Overview: Understanding cases of averted violence allows officials and researchers the ability to study where violence reduction principles worked and stopped an attack from moving from idea to action. This study included 67 averted attacks occurring from 2006 to 2018. The report stresses the importance of identifying risk factors like bullying, access to firearms, and grievances prior to criminal action.

Key Points:

- Preventing attacks depends on those who see these warning signs coming forward and sharing their concerns prior to behaviors that cross over into criminal actions.

- Students are often in the best position to identify concerns with their peers. There should be focused efforts on encouraging sharing of concerns and reducing the stigma behind reporting.

- In addition to students, parents are also in an excellent position to be trained to recognize warning signs and share these with the school. Similarity, in 1/3 of the cases, the school resource officer (SRO) was critical in reporting or responding to a plot.

- Removing a student from school does not remove the risk. Former students who were expelled or graduated still present a risk of an attack.

- Students displaying an interest in violent or hate-filled topics, particularly during the month of April, should elicit an immediate intervention.

- Many of the attackers had unrestricted access to firearms, particularly within their home. Even when secured, attackers pried open gun safes, found the key or stole them when left out.

- Grievances around injustices, particularly bullying, rumors around school or others being mean, were common motivations for attacks. Other grievances were related to school staff and romantic relationships.

- In nine cases (13%), plotters were motivated by suicide to carry out their attacks.

- Eight cases (12%) involved plotters motivated by a desire for fame and notoriety. This was evidenced by the plotters expressing a desire to make a name for themselves or achieve national recognition, emulate previous mass attackers, exceed the number of victims by previous mass shooters, or inspire a following after their deaths

- In 11 cases (16%), plotters attempted to recruit others to carry out their attacks. In some cases, the recruitment efforts failed, and in others they were successful. These provide opportunities to share information forward with authorities.

- This analysis of averted school attacks demonstrates that there are almost always intervention points available before a student's behavior escalates to the point where an arrest may be warranted. These intervention points may include addressing bullying, providing mental health supports, assessing the impact of home-life factors, and mediating conflicts between classmates.

- A threat assessment program establishes a system for implementing these types of interventions and entrusts a team with responsibility for ensuring that no student falls through the cracks.

From the Article:

- "Threat assessment is the best practice for preventing acts of violence" (p.6)

- "For many of the cases (n = 30, 45%), retaliating for a grievance played a role in the motivation of the plotters. They sought revenge for perceived wrongs, held specific grudges, or had feelings of resentment toward others." (p. 12).

- "The second most prevalent motive found in these cases (n = 10, 15%) was a desire to kill, evidenced by plotters' aspirations of killing others, sadistic interest in violence and previous incidents of mass violence, pleasurable feelings derived from animal abuse or thoughts of causing physical harm to others, and desires for power over their victims. While it is possible that a desire to kill could be associated with psychological symptoms (e.g., homicidal thoughts), it more often appeared to develop as a response to the plotter's personal circumstances and life experiences." (p. 13)

- "In most (n = 30, 70%) of these cases, plotters had access to a family member's firearm in their home. In 27 (63%), the plotter's access to firearms was unimpeded as they owned the weapons, stole them from family members, had them in their possession when the plot was discovered, or had permission to access the secure location where they were kept." (p. 20).

- "In nearly all (n = 63, 94%) of the cases, the plotters shared their intentions about carrying out an attack targeting the school in various ways, including verbal statements, electronic messaging, and online posts." (p.25)

- "In about two-fifths (n = 29, 43%) of the cases, others observed concerning communications about the plots, but did not take action to report the information. In all of these cases, the plotters' statements about their intentions were clear, and were most often either shared directly with their friends or overheard at school by others…the reasons why these statements were not reported to a responsible adult were not always described, but some peers later shared that they thought the plotters were joking or they had been threatened by the plotters if they spoke up. Unfortunately, in some cases the peers actually encouraged the plotters." (p. 31)

- "Twenty-seven plotters (63%) exhibited emotional or psychological symptoms, the information for which was identified through statements made by the plotters, reports from family or friends, statements issued by school districts or administrators, law enforcement, media interviews with attorneys, social media posts, and journal writings. (p. 36).

- "The evidence presented in this report supports past research findings that bullying can cause significant stress and harmful outcomes for students. Bullying does not have to meet a legal threshold before schools can intervene." (p. 41).

- "Violence prevention is everyone's responsi-bility, and we all have a role to play. The findings in this report support a growing body of research that indicates targeted school violence is preventable when bystanders are able to report their concerns to professionals who will appropriately assess and respond to the situation. Consistent with prior NTAC research, these findings also highlight the scope of concerning behaviors that are displayed by students before they engage in targeted school violence and the opportunities that exist for early intervention." (p. 53).

National Threat Assessment Center (2021). Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots against schools. Retrieved on April 26, 2021 from www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2021-03/USSS%20Averting%20Targeted%20School%20Violence.2021.03.pdf