



Situational Awareness Report

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School Shooting Commonalities

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(U//FOUO) NJ ROIC Intelligence & Analysis Unit / Threat Program ~ IAU201209-1807

Scope Note

(U//FOUO) This report attempts to analyze the indicators and commonalities of recent school shootings in an effort to inform public safety officials and assist in the detection and prevention of potential school shooter plots or attacks. All incidents included in this assessment occurred in the United States while classes were in session. Domestic violence shootings and gang violence were not included in an effort to differentiate between “active shooter” incidents and other acts of violence. DHS defines an “active shooter” as an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.¹

Overview

(U//FOUO) Recently several school shooting plots and attacks have occurred throughout the United States, which has resulted in the deaths and injuries of their victims. These incidents included:

- January 2011 (Utah) – Law enforcement officers arrested two teenagers after discovering that they planned to bomb their high school. The two suspects had blueprints of the school and planned to escape after their attack by stealing a plane at a nearby airport.²
- February 2011 (Ohio) – A student killed three classmates and injured two others at a high school when he opened fire in the cafeteria.³
- April 2012 (California) – A school shooting left seven people dead and three others wounded when a nursing student opened fire at a small Christian college.⁴
- October 2012 (Maryland) – A 15-year old high school student shot and critically injured a classmate on the first day of school.⁵

(U//FOUO) One or more plots or shootings have occurred in each of the last 10 years in the United States, resulting in the deaths of students and school administrators. These attacks have occurred at all types of schools, including elementary, high school, college, and other educational institutions. In

¹ (U) DHS, *Active Shooter: How to Respond*, October 2008, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf

² (U) *Associated Press*, “Student Charged in Utah School Bomb Plot, January 2012,” <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/01/27/utah-girl-credited-with-ouing-school-bombing-plot/>

³ (U) CBS News, “Death Toll in Ohio School Rises to 3, February 28, 2012,” http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-201_162-57386781/death-toll-in-ohio-school-shooting-rises-to-3/

⁴ (U) *Washington Post*, “Students Ran, Hid as Gunman Opened Fire on Calif. Campus,” April 3, 2012, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/apr/3/students-ran-hid-gunman-opened-fire-calif-campus/>

⁵ (U) *ABCNews.com*, “Robert Gladden Charged in Perry Hall High School Shooting,” August 28, 2012 http://www.abc2news.com/dpp/news/crime_checker/baltimore_county_crime/robert-gladden-charged-in-perry-hall-high-school-shooting

every instance of a school shooting attack in the United States during this period, the attacker has used small arms or homemade explosives.

New Jersey Plots

(U//FOUO) On Thursday, November 29, 2012, a high school student in Trenton, New Jersey was prevented from targeting his classmates in a school shooting. After several classmates attacked the student in his cafeteria, the student fled his school and took a taxi home to obtain a firearm. When he returned to the taxi, he instructed the driver to go back to the high school. During the return trip, the driver heard the student's threats and attempted to calm the student and delay the trip back. Prior to arriving at the school, the student exited the vehicle allowing the driver to contact law enforcement resulting in the student's arrest.^{6 7}

(U//FOUO) In 2009, New Jersey law enforcement arrested two students for planning to attack the Bridgewater-Raritan High School (Somerset County) after another student informed faculty members about the threat. The investigation later found that one student was constructing explosives at his home⁸

Use of Social Media

(U//FOUO) In the past several years, the majority of students who have conducted plots or attacks against their schools have publicized their anger or intentions through the use of social media. Not every instance of expression of anger will necessarily result in violence, but when school shootings have occurred, the perpetrators have often previously expressed a fixation with death or inflicting pain on others.

(U//FOUO) While students have used social media to express their anger and intentions to attack their schools, this type of action is neither new nor limited to online activity. Even without the use of online media, students have expressed their frustration and intentions through other outlets by using handwritten journals, notes, and drawings. These documents can indicate pre-operational planning, as illustrated in the 1999 Columbine shooting. Diary entries of the Columbine shooters, released in 2006, not only contained their anger but also reminders to fill ammunition clips and acquire bomb-making materials, including nails, propane, and fuses.⁹

(U//FOUO) Recent examples of students publicizing their intentions to plot or attack their schools include the following:

- January 2011 (Nebraska) – A high school student who shot one administrator and killed another posted ominous messages on his Facebook page that read., "You're gonna hear about the evil [expletive] I did but that [expletive] school drove me to this. I want you guys to remember me for who I was before this. I greatly affected the lives of the families ruined but

⁶ (U) *Star Ledger*, Trenton High School Arrested Before Returning to School to Shoot Fellow Classmates, November 2012, http://www.nj.com/mercer/index.ssf/2012/11/trenton_high_school_student_ar.html#incart_river

⁷ (U) *Star Ledger*, Cab Driver Who Foiled Trenton School Shooting Quits Job, Fearing Retaliation, November 2012, http://www.nj.com/mercer/index.ssf/2012/11/cabbie_who_foiled_trenton_scho.html

⁸ (U) NJ.com, "Uneasy Students Return after Bridgewater-Raritan High School Bomb Threat," December 14, 2009, http://www.nj.com/news/local/index.ssf/2009/12/uneasy_students_return_after_b.html

⁹ (U) Associated Press, "1,000 Pages of hate-filled, threatening documents made public," August 7, 2006, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12370508/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/columbine-killers-diaries-offer-chilling-insight/#.UEoJmSirK18

I'm sorry. Goodbye." ¹⁰ These attacks occurred despite the existence of these postings because friends or family were unaware of these writings until law enforcement investigated the shootings and searched the students' computers.

- February 2012 (Ohio) – Authorities discovered several Facebook postings by a high school student attending Chardon High School after he killed three classmates. One of his Facebook postings read, "He longed for only one thing, the world to bow at his feet," and ended ominously, "Die, all of you."¹¹
- In 2012 law enforcement officers arrested several students after they posted threatening language online. In one instance, in January 2012, two students were arrested for planning to bomb their school after one of them shared their plans with another student, who then informed school officials. When questioned by law enforcement, one of the students stated that not only was the 1999 Columbine High School shooting their inspiration, but also that they hoped to surpass its death toll¹² This instance and several others in which a concerned student or parent informed the local police department, preventing the attack, demonstrate the importance of reporting suspicious activities.

(U//FOUO) While social media has provided students with a venue to post their anger and intent, the Internet can also provide them with access to violent web sites. Violent online material has the potential to influence an already emotionally troubled student producing sometimes negative and deadly consequences. In 2005 a 16-year old, who posed messages on a neo-Nazi website calling himself the Angel of Death, killed nine people and wounded seven before committing suicide.¹³ Some online material can also provide instructions on weapons use and bomb construction.

Weapons Acquisition

(U//FOUO) When examining school shootings, a distinction emerges when determining how students obtain their weapons to attack their victims. The main variable is the student's age and the type of school the student attends. K-12 grade students, unlike higher education students, are underage and must resort to stealing weapons, normally from a family member or neighbors. College students, on the other hand, have legal access to gun stores and shows. In the Virginia Tech School shooting, Cho Seung-Hui purchased his weapons legally in Virginia at two gun stores and bought two gun magazines online on eBay.^{14 15}

¹⁰ (U) CBS News, "Omaha School Shooting: Millard South High School Shooter Left Disturbing Facebook Post," January 6, 2011,

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-20027545-504083.html

¹¹ (U) ABC News, "Chardon High School Shooting: Second Student Dies as Alleged Gunman Is Identified," February 28, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/chardon-high-school-shooting-gunman-identified-tj-lane/story?id=15799815#.UFDHma4rK18>

¹² (U) Associated Press, "Student Charged in Utah School Bomb Plot," January 29, 2012, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2012-01-27/utah-school-bomb-plot/52820328/1>

¹³ (U) FoxNews, "Shooter Obsessed With Violence," March 23, 2005, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,151214,00.html>

¹⁴ (U) CBSNews, "Guns Used In Rampage Traced To Virginia Shops," February 11, 2009, http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500690_162-2695059.html

¹⁵ (U) MSNBC, "Cho Bought Ammo Clips on Ebay," April 21, 2007, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18246522/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/va-tech-shooter-bought-ammo-clips-ebay/#.UFDIi64rK18

Who are the shooters?

(U//FOUO) In the last 10 years, male students have been responsible for the majority of school shootings nationwide. Students who perpetrated attacks were also more likely to know their intended targets rather than to attack their victims randomly. When students targeted an administrator, they believed that either the school failed to protect them from bullies, or the student felt school officials unfairly reprimanded them.

(U//FOUO) The remaining attackers were outsiders with no relationship to the school or school employees who attacked their supervisors because of employment disputes. One instance of a school employee attacking a school occurred in March 2012, when hours after a teacher was fired, he returned to school and shot dead a school administrator prior to committing suicide. Outsider shooters with no relation to the school, on the other hand, are more likely to attack their victims randomly because these attackers had no discernible association with the school and had no grievances with any potential victims.

(U//FOUO) In 2006, two separate outsider attackers shared similar tactics, one at Platte Canyon High School in Colorado in September, and another at an Amish school at Nickel Mines, PA, in October.^{16/17} In both incidents, the gunmen attacked the schools, took several female students hostage, and killed one or more students, before taking their own lives moments before law enforcement officers broke into the classrooms. The threat from outside attackers is not, however, limited to a gunman entering a school. Shooters have also targeted students by waiting outside the school or near the perimeter during recess or at dismissal.

Implications for New Jersey

(U//FOUO) While online displays of violence can be detrimental to any student, no school shooting has been a terrorist attack but instead has been criminal in nature. History has shown that school shootings can occur at all types of educational institutions, no matter the size of the campus, nor student enrollment. School shootings have occurred all across the country, and an incident could potentially occur in New Jersey with little or no warning. Therefore, the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness has assessed that there is a moderate threat of attack to New Jersey schools.

(U//FOUO) Schools remain targets from not only outside attackers, but also students who are emotionally and mentally ill, as well as those who experience withdrawal, bullying, or social rejection. These threats demonstrate the importance of encouraging students, teachers, school resource officers, and school administrators to report suspicious activity.

(U//FOUO) For additional information, please see attached *The Department of Homeland Security Protective Security Measures Report for Elementary and Secondary Schools and Higher Education Institutions*.

¹⁶ (U) Associated Press, "Hostage Wounded In Colorado School Standoff Dies," September 28, 2006, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15032063/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/hostage-wounded-colo-school-standoff-dies/#.UD0CA6ArK18

¹⁷ (U) Associated Press, "5th Girl Dies After Amish Schoolhouse Shooting," October 3, 2006, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15105305/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/th-girl-dies-after-amish-schoolhouse-shooting/#.UD0MUKArK18

Suspicious Activity in New Jersey

(U//FOUO) In 2012, the most frequently reported type of incident in New Jersey Suspicious Activity Report System (NJSARS) for K-12 schools was unsubstantiated bomb threats, followed by suspicious persons. For colleges, it was suspicious persons on campus.¹⁸

(U//FOUO) Any suspicious activity with a possible nexus to terrorism in New Jersey should be reported immediately following existing protocols specific to respective counties. Activity can also be reported to CT Watch located at the ROIC by dialing 2-1-1 or (866) 4SAFENJ (866-472-3365), or by e-mailing Tips@NJHomelandSecurity.gov.

Contact Information

(U//FOUO) Any agency with information or comments/questions about this document should contact the NJ ROIC Intelligence & Analysis Unit at (609) 963-6900, ext. 6212, or njroicanalysis@gw.njsp.org.

¹⁸ (U//FOUO) New Jersey Suspicious Activity Reporting System