



ALERT – THREAT AWARENESS

The Center for Emergency Management Intelligence Research issues alerts for urgent threat and hazard awareness, which are applicable for any emergency management life safety aspects.

Emergency Management Intelligence (EMINT) is the curation of intelligence beyond situational awareness and whose scope is greater than Law Enforcement/Homeland Security. EMINT is applicable to all aspects of Community Lifelines, Emergency Support Functions, Recovery Support Functions, and all aspects of Preparedness/Protection/Prevention and Mitigation, in addition to Response and Recovery.

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Alerts are issued for urgent, brief items and may not contain a deeper analysis or research. More detailed open-source reports and white papers are published via the National Security Policy and Analysis Organization at American Public University, online at <https://nspao-apus.org/>

- Attacks on K12 schools, especially gun violence, will involve a whole-community response and recovery effort – and therefore all groups should work together collaboratively to help *prevent* attacks. For school districts, one of the best ways to support this, is through behavioral threat assessment/action management teams (BTAMs).
- These teams also need to collaborate with other area BTAMs, to expand coverage and become force-multipliers.
- Law enforcement and homeland security officials needs to coordinate with school districts – especially those with either independent or coordinated security **and/or** emergency management organizations themselves - on threat awareness notifications.
- Intelligence analysts¹ and researchers² currently view anniversaries³ of prior attacks, as potential hazards to the same or similar targets. Additionally, public safety entities may also be targeted, especially if they were involved in the original attack's response/recovery.

In anticipation of the 25th anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting, emergency managers supporting K12 school districts across the nation need to turn their steady-state vigilance into action.

On April 29, 1999, a paradigm shift occurred in mass shootings in America. Twelve students and one teacher were killed at that school in Colorado. In addition, 24 people were injured.⁴ While there were sporadic shooting incidents at K12 schools prior to Columbine – including ones where the **motivation** was either unknown or unspecific in their targets – this was the first mass shooting shown on live television.⁵ The enormity of this predominately American problem was front and center in households, across the country. This was also another pivotal incident

¹ <https://www.njohsp.gov/specialevents>

² <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27158149?seq=5>

³ <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/714926>

⁴ <http://www.acolumbinesite.com/victim/injured.html>

⁵ Follman, M. (2022). *Trigger Points: Inside the Mission to Stop Mass Shootings in America*. Dey St./Harper Collins.

where law enforcement started to change tactics. In the same way that the Texas Tower attack⁶ in 1966 ushered in the era of S.W.A.T. teams. Columbine helped move law enforcement away from considering school shootings as hostage situations, to a new paradigm called an ‘active shooter’⁷.

In the 22 years between 1966 and 1998 – the year before the Columbine shooting – there were a total of 701 incidents involving shootings, impacting schools in the United States.

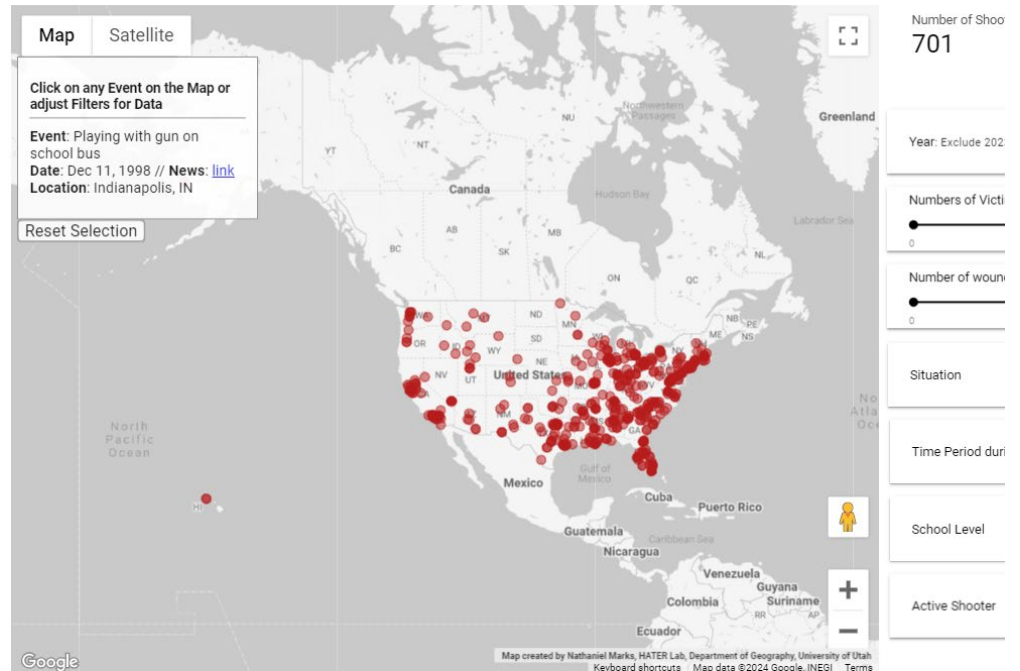


Figure 1 - Shooting incidents - in total – impacting schools (all types) between 1966 and 1998
Source: K-12 School Shooting Database.⁸



In the 25 years (with only January data of 2024) since Columbine, there have been 1,988 incidents involving shootings, impacting schools in the United States. That is a 284% increase, almost three times the number from before Columbine.

⁶ <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/06/01/texas-tower-shooting-myth-good-guy-with-gun/>

⁷ <https://k12ssdb.substack.com/p/active-shooter-combines-and-confuses>

⁸ <https://k12ssdb.org/interactive-map>

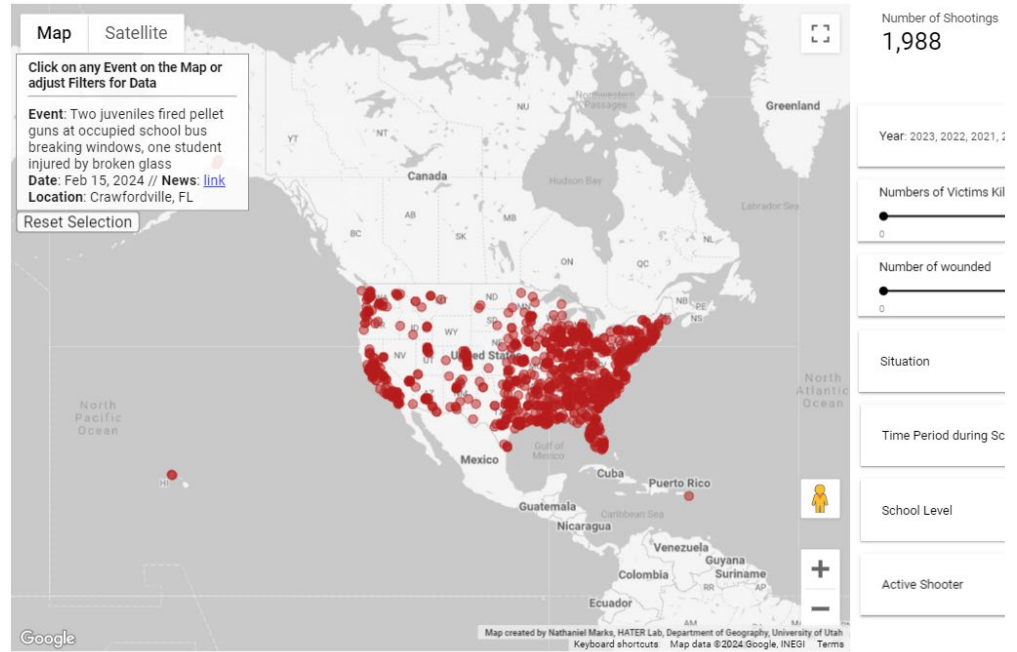
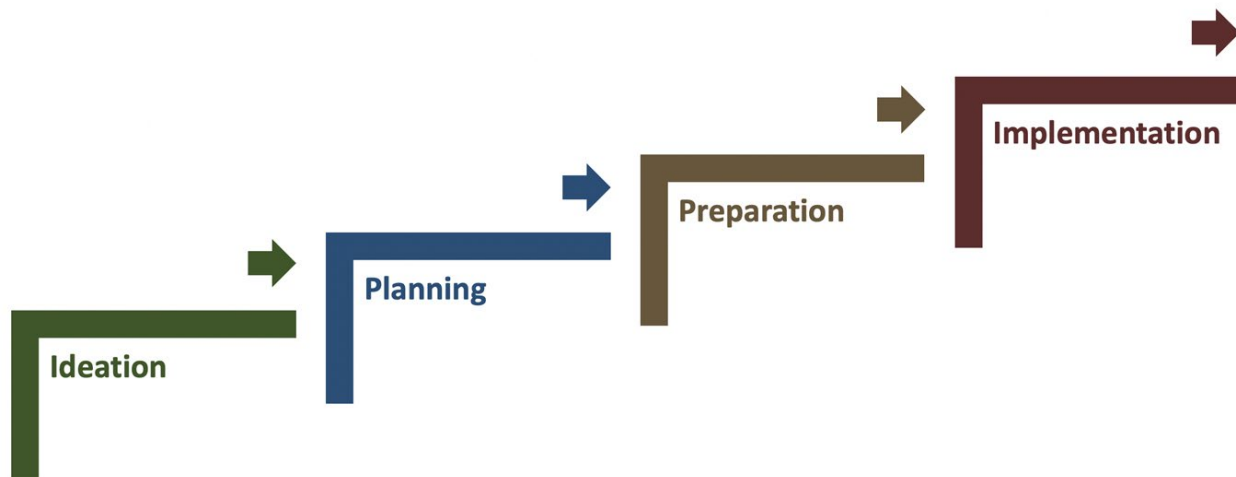


Figure 2- Shooting incidents - in total – impacting schools (all types) between 1999 and 2024 (through January) Source: K-12 School Shooting Database

Fast forward to 2024, and communities everywhere are still reeling from this agile threat. While much effort is being directed at fortifying schools and using technology to alert and action against potential threats, there has been successes in disrupting the pathway to violence at earlier steps. Agility in protecting against and preventing adverse impacts is critical for this life safety set of hazards. Unfortunately, what has also happened is that future active shooters continue to be **motivated** by what they audaciously believe to be the ‘successes’ of prior attacks, starting with Columbine. Any attack is considered effective and breeds bravado for others. Even the Columbine shooters themselves were attempting to mirror a prior attack – for them, it was the Oklahoma City bombing of a federal office building.⁹ The ideation aspects copycat attacks, anniversary attacks, etc. are one part of that pathway to violence¹⁰, noted by researchers Callhoun and Weston in 2003:



⁹ <https://k12ssdb.substack.com/p/covid-columbine-copycats-and-counting-school-shootings>

¹⁰ https://rems.ed.gov/docs/vt_threatassessment09.pdf

There is quite a bit to unpack when it comes to threat assessment – and hopefully your community’s K12 school district has a robust behavioral threat assessment management (BTAM) team in place now. A BTAM which is collaborative and cooperative with local public safety and emergency management officials, as well as the BTAM teams of other area school systems, such as hospitals, colleges/universities, and those teams found in some major businesses.

A Call to Action now

Here are two aspects from research work by the FBI¹¹, which was published right after the Columbine incident, and which **should be reviewed and implemented now**, by BTAMs and emergency managers supporting K12 school districts everywhere:

Leakage

Leakage is when a student (or anyone) reveals thoughts, *intentions*, feelings, etc. – whether intentionally or unintentionally – that they may be participating in an upcoming violent act.¹² These are those warning signs which are out there for families to uncover in drawings and writings, for peers to identify in social media posts. ‘Uncover’ and ‘identify’ are words specifically used, as they are *action* verbs. **If you think someone might be on the pathway to violence aimed at any school, now is the time to act.** Kids tell their adult family members, family members tell school officials, including school resource officers, faith leaders, medical professionals, etc.; and school officials - as well as those other groups – follow their protocols and tell others (such as your BTAM team) who can investigate and *intervene*. Look for anything which mentioned **Columbine**, and then **collaborate and communicate** with your state/territory/tribal level Department of Education on **other key words** and phrases to search for. Those groups are most likely **coordinating** with other state/territorial/tribal-level departments (such as state police, homeland security, human services, children’s services, and more) who are all working on protecting children from many, many threats. These are the professionals, who will determine what the FBI¹³ and U.S. Secret Service¹⁴ describe, as “people who **pose** a threat”. It is all our collective responsibility to give those professionals the intelligence needed to help interdict and disrupt before “people **make** a threat”.

Injustice Collectors

In 2000. Mary Ellen O’Toole of the FBI, also coined the term ‘Injustice Collector’¹⁵. An Injustice Collector is someone who has significantly building resentment over past grievances towards them – real, perceived,



¹¹ O’Toole, M.E. (2000). The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective. Critical Incident Response Group, FBI Academy, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime.

¹² https://drreidmelo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/2011_theconceptofleakage.pdf

¹³ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles/threat.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.secretservice.gov/newsroom/reports/threat-assessments/schoolcampus-attacks/details-1>

¹⁵ O’Toole, M.E. (2000). The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective. Critical Incident Response Group, FBI Academy, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime.

or both – and no matter how much time passes, they will never forget or forgive those who they believe are responsible. Time does not heal all wounds for these individuals. Local School Districts and Public Safety Officials need to ask themselves: Does this description remind you of anyone in or around your school district? Maybe a former faculty or staff member? Colleges and Universities need to be concerned with forwarding possible threat actors to local public safety officials and/or BTAMs at applicable K12 schools, as applicable (i.e., education major who already did internship at K12 school, is expelled from college/university).



Families: does this description cover anyone you know? Maybe you do not see any of the specific signs of *leakage*, but something seems off. And it does not have to draw a straight line between your family and a school.¹⁶ The idea of “If you see something, say something®”¹⁷ holds true for stopping the steps on the pathway to violence. Like dominoes being set up to fall, there are ways¹⁸ to block someone from causing harm at a school, and at many points along the pathway to violence. This type of messaging needs to be implemented into crisis communications now, ahead of any trouble.

In a number of recent incidents targeting schools, the perpetrator of harassment and/or bullying escalates a grievance into more deadly forms of violence, but today it is also the victim of such harassment and/or harassment who may become the aggressor.¹⁹ Make the effort to identify and communicate to your BTAM team possible Injustice Collectors, especially in light of the upcoming Columbine anniversary date. This past incident may be a triggering event for some to implement their plans: to gain notoriety²⁰, die by suicide²¹, act upon a significant trauma or mental health issue²², or some other currently undefined motive.

The CEMIR is a think-tank devoted to advocating for the use of Intelligence all the time for Emergency Management - and not just Law-Enforcement Intelligence - but all kinds and types, applicable to the full-cycle needs of Emergency Management.

Emergency Management Intelligence (EMINT) is actionable intelligence, which is needed before, during, and after incidents, emergencies, and disasters. MAC groups, Policy Councils, command and general staff, and others all benefit from coordinated, consolidated intelligence flow. EMINT is full-cycle and full Incident Command System (ICS). Learn more from our [FAQ page](#) and [subscribing](#) to our blog.



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¹⁶ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/new-jersey-mom-helps-thwart-school-shooting-plot-in-kentucky/>

¹⁷ <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/if-you-see-something-say-something%E2%84%A2-campaign-overview>

¹⁸ <https://info.publicintelligence.net/NJ-SARS.pdf>

¹⁹ https://www.secretsservice.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/Protecting_Americas_Schools.pdf

²⁰ Follman, M. (2022). *Trigger Points: Inside the Mission to Stop Mass Shootings in America*. Dey St./Harper Collins.

²¹ <https://jaapl.org/content/51/3/314>

²² <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1327&context=honors-theses>