, planning and preparation (e.g., stockpiling of guns, target practice), observable fixation on a target, and animal abuse.[21]

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Reporting Red Flags

In an ideal situation, leakage and warning signs raise red flags that alert individuals connected to the shooter sufficiently to inform authorities of a potential threat. This, however, is not always the case.[22] In nine failed and foiled mass school shooting incidents, the offender engaged in leakage, but this leakage was overlooked and the attack was thwarted through other means. In general, research finds leakage often

occurs prior to completed and attempted mass shootings.[23] In other words, most mass school shooting offenders make direct communication of intent to harm a target, and/or reveal clues to a third party about their violent intentions, rendering these incidents highly preventable. Yet, individuals made aware of threats often failed to report them for a variety of reasons: they did not take them seriously; they did not want to make trouble for the offender; and/or they did not want to bear the responsibility for reporting.[24]

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Individuals surrounding a potential mass school shooter are in the best position to recognize warning signs, leakage, and preparatory behavior—better positioned than mental health professionals and law enforcement, who are often only made aware of leakage after it has been reported. As such, there is an urgent need for public education and training to raise awareness about the importance of recognizing leakage and warning signs and reporting these indicators to authorities. Scholars also illustrate the need for developing and utilizing anonymous tip lines to thwart mass school shooters.[25] When students identify warning signs, these systems can provide a valuable resource for those who do not want to be viewed as "snitches," as well as those who may not feel connected to a teacher or staff member who they would trust with the information.[26]

The responsibility for using red flags to prevent mass school shootings, however, does not lie solely with peers, students, teachers, and other civilians. For red flags to be useful, they must first be reported to authorities—including mental health professionals, school administrators, and law enforcement personnel. Subsequently, they must be taken seriously by these authorities. For instance, current law enforcement training often focuses on attack response and resolution instead of threat assessment.[27] Even when law enforcement professionals are notified about warning signs and leakage suggestive of an impending attack, they may struggle to overcome popular misconceptions about who is at risk for committing a mass school shooting. For example, a police officer who receives a tip about a potential threat may first investigate the suspect's criminal record and/or interview the suspect. However, many mass school shooters do not have a criminal record—especially if they are young students—and they may successfully convince law enforcement that they are not a threat because they lack this preexisting criminality.[28]

Ultimately, encouraging students and teachers to report potential threats remains one of the most effective strategies for reducing school shootings.[29] Yet some offenders may have little or no connection to the targeted school. For instance, the foiled and failed elementary school incidents all involved adult offenders with no connection to the school. Available evidence suggests all offenders during these incidents were suffering from a mental health crisis, but none of these individuals would have been identified through warning signs and leakage by those associated with the school (i.e., students, teachers, or administrators) because they did not have any affiliation

with or connection to the location. Instead, the shootings were thwarted by attentive civilians and law enforcement personnel. In one case, the offender leaked clues to the impending attack, which were observed and reported to authorities by the offender's wife. In another incident, suspicious co-offenders were identified and stopped by a nearby deputy on their way to the shooting. This emphasizes the importance of also educating civilians, as well as law enforcement, to recognize, report, and address red flags.

Changing Offenders' Minds

In three incidents, the offenders were talked out of continuing with their planned attack, and in an additional four incidents, offenders backed out of their planned mass shooting after preliminary attack engagement. For instance, a 13-year-old boy brought a .22-caliber pistol and 50 rounds of ammunition to his middle school.[30] He also had a written will and a hit list of eight school officials who he planned to shoot. However, after pulling out the handgun in his classroom, his brother—who was also present—was able to convince the boy to let the students leave the room. After police arrived, the brother and a fellow officer were able to talk the boy out of continuing his planned attack, eventually convincing him to put his gun down and allowing the police to arrest him. This demonstrates that some offenders who plan an attack may be susceptible to counter-messaging from trusted family members or authorities. It also may be the case that planning an attack provides a psychological reward that is unmatched in reality.

Scholars suggest planning a mass school shooting plot is like daydreaming and the enjoyment of premeditated mass violence often occurs during planning and preparation. However, Levin and Wiest propose that for some shooters, "that dream ends the moment the event begins, and the reality is rarely as fulfilling as the fantasy."[31] For example, a 22-year-old man planned to kill "at least 70 students" at his former high school, wanting to become the "biggest mass murderer in history."[32] He was fascinated with previous mass shootings (particularly Columbine) and fantasized about "some sort of violent act" nearly every day. But after killing his family to spare them from living with the guilt of his actions, the event became "all too real" and he gave up on his planned school attack. Instead, he wrote on the wall of his family home, "I will never forgive myself, I don't know why I did this." This case exemplifies the stark difference between fantasizing and actualization of an attack, especially concerning the anticipated benefits to the offender. For this offender, the attack initiation—killing his family—failed to provide the psychological reward he anticipated and instead forced him back to an unpleasant reality that convinced him against continuing the violence. Currently, it is not clear how common this type of offender-initiated change-of-heart occurs, though these preliminary findings suggest this is a valuable avenue for future research on preventing mass school shootings.

In six incidents, the offender died by suicide before killing anyone. For example, one 15-year-old boy—who idolized the Columbine shooters and dreamed of engaging in a similar copycat attack—developed detailed plans for a mass school shooting.[33] But

after arriving at his middle school and firing one shot, he recognized reality versus fantasy and decided to die by suicide. While only six offenders died by suicide, available evidence identified suicidal ideation in nearly one-third of the thwarted mass school shooting offenders. To this end, scholars emphasize the importance of suicide prevention as a form of mass school shooting prevention. Expanding on this idea, researchers emphasize the need for "holistic violence prevention" in schools that addresses mental health, nurtures supportive environments and strong relationships, and adopts crisis intervention/de-escalation techniques for at-risk students.[34] Research finds most mass school shooters had school-related problems (i.e., potential warning signs), and peers, fellow students, and teachers are the ones most likely to notice their concerning behaviors.[35] As such, teachers, counselors, and SROs are increasingly being trained to detect and assess students in crisis.

Additionally, research finds that some mass shooting offenders are motivated to imitate prior shooters in an effort to seek infamy.[36] As illustrated in many of the outlined examples, offenders often idolize the Columbine shooters and want to garner similar recognition and celebrity. Available evidence indicates nearly half (44 percent) of thwarted mass school shooters were fame-seeking. These fame-seeking offenders may demonstrate comorbid suicidal ideation and further, may be more likely to unintentionally leak their plans due to their fascination with previous mass shooters.[37] For example, students who idolize mass shooters often draw pictures, write stories, or make statements that showcase their interest in guns and violence—all of which are often observable to other students and teachers.

Importantly, fame-seeking offenders, like suicidal offenders, may be susceptible to prevention strategies that address their mental health and redirect their negative cognitions and emotions. For instance, media outlets can play a unique role in discouraging fame-seeking attacks.[38] The No Notoriety campaign advocates that media coverage should focus on the victims instead of the offenders by describing and honoring the backgrounds and heroic actions of victims rather than the offenders' pathways to violence.[39] This type of media attention demonstrates to potential shooters that victims' lives are more worthy of public attention than shooters' actions, thus removing the anticipated reward of fame. The de-emphasis of offender-focused media coverage could help disengage those offenders who are strongly motivated by a desire for violent infamy and change their minds about the realistic consequences versus rewards of committing a mass school shooting.

Mitigating Harm through Situational Crime Prevention

If an attack does occur, situational crime prevention—which is a policy-oriented approach to crime prevention that aims to reduce opportunity in the environment—may be effective for avoiding, or at least reducing, casualties.[40] The effects of target hardening via situational crime prevention are more likely to be observed in the context of attempted mass school shootings, rather than failed or foiled, which are the focus of this brief. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider how situational crime prevention may have contributed to failed mass school shootings and to review potential strategies for creating defensible space in schools.

In many of the failed cases, situational crime prevention techniques—including entry control measures, lockdowns, and SROs—helped prevent casualties. Entry control measures such as door locks enable both prevention and mitigation by denying access to the location and limiting access to the victims if shooters make it inside. Mitigation measures, like lockdown drills, are designed to reduce the number of victim casualties and are especially important for building the muscle memory that facilitates swift action in a crisis situation. Similar to a fire drill, lockdown drills provide practice and training with procedures and alert systems so that students and teachers can engage in familiar behaviors even if cognition is impaired by fear or distress.[41] Even in the event of an insider attack, school safety procedures—including lockdowns—can remove the number of available targets from all offenders, students, or outsiders, thereby mitigating harm.

Standardizing the best practices and requiring rigorous assessment of lockdown drills at a national level would help to ensure that schools are equally prepared across states and districts.

Research on public mass shootings in general—not limited to schools—suggests that lockdowns exert a significantly protective effect on casualty outcomes when they are properly implemented.[42] While most schools run lockdown drills as part of their school safety plans, there is considerable variability in their procedural details, as well as the consistency of responses.[43] Some schools incorporate frequent and specific active shooter survivability techniques in school safety plans; others may run a less-intensive lockdown drill—without incorporating silence and moving to safe zones—once or twice per year. Standardizing the best practices and requiring rigorous assessment of lockdown drills at a national level would help to ensure that schools are equally prepared across states and districts.

Schools, unlike other public locations, are relatively controlled facilities, meaning authorities and administrators can implement procedures and policies intended to secure the building and promote safe practices and responses in the event of a crisis. The effects of these procedures can be observed in the failed incidents mentioned above. In many of these incidents, place managers—teachers, principals, and security guards—responded rapidly to threats or took advantage of the shooter's failure (experiencing gun malfunction) to intervene. Students and teachers engaged in lockdown responses, likely reflecting the success of drills and practice. Ultimately, when implementing school security measures, the goal is to find a balance between restrained caution and intrusive hypervigilance.[44] There is emerging research indicating the utility of lockdown drills and SRO efficacy for school safety,[45] and future research should continue to explore how these efforts can harden the school environment. These strategies can protect intended victims

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during mass school shootings, which often involve firearms capable of producing many casualties.[46]

A Roadmap for Policymakers

Since the turn of the century, mass school shootings have been a consistent threat and concern in America. However, these attacks are not inevitable, and this research brief illustrates methods for addressing and preventing future attacks. Current findings surrounding foiled and failed mass school shooting cases emphasize the importance of educating the public to recognize leakage and warning signs, encouraging red flag reporting and accurate identification of potential threats, utilizing techniques to change offenders' minds, and implementing standardized, empirically supported school security procedures.

Offenders often spend an extended period of time fantasizing, planning, and preparing for an attack, providing critical opportunities for threat assessment, intervention, and prevention. During this time, leakage was the most common occurrence that led to foiled plots instead of actualized mass school shootings, although it was not consistently reported or addressed. Public safety campaigns should raise awareness about frequent types of leakage and warning signs, as well as when and where to report red flags, similar to the "See Something, Say Something" campaign to address terrorist and extremist violence. Since most offenders were current students at the school, students and teachers would be the most likely to notice these red flags, although they must report them, and SROs and law enforcement officials must take these reports seriously for prevention to be effective. Additionally, it appears some offenders may be susceptible to counter-messaging strategies aimed at addressing suicidal ideations and celebrity seeking. School-based efforts to identify and assist students in crisis, as well as altering media reporting practices, can contribute to changing offenders' minds about whether to engage in an attack.

If red flags do go unnoticed or are overlooked, and an offender is able to initiate an attack, there are still opportunities to avoid or reduce casualties. Situational crime prevention efforts like door locks and lockdowns provided valuable techniques for saving lives during failed attacks. However, to reduce the number of attempted and completed mass school shootings,

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policymakers should consider standardizing guidelines for lockdowns and active shooter drills, based on empirically tested and supported drill techniques. Additionally, different prevention techniques may be necessary for different school environments. Elementary schools have been more vulnerable to outsider attacks, and while school safety and threat assessment should never exclude one type of prevention for another, elementary schools might be better served with outside threat prevention and security procedures limiting outsider access versus prevention efforts that mostly focus on threats from within the school. Comparatively more insider threats occur at high schools, which also tend to have more open campuses than middle or elementary schools. Thus, while high schools are more challenging to secure from outsiders through situational crime prevention, since they are more vulnerable to insider threats, they may be better addressed through student education and awareness about leakage, warning signs, and reporting.

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Finally, while beyond the scope of this work, findings raise important questions about how these young offenders are accessing or planning to access firearms. Foiled and failed offenders were often below the legal age for purchasing and possessing firearms in many states, especially handguns.[47] Prior research on completed mass shootings and mass school shootings indicates that most underage offenders steal guns from their homes and family members.[48] In these cases, common sense gun laws that limit and restrict purchases—such as background checks and waiting periods—might have less of an obstructive impact on planned shootings than legislation that encourages or regulates gun storage and safety training in family homes.[49]

ENDNOTES

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