



School Safety Newsletter

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Report: 'Missed Opportunities' to Stop Arapahoe Shooter

January 18, 2016

<http://www.9news.com/story/news/local/2016/01/18/report-missed-opportunities-stop-arapahoe-shooter/78961022/>

CENTENNIAL - Officials at Arapahoe High and Littleton Public Schools were responsible for “major failures” in communications, threat assessment and thinking in the months and years before a student fatally shot a classmate and then committed suicide in 2013, according to a highly critical report made public January 18, 2016.

Had school and district officials acted differently – had they, for instance, conducted an effective threat assessment of the student after numerous red flags – Karl Pierson’s “violent plan might have been interrupted” before he shot and mortally wounded Claire Davis and then ended his own life.

Davis died eight days after the Dec. 13, 2013, attack.

"There should be two kids in college right now, and they're not, but that's our view," Claire Davis father, Michael, said. "The reports actually say if they had followed the rules and procedures, it may have prevented the tragedy."

The report, completed by researchers at the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, pointed to “many missed opportunities” leading up to the attack.

On 27 occasions, the report concluded, individuals made decisions that undercut the ability of school officials and law officers to thwart the attack. Although one of those decisions was attributed to fellow students – some classmates knew Pierson had obtained a gun but did not report it to anyone – the rest were all made by school or district officials, the researchers found.

They didn’t notify the law officer assigned at the school when Pierson threatened to kill the librarian in charge of the debate team. They didn’t suspend Pierson for that threat or an outburst in Spanish class. They didn’t notify the school administrators responsible for assessing the potential threat posed by Pierson after two security guards saw him looking at guns on the internet.

Taken individually, each decision might not have meant much. But William Woodward, one of the report’s authors, said that taken together the implication is frightening.

“All 27 of those decisions that got made – either to do something or not do something – not one of them made a difference in whether Claire lived or not,” Woodward said. “But together they built a culture of not paying attention and not being really clear about why different events happen and why they make certain decisions or don’t make certain decisions.”

The report and two others published on Monday came in the wake of a binding agreement between Davis’ parents and the school district. Basically, Michael and Desiree Davis agreed not to seek damages from the school district or individual employees, and the district in turn agreed to answer questions about what was known before the shooting.

In addition to the CU study, which was requested by the Davises, the district requested two other examinations of the incident. One was conducted by Linda Kanan, a professor at the University of Denver, in conjunction with Nicoletti-Flater Associates, and the head of an organization called Safe Havens International wrote a third report.

Last Thursday, in anticipation of the release of the reports, 9NEWS made multiple requests for comments from and interviews with officials with Littleton Public Schools. As of Monday, no one from the district had responded.

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future through
information
sharing*

In This Issue

- Report: ‘Missed Opportunities’ to Stop Arapahoe Shooter
- Next Monthly Webinar - March 2, 2016
- Find Out More: Why and What is a Threat Assessment?
- Countering Violent Extremism: FBI Launches New Awareness Program for Teens

Report: ‘Missed opportunities’ to stop Arapahoe shooter (continued)

In a statement posted online Monday and in a press release, district Superintendent Brian Ewert said, in part, “LPS looks forward to reviewing and learning from all of the reports prepared by experts in school safety and mental health ... We are always looking for ways to improve our processes and procedures in all areas of our organization.”

The school board has a meeting scheduled Thursday afternoon and plans a press conference afterward. The district also posted a report from Ewert online Monday.

Neither the press release nor the report made mention of the CU study.

“In retrospect and with the benefit of a great deal more information than was available at the time, we now understand that some warning signs were missed by those both inside and outside of LPS,” Ewert wrote in his report. “We are profoundly sorry that this may have contributed to the loss of two students’ lives that day.”

Davis’ parents expressed the hope that their daughter’s death would be a catalyst to prevent anything like it from happening again.

“The angry young man that murdered our daughter was a student in crisis who desperately needed guidance in a different direction from the one he pursued,” they wrote, in part, in a preface to the critical report. “The lesson to learn is not that our schools should be less tolerant and more punitive, rather that our schools are now, as never before, in a unique position to identify and secure help for troubled students.”

The shooting came what the center’s researchers concluded were repeated instances of “concerning” behavior on the part of Pierson, some of it going back more than a decade.

In November and December 2003, for instance, when he was in elementary school, he was involved in two incidents the researchers found troubling. In one, he hit two students with his lunch box because he didn’t think they were moving fast enough, and in the other he kicked one student in the stomach and hit another in the head.

Those incidents were known by the school’s psychologist, Esther Song, when she led a threat assessment of Pierson three months before the shooting. That assessment was undertaken after he was removed as captain of the extemporaneous team within the speech and debate club – an incident that led to the death threat.

The report also documented more than two dozen other incidents while he was a student at Arapahoe High – everything from bullying fellow students and uttering threats to bizarre behavior in class.

But the failure to have a single person of evaluating all of that information marked a major failure, the authors wrote.

“Not one AHS teacher, administrator or staff person had a complete record of KP’s history of concerning behaviors over his more than three years at AHS, making it challenging to adequately assess the threat he presented,” the authors wrote. “If AHS staff had consistently documented his behaviors, a pattern of ‘boundary testing’ would have been more apparent.”

Song, then the school psychologist, and Kevin Kolasa, an assistant principal at the time, conducted the safety assessment on Pierson after the death threat. They concluded that Pierson represented a “low level” safety concern.

But the study’s authors pointed out that Song and Kolasa marked five of 24 possible risks presented by Pierson in their assessment – but they could have noted at least seven and as many as nine others.

“A properly executed threat assessment would have revealed a higher level of concern,” the study’s authors wrote, “and a higher level of concern should have prompted more serious disciplinary action and more thorough monitoring and support planning.”

On top of the communications problems, the report found that the school and district failed to “adequately implement” threat assessment policies. For example, the report said the school and district failed to adequately train staff members on threat assessment and failed to adequately complete safety planning.

It did note that school officials have made “several changes in their approach to school safety since 2013.”

The other reports echoed some of the findings of the CU study.

For instance, the work of Linda Kanan and John Nicoletti found similar gaps in the district’s and the school’s safety planning.

Among the gaps they identified: There was no identified district level safety team to plan and coordinate prevention and safety efforts. And Arapahoe High School teachers and administrators were confused about student privacy protections and some thought it was a barrier to reporting or discussing behavior concerns. They also weren’t clear what behavior constituted something they should report.

Instead, Kanan said Pierson’s outbursts and other troubling behaviors got viewed as isolated incidents, each one addressed specifically and not examined in context of a pattern of behavior.

**Monthly
Webinars!**

Normally first
Wednesday of
Every Month
at 10 am.

**Next
Webinar**

**Wednesday
March 2,
2016**

Each webinar
has a round
table discussion
at the end.
Questions are
always
welcome!

To participate, you
must be a vetted
member. For more
information please
email
schoolsafety@isp.
state.il.us

Report: ‘Missed opportunities’ to stop Arapahoe shooter (continued)

“That shouldn’t have happened,” said Nicoletti, of Nicoletti-Flater Associates. “We can’t predict violence, but we should be able to prevent a lot of it.

Michael Dorn, the executive director of Safe Havens International, said he was concerned about the whole idea that school administrators could assign a “level” of risk to a particular student. “We tend to have this desire to boil everything down, you know, if we choose to do 1, 2, and 3, then we’ll be okay,” Dorn said. “It’s just not that simple. And the more we try to do that, I feel, the less safe we are.”

For Sarah Goodrum, co-author of the CU report, all of it is frustrating given what happened on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School – the day two students murdered a dozen classmates and a teacher and wounded more than 20 others before killing themselves.

One of the biggest takeaways from that tragedy was that numerous people saw red flags in the behavior of the killers before the incident but no one put it all together. “Our hope going forward is that we don’t have to wait another 16 years to see these changes implemented in schools and districts and in the legislature, and that we won’t have to wait for another shooting,” Goodrum said. “It’s time to build the system that will bring the change that’s needed to help students in crisis.”

"Every parent that sends a child to school, and that child does not return home, deserves the answers of why," Desiree Davis, Claire Davis' mother, said. "We need to make changes, because this should never happen to another family in the state of Colorado or this nation."

Find Out More: Why and What is a Threat Assessment?

*We believe the results of this effort have given schools and communities real cause for hope. Through the Safe School Initiative, staff from the U.S. Department of Education’s Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and the U.S. Secret Service’s National Threat Assessment Center have found that some school attacks may be preventable. The companion report to this document, *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*, details findings from the Safe School Initiative and includes several key findings relevant to prevention efforts. In particular, the Safe School Initiative findings indicate that incidents of targeted violence in school were rarely impulsive; that the students who perpetrated these attacks usually planned out the attack in advance—with planning behavior that was oftentimes observable; and that, prior to most attacks, other children knew that the attack was to occur. Taken together, these findings suggest that it may be possible to prevent some future school attacks from occurring—and that efforts to identify, assess, and manage students who may have the intent and capacity to launch an attack may be a promising strategy for prevention.*

*This document, *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*, takes these findings one step further by setting forth a process for identifying, assessing, and managing students who may pose a threat of targeted violence in schools. This process—known as threat assessment—was first pioneered by the U.S. Secret Service as a mechanism for investigating threats against the president of the United States and other protected officials. The Secret Service threat assessment approach was developed based upon findings from an earlier Secret Service study on assassinations and attacks of public officials and public figures.*

Excerpt from [Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Create Safe School Climates](https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf), United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, Washington, D.C., July 2004 <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>

Littleton Public School’s Threat Assessment & Action Plan (discussed in the above article): <http://www.littletonpublicschools.net/sites/default/files/THREAT%20ASSMT%20-%20TAAP%20Form.pdf>

Essentials of School Threat Assessment: Preventing Targeted School Violence written by the Colorado School Safety Resource Center in November 2011 and updated in December 2014: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cssrc/threat-assessment>

This document is intended as guidance to Colorado schools and was created with collaboration from the Threat Assessment Work Group of the Colorado School Safety Resource Center. Consultation with district legal counsel and local law enforcement is recommended. Additional consultation and template formats may also be obtained from the Colorado School Safety Resource Center, Department of Public Safety. This guide includes: elements of a school threat assessment process, the cycle of threat assessment, threat assessment inquiry steps, secret service eleven key questions, and selected threat assessment resources.

Threat Assessment Strategies for Schools and Higher Education - Training Material and Webinar
<https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=trainingCenter.traininginfo&eventID=774&from=training&dtab=0>

This OJJDP-sponsored Webinar provides an overview of threat assessment programs for both K-12 schools and higher education campus settings, discusses key components for school/campus threat assessment strategies and programs, and discusses resources to meet standards of practice in threat assessment. Learning objectives include: present an overview of the threat assessment and management process, discuss policies and procedures around the investigation of threats, including review of the differences between K—12 and higher education settings, and provide resources for facilitation of threat prevention and intervention.

Countering Violent Extremism: FBI Launches New Awareness Program for Teens

Mia Ray Langheim

School Intelligence

Officer



February 8, 2016 - <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2016/february/countering-violent-extremism>

Today like never before, violent extremists of all kinds are deliberately targeting our nation's young people with poisonous propaganda—especially in cyberspace, where they are flooding social media with slick recruiting videos and persuasive calls to action.

The FBI's investigations and analysis indicate that these efforts—to a disturbing degree—are succeeding. Across America, there are young people who are embracing various forms of violent extremism, actively communicating with violent extremists, and helping with recruitment. Without warning, many teens are joining violent extremist groups in the U.S. or leaving their families and traveling to war zones thousands of miles away to enlist in violent extremist movements—some are even plotting and launching attacks in the U.S. and overseas.

In this hyper-connected world—where violent extremist information is only a click away—it's more crucial than ever that young people learn what violent extremism really is, how it hurts innocent victims and perpetuates violence, and how its recruiting strategies are intended to deceive.

Today, as part of its leading role in helping to prevent terrorist attacks and in sharing its expertise on public safety issues, the FBI is taking the next step in educating communities on violent extremism by launching a new, free program for teens nationwide.

It's called **Don't Be a Puppet: Pull Back the Curtain on Violent Extremism**, and the centerpiece is an interactive website at <https://cve.fbi.gov> that uses activities, quizzes, videos, and other materials to teach teens how to recognize violent extremist messaging and become more resistant to self-radicalization and possible recruitment.

The site doesn't refute violent extremist beliefs point by point or discuss matters of faith or politics. Instead, it makes teens aware of the destructive reality of various forms of violent extremism, including hateful attacks based on race, religion, or other factors. Through its **Don't Be a Puppet** theme, the program encourages teens to think for themselves and display a healthy skepticism if they come across anyone who appears to be advocating extremist violence.

The **Don't Be a Puppet** initiative was developed through the combined efforts of the FBI Office of Public Affairs (OPA) and the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program in the Bureau's Office of Partner Engagement, with the input and support of other FBI components. A number of community leaders, government and law enforcement officials, high school teens, and other public and private partners from across the U.S. evaluated the site and provided valuable feedback. The consensus was that the program is a positive, proactive tool that addresses a serious threat.

"We want teens to apply their critical thinking skills to this issue just like they would to any subject in school," says Jonathan Cox, head of the OPA unit that created the website and developed the concept. "We're saying, 'Don't be a puppet,'—in other words, don't just blindly accept what violent extremists tell you or you could end up being controlled and manipulated by people who want you to hurt or kill innocent people."

The website is divided into five main sections, each with various activities and elements to complete (see above sidebar for more information). A sixth "Where to Get Help" page offers conflict resolution tips, identifies resources to contact for assistance, and provides links to more information. Teens receive a printable certificate upon completion of the site.

The program is open to anyone in the United States who wishes to participate, but it is designed for a teenage audience. No registration is required to sign up for or use the website. The Bureau also recommends that community groups, resource officers, coaches, school administrators, and parents and families review the site and use it to raise awareness of violent extremism and its growing impact on our nation.

To learn more, visit the Don't Be a Puppet: Pull Back the Curtain on Violent Extremism website (<https://cve.fbi.gov/>). Community groups, parents, and teachers who are interested in using the program can also discuss the details with the community outreach specialist in their local FBI field offices (<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field>).

Incidents like the Charleston shootings and the Boston Marathon bombings have demonstrated that extremist violence transcends race and religion and can have a devastating impact on communities. It's the FBI's hope that this new initiative can make a difference in helping to keep young people from being radicalized and recruited, now and in the future.

School Safety Newsletter

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