
By Thomas Wheeler
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Key Points

• After the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, President Donald Trump tasked a multi-agency effort to review best practices for school safety, which issued a landmark Federal Commission on School Safety (FCSS) report containing practical and actionable advice to keep students safe.

• After the school shooting in Oxford, Michigan, which—judging by a lawsuit filed against the school district—appeared to parallel the Parkland shooting with red flags missed and administrative missteps made, the Biden administration declared that the FCSS no longer reflected federal policy.

• There is a willful campaign from social justice advocacy organizations to fight against some of the key best practices FCSS identified. An examination of the alleged circumstances of the Oxford shooting suggests that school leaders should take their cues on school safety not from advocacy organizations or the Biden administration but from a careful evaluation of previous tragedies.

On February 14, 2018, a former student walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, with a semiautomatic rifle. He murdered 17 people and wounded 17 others. The Associated Press labeled the Parkland school shooting the story of the year for 2018.1 However, Alexander Russo, an education journalist, distinguished it as one of the most poorly covered education news stories of that year.2 Rather than take a deep look at what went wrong and how to prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future, most of the national conversation hewed to expected partisan narratives. President Donald Trump, however, tasked the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and Justice with forming a Federal Commission on School Safety (FCSS) to better understand how to avert further such tragedies.3

Over the next nine months I worked as a senior adviser for the FCSS as it held dozens of site visits, formal meetings at the White House, and listening sessions. We met with stakeholders, took testimony, and received a huge volume of evidence on issues of school safety and school shooting prevention. The FCSS also reviewed 31 prior school
shootings from the January 29, 1979, shooting at Grover Cleveland Elementary School in San Diego, California, to the May 18, 2018, shooting at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas, to systematically catalog both the causes underlying the shootings and the efforts made after the events to improve school safety in response and assess the effectiveness of those efforts. In December 2018, the FCSSS’s final report containing hundreds of recommendations and best practices designed to make schools safer and prevent school shootings was delivered to the president.

Three of the most important recommendations in the final report included the need for (1) effective multidisciplinary threat-assessment teams that work together to assess reports of potential threats, (2) a free flow of information regarding threats and threatening behavior between various stakeholders inside and outside the schoolhouse, and (3) professional law enforcement to take a hands-on role in evaluating and responding to threats.

The importance of implementing these and other recommendations in the final report for understanding and preventing school violence is illustrated by the recent shootings in Oxford and Uvalde. For example, the final report noted that due to the wall-to-wall media coverage given to these school shootings, it is almost inevitable that there will be “copycat” shootings. Just as the Santa Fe shooting followed the Parkland shooting, so too the Uvalde shooting followed the Oxford shooting. This is known as the “contagion effect,” and some form of follow-on shooting after Oxford was predictable, yet the school in Uvalde was woefully unprepared.⁴

On November 20, 2021, a student at Oxford High School in Oxford Township, Michigan, opened fire on his classmates, killing four. The news cycle moved on relatively quickly. Only in the weeks following did details emerge suggesting striking parallels between the Parkland and Oxford shootings. Judging by the fact pattern alleged by the victims’ parents’ lawsuit against the school district, the three key recommendations outlined above were not followed. If they had been, there is a strong case that the shooting could have been averted.

Ideally, either the press or the federal government would seek to understand and broadcast lessons learned from school shootings. Unfortunately, two weeks after the Oxford school shooting, the Biden administration affixed an advisory to the FCSS report: “This report is under review as of December 9, 2021. Some statements in this report do not reflect the current positions or policies of the Departments of Education, Homeland Security, Justice, or Health and Human Services.”⁵ Even more troubling: Left-leaning organizations apparently aligned with the Biden administration are actively pursuing a campaign against the best practices for preventing school shootings outlined in the FCSS report. So-called social justice and civil rights groups have mounted a concerted campaign against the three key recommendations.

As a lawyer, I must note that the allegations made by the victims’ parents have not yet been proven in court. Nor can I necessarily draw any reliable inference about what accounted for or motivated the alleged failures. But as a recovering policymaker, I felt compelled to bring to the public’s attention the fact pattern alleged by the victims’ parents and its potential policy implications. I fear that we may be on track to willfully unlearning the lessons from Parkland and other school shootings. This is especially troubling given an apparent spike in school shootings in the wake of the pandemic.⁶

In this report, I cover the facts of the Oxford school shooting case, as alleged by the lawsuit filed against the school district by the victims’ parents. I then make the case that the three key policies recommended in the FCSS report could have, if implemented, potentially averted the shooting and explained the forces pressuring school districts like Oxford to abandon these best practices. Although the facts in the Uvalde shooting are at best murky this early in the process, there are nevertheless some significant questions raised by that situation too. My hope is that this report can be a resource to state- and district-level leaders and draw attention back toward best practices that could help save students’ lives.
Details of the Oxford Shooting

This section provides an abridged account of the lead-up to the school shooting, as alleged in the lawsuit against the school district. All statements in this section should be considered alleged until proven, or disproven, in a court of law.

Several parents contacted the principal of Oxford High School “with concerns about threats to students made on social media” two weeks before the shooting. The alleged shooter had “posted countdowns and threats of bodily harm, including death, on his social media accounts, warning of violent tendencies and murderous ideology prior to actually coming to school with the handgun and ammunition to perpetuate the slaughter.” A severed bird head in a jar of yellow liquid was found in a boy’s bathroom at the school weeks before the shooting, and administrators had been informed that the alleged shooter was responsible for it. Social media postings in which the shooter posed with a handgun had also been brought to school administrators’ attention. For example, the alleged shooter posted a picture of himself with a Sig Sauer 9 mm semiautomatic handgun with the caption “just got my new beauty today” with an emoji with heart eyes, followed by “Sig Saur [sic] 9 mm. Any questions I will answer.”

School administrators appear to have taken steps that could have inhibited students from sharing important safety information with them.

Despite this troubling fact pattern, the school principal assured students that there “has been no threat to our building or our students.” The school superintendent also took to the school loudspeaker to tell students to “stop spreading information over social media and to stop relying on information on social media, reiterating that there were no threats that posed any danger to students at Oxford High School.” While the victims’ parents have not alleged a direct threat made to the school, reasonable individuals should have found this fact pattern troubling enough to investigate it in depth and consult individuals and organizations that are trained to assess whether such a pattern could constitute a credible threat. But information regarding this disturbing behavior in the weeks leading up to the shooting was not even relayed to the school resource officer (SRO). Rather, school administrators appear to have taken steps that could have inhibited students from sharing important safety information with them.

On Monday, November 29, 2021, one day before the shooting, a teacher observed the alleged shooter “searching for ammunition on his cell phone during class” and reported this fact to school administrators. The administrators removed the student from the classroom and discussed the incident with him. Administrators attempted to contact his parents, but the parents did not respond. The teachers and administrators “deliberately decided to exclude the school safety liaison officer from notice of such dangers” and released the alleged shooter without additional investigation or discipline.

Later that night, the shooter recorded two videos on his phone in which he talked about killing his peers. An entry in his journal, which was found in his backpack after the shooting, detailed his “desire to shoot up the school to include murdering students.” That evening, the student also “posted to his Twitter account, ‘Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds. See you tomorrow Oxford.’”

At 8:30 a.m. on November 30, 2021, a teacher found a disturbing note and drawing on the student’s desk. According to the teacher, it showed a semiautomatic handgun pointing at the words ‘the thoughts won’t stop help me.” It included a drawing of a bullet with the words “blood everywhere” written above it. The words “my life is useless” and “the world is dead” were also written on the drawing. According to the prosecutor, “Between the drawing of the gun and the bullet is a drawing of a person who appears to have been shot twice and bleeding. Below that figure is a drawing of a laughing emoji.”

The student was sent to the office. He had his backpack with him in class—in violation of a school policy against bringing backpacks to class. In his backpack was both a journal in which the
alleged shooter threatened to murder his classmates and, more consequentially, the 9 mm Sig Sauer and 30 rounds of ammunition. The school administrators allowed the student to bring his backpack (with his gun) to the central office, where he waited for his parents to arrive.

When threatening statements of the sort that the student allegedly made are reported to school administrators, it is best practice to share the information with the school safety officer. It would then be standard operating procedure for the school safety officer to search the possessions of the student in question. If the school safety officer had done so in this instance, the gun and ammunition would likely have been found—before the shooting took place. According to the victims, however, the school staff chose not to report the student’s threats to or otherwise involve the SRO at this point. Moreover, school staff deliberately excluded the SRO from their meeting with the student and his parents.

During the meeting, school administrators encouraged the shooter’s parents to seek counseling for their son. The shooter’s parents did not like the idea of their son being sent home for the day. School administrators did not insist on it. During this conversation, the shooter had his backpack, containing his gun, in his possession.

After returning to the classroom with his backpack, school security videos show that the student went into a bathroom with his backpack. He then walked out of the bathroom at 12:51 p.m. with the 9 mm Sig Sauer, firing shots at classmates and staff, killing four and injuring seven. He was disarmed and arrested by the SRO, an Oakland County sheriff’s deputy, at 12:57 p.m.

The victims allege in their complaint that this tragedy would have been averted if only the Oxford High School teachers, staff, and administrators had followed minimal school safety protocols, including (1) communicating the student’s threats and actions both before and on the day of the shooting to the SRO and law enforcement, (2) using recognized multidisciplinary threat-assessment teams and tools to properly assess the threat that the student posed, and (3) following standard protocols by asking the SRO, due to the severity of the threats and specifically the note written by the student, to attend the meeting with the student and his parents, which would have almost certainly led the SRO to search the student’s backpack and discover the gun and journal.

**Best Practices Ignored**

Although they did not put it in exactly these terms, the victims’ parents effectively allege that the school willfully ignored the best practices found in the FCSS final report. They allege that teachers, administrators, and staff deliberately refused to share information about the student’s threats with law enforcement and deliberately excluded the SRO from the meetings with the student and his parents immediately before the shooting. They further allege that the school failed to conduct a multidisciplinary threat assessment of the risk the student posed given his conduct.

According to the victims, the SRO was the only person who did his job correctly. And there is good reason to believe that if the SRO had been allowed to do his job at certain junctures before the shooting, the incident might have been averted altogether. Unlike the school administrators, who cannot necessarily be faulted for failing to search the shooter’s backpack after receiving notice of the threat he posed, the SRO was trained to follow this standard procedure.

School administrators have a certain natural incentive to underreport potential threats to not (perhaps) unduly alarm the school community.

Why were these best practices ignored? Why was information inadequately shared? Why was an appropriate threat assessment not conducted? Why was an SRO not consulted during the moment of crisis? Definitive answers to these questions will not exist until the trial—if even then.

But from my perspective, I unfortunately find none of the petitioners’ allegations particularly surprising. School administrators have a certain natural incentive to underreport potential threats to not (perhaps) unduly alarm the school community. A goal of the FCSS was to produce and publicize best
practices. The hope was that by doing so, these practices would become ingrained into the common sense of school administrators. Unfortunately, rather than amplify—or even report fairly on—the contents of the final report, the media essentially used it as another occasion to launch a partisan attack on the Trump administration. Media coverage tended to focus more on what was not in the report—calls for gun control—than what was. The report’s message and key recommendations did not seem to carry far.

What’s more, a host of so-called civil rights groups and education-advocacy organizations have publicly committed to pushing against policies that could have averted this shooting. These organizations and the Biden administration are pushing schools to mitigate disciplinary consequences and ease, if not eliminate, the role of SROs in the name of fighting the so-called school-to-prison pipeline. There is a multifaceted campaign to restrict information sharing between law enforcement and schools, eliminate the use of student threat assessments, and “de-police” schools. If followed, these efforts appear to be a tailor-made recipe for missing the warning signs that, if caught, could prevent future school shootings.

Information Sharing. As noted above, it is alleged in the Oxford complaint that the teachers, counselors, and administrators did not include the SRO in discussions regarding threats made by the student. The victims’ lawsuit alleges that this was a “deliberate” decision, although they did not provide concrete evidence of intent. From a policy perspective, the matter may be worse if the exclusion of the SRO was not “deliberate” but rather the default.13

As a result of the Parkland shooting, the FCSS final report devoted two chapters to the issue of information sharing. According to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission4 created by the state of Florida after the Parkland shooting, “At least 30 people had knowledge of [the shooter's] troubling behavior,” including his mother, numerous school officials, mental health providers, the sheriff’s office, and even the FBI. However, since they did not share their puzzle pieces with each other, no one had the complete picture.

Motivated by these failures, the Florida Commission recommended “improved mental health care coordination and information sharing among all stakeholders.”5 The FCSS addressed these needs in Chapters 17 and 18 of its report, respectively titled “The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and Other Statutory and Regulatory Privacy Protections” and “The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and Other Statutory and Regulatory Privacy Protections.”6 These chapters clarified that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act should not, did not, and do not prevent the free flow of crucial information between law enforcement and educators regarding school safety issues. The FCSS final report further recommended that documents be issued to make this clear; the Department of Education issued such a document on February 1, 2019, titled “School Resource Officers, School Law Enforcement Units, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).”7

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The Biden administration has not only downgraded the authority of the recommendations in the FCSS report in this area and others but also signaled that it will investigate school districts that share information with law enforcement in ways the administration does not approve of. For example, the Department of Education announced it would investigate whether Pasco County, Florida, violated federal law by sharing student information with local law enforcement.8 Social justice activist groups have campaigned against sharing information with law enforcement to not facilitate this alleged school-to-prison pipeline. Some groups have even brought in issues of immigration and sexuality to bolster the
argument against information sharing. For example, a group called Popular Democracy has argued:

The school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline refers to the policies and practices that punish, isolate, marginalize, and deny access to supportive learning environments for Black, Brown, Latinx, Indigenous, immigrant, and LGBTQIA+ youth, as well as young people with disabilities, instead funneling them into the criminal legal system.\textsuperscript{39}

A New York University Steinhardt piece titled “Ending Student Criminalization and the School-to-Prison Pipeline” specifically recommended that policymakers should also prohibit undue information sharing between law enforcement, ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] and school personnel.\textsuperscript{20}

**Threat Assessments.** The purpose behind enhanced information sharing between schools and law enforcement is to permit a fully informed multidisciplinary team-based approach to assessing threats to school safety. Chapter 5 of the final report, “Using Suspicious Activity Reporting and Threat Assessments to Enhance School Safety,”\textsuperscript{21} discusses the need for a holistic student review, a vital part of effective threat assessment, to avoid more tragedies like Parkland.\textsuperscript{22}

To that end, the final report recommended that step one in “creating a comprehensive targeted violence prevention plan” is as follows:

Establish a multi-disciplinary threat assessment team. Threat assessments are best performed by multi-disciplinary teams that include highly trained professionals from a variety of different disciplines (e.g., teachers, administrators, school resource officers, school psychologists, guidance counselors). The team will conduct the threat assessments, implement crisis prevention when needed, assess the student’s potential for violence, and develop intervention and management strategies to mitigate that risk.\textsuperscript{23}

The United States Secret Service has done extensive work regarding the benefits of multidisciplinary threat-assessment teams generally, specifically in the school context. For example, the November 2019 report *Protecting America’s Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence* notes:

The analysis suggests that many of these tragedies could have been prevented, and supports the importance of schools establishing comprehensive targeted violence prevention programs as recommended by the Secret Service in *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence*. This approach is intended to identify students of concern, assess their risk for engaging in violence or other harmful activities, and implement intervention strategies to manage that risk. The threshold for intervention should be low, so that schools can identify students in distress before their behavior escalates to the level of eliciting concerns about safety.\textsuperscript{24}

In an era of skyrocketing student suicides,\textsuperscript{25} these multidisciplinary threat-assessment teams play a vital role in combating student suicides.

During 2021, social justice groups attacked these recommendations. As Congress debated the EAGLES Act, which endorsed the use of threat-assessment teams, social justice advocates challenged it as an effort to “entrench school safety with law enforcement” and criticized the use of threat assessments.\textsuperscript{26}

The undesignated oppose legislation which proposes addressing what is perceived to be problematic student behavior through the use of violence risk assessments, threat assessments and preemptive use of law enforcement. Collectively, these measures do little more than harden schools and put the well-being of students, especially students of color and students with disabilities, at risk of further marginalization and in some cases serious physical injury or even death.\textsuperscript{27}
Furthermore, on October 26, 2021, just one month before the Oxford High School shooting, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, which represents more than 220 national civil rights groups, contended in a letter to lawmakers that “relying on threat assessment systems, as outlined in the EAGLES Act, would be misguided, detrimental, and wasteful.” The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), a member of the Leadership Conference, and its affiliates have taken a nearly identical position:

Threat assessment, to be effective and fair, must: be restricted to situations in which a clear threat is communicated; be transparently assessed for patterns of inequity (by race, disability, gender, etc.); and limit police involvement—including unwarranted access to student records—to emergency situations where there is an imminent threat to the school community, and school staff determine that a referral to law enforcement is needed.

Based on what happened at Oxford High School, it is clear that had the school implemented the type of multidisciplinary threat-assessment team recommended in the FCSS final report, it would have conducted a threat assessment of the shooter, assessed the student’s potential for violence, and developed intervention and management strategies that would have mitigated the risk of violence, potentially saving the lives of four students and preventing life-changing injuries to six other students and a teacher. On the other hand, if school administrators had followed the ACLU’s and Leadership Conference’s recommendations, they likely would have taken the exact course of action they ended up taking to tragic result.

The Essential Role of Properly Trained Law Enforcement. Finally, as the FCSS final report discusses in Chapter 13, “Training School Personnel to Help Ensure Student Safety”:

All school personnel play an important role in school safety. Training on safety matters helps prepare them to respond to incidents of school violence. The school personnel best positioned to respond to acts of violence are those with specialized training such as school resource officers (SRO), who are typically sworn law enforcement officers, and school safety officers (SSO), who are typically unsworn school security staff. These officers have been specifically trained in school safety to act as a first-line of defense. Their presence at school facilities and on campus allows them to build the kinds of relationships with students that can prevent or mitigate incidents of school violence.

Unfortunately, social justice advocates have extended the call to “defund the police” to include removing law enforcement officers from the schools. On October 6, 2021, the ACLU held a webinar titled “Research Is Power: Leveraging Data for Police-Free Schools.” The webinar argued:

Police in schools perpetuate chilling patterns of discrimination that harm and traumatize students and funnel them into the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. From local efforts to remove police from schools to advocating against the use of federal funding for school police, research can be a key tool for advocacy.

A 2021 Brookings Institution report titled “A Better Path Forward for Criminal Justice: Reconsidering Police in Schools” noted that “school leadership must strictly limit their [SROs’] roles and responsibilities.” The National Education Association has tacitly endorsed a similar approach in its “Policy Statement on Discipline and the School-to-Prison Pipeline”:

School-to-Prison Pipeline means the policies and practices that are directly and indirectly pushing students of color out of school and on a pathway to prison, including, but not limited to: harsh school discipline policies that overuse suspension and expulsion, increased policing and surveillance that create prison-like environments in schools, overreliance on referrals to law enforcement and the juvenile justice system.
Oxford is not the only school that has reduced or restricted the role of police in schools and suffered adverse consequences. For example, in May 2021, the Alexandria City Council voted to remove SROs from schools and instead devote the money to mental health. After a series of violent incidents, Peter Balas, a principal at Alexandria City High School, testified before the city council: “Our students are sending us warning shots—literal warning shots. Please reconsider this. My staff, my students, we’re not OK. Also our community is not OK.” In response to the raft of violent incidents, community pressure, and this compelling testimony, on October 13, 2021, the Alexandria City Council voted to reinstate the SRO program, conceding their error, just one month before the Oxford school shooting.\(^{35}\)

In February 2021, the Los Angeles Unified School District partially defunded its school police program, cutting the budget by $25 million and eliminating 133 positions. Investigating the impact of these cuts, CBS News reported a spike in violent incidents at the schools in this district:

> According to a bulletin from the Associated Administrators of LA [Los Angeles], a union that represents administrators in the district, from August to October of 2021, there have been 108 assaults, with 16 students requiring transport to the hospital. Police sources also add there have been 44 weapons recovered, including five handguns and 32 knives, and it’s not just a matter of not enough officers to patrol. “Our officers have been told, correct, to stay off campus,” Gilbert Gamez is president of the Los Angeles School Police Association.\(^{36}\)

The article continues:

> The Pomona School District, a few weeks ago, decided to bring police back after removing them from high schools. The LA school board, though, rejected a resolution in September that would have allowed individual middle and high schools to decide on bringing back an officer on campus.\(^{37}\)

While the investigation of the Uvalde school shooting is just beginning, and the facts kept shifting in the early days of the incident,\(^{38}\) there are several significant areas of concern raised by recently released video, body-camera footage, and audio recordings. As already noted, Chapter 13 of the final report called for “sworn law enforcement officers” and recommended that these individuals be procured through memoranda of understandings with local law enforcement agencies to ensure that they have ongoing specialized training, are fully resourced, and operate to current standards of practice. However, many states (including Texas) allow schools to create their own school police departments under the direction and control of local school boards rather than use officers from existing law enforcement agencies. In a 2017–20 audit report from the Texas School Safety Center, 41 percent of 1,022 school districts reported contracting with another law enforcement agency compared to about 32 percent of districts that reported employing their own police force.\(^{39}\) As a consequence, the training, resources, and professionalism of these school-controlled entities can vary wildly.

The Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District (ISD), serving 4,150 students, with eight schools as well as an administrative building, created the Uvalde Consolidated ISD Police Department after the Parkland and Santa Fe shootings in 2018 and appointed a chief of police, one Lieutenant Detective, and three officers.\(^{40}\) Unfortunately, with such a tiny group, unlike at Oxford High School, Robb Elementary School did not have an SRO at the school on the day of the shooting (despite early press reporting to the contrary).\(^{41}\) Moreover, because the school’s chief of police was first on the scene per law enforcement protocol he became the “incident commander” in charge of everything that happened thereafter. He was not up to the job, using outdated tactics and treating it as a barricade situation and not an active-shooter situation, and he did not even bring his radio to the incident.\(^{42}\) As the incident commander:

> Peter Arredondo, the chief of police for the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District, stopped at least 19 officers from breaking into the school as the gunman opened fire for at least an hour.
Arredondo believed that the shooter had barricaded himself and that the children were not under an active threat, Steven McCraw, the director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, said Friday.

“From the benefit of hindsight where I’m sitting now, of course, it was not the right decision. It was a wrong decision. Period. There was no excuse for that,” McCraw said at a news conference. “There were plenty of officers to do what needed to be done, with one exception, is that the incident commander inside believed he needed more equipment and more officers to do a tactical breach at that time.”

While we will continue to learn more about what happened through the inevitable review process, the failure of the chief and his tiny school-operated police department clearly emphasizes the need for professionally trained and managed law enforcement units to handle school security to avoid just these types of situations. Many if not most schools will struggle with obtaining the resources, providing the ongoing training, and giving the professional leadership necessary to run their own police departments leading to situations such as Uvalde. As discussed in Chapter 13 of the final report, the better practice is for most schools that are not heavily resourced to leave these duties with professional law enforcement agencies through memoranda of understanding. However, as noted above, many social justice entities oppose this level of cooperation between schools and regular law enforcement agencies, leading to schools creating their own departments under local school board direction and control instead of outside independent law enforcement agencies.

Conclusion

In the wake of the pandemic, which deeply destabilized children’s lives, we are facing a mental health epidemic. According to Education Week, school shootings occurred this year with nearly unprecedented frequency. School administrators must be vigilant against threats and follow best practices for assessing and addressing them seriously. The Trump administration committed to establishing such best practices and making them readily available for school leaders across the country. Unfortunately, the Biden administration and its ideological allies appear dedicated to opposing these best practices in the name of “social justice.” Schools that follow along with them may be depriving themselves of tools essential to keeping students alive.

Hopefully, common sense will prevail in individual school districts even when groupthink is leading the public education establishment in the exact wrong direction. Even if it is no longer official federal government policy, school leaders should still look to the FCSS final report for recommendations and guidance. We must learn the proper lessons from history, so that we aren’t doomed to keep repeating it.

About the Author

Thomas Wheeler is former acting assistant attorney general for civil rights at the US Department of Justice, former senior adviser and senior counsel to the US secretary of education and the White House Federal Commission on School Safety, former general counsel for the National Sheriff’s Association, and a former member of the board of directors for the National School Boards Association.
Notes

4. Chapter 6 of the final report, entitled “Effects of Press Coverage of Mass Shootings,” discusses this issue in great detail, noting that there is “significant evidence that mass killings involving firearms are incented by similar events in the immediate past.” One of the recommendations from the final report to address this issue was to adopt the “Don’t Name Them, Don’t Show Them” (similar to “No Notoriety”) voluntary policy in an effort to reduce the appeal of mass shootings by those who may be susceptible to external influence. Started in response to the Aurora, CO, movie theater shootings in 2012, the “No Notoriety” campaign emphasizes that media outlets should not use names or display photos of killers. Thus except where used in quotes from other sources, in this report the shooter’s name will not be used.
22. “Informed, alert communities play a critical role in keeping our nation safe. By reporting suspicious activities, individuals may be providing the information authorities need to stop an attack before it occurs. This is especially true in relation to school attacks. Studies have shown that, prior to the incident, most attackers engaged in behavior that caused others concern and that others knew about the attacker’s ideas or plan to attack. Indeed, before the Parkland shooting, multiple reports were allegedly received about the shooter’s concerning behavior. How they were processed, evaluated, and acted upon remains under review. What is certain is that effective programs addressing suspicious activity reporting and threat assessment can significantly reduce—or prevent—violence.” See Federal Commission on School Safety, Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety, 49.


27. Coalition for Smart Safety, letter to Patty Murray et al., April 23, 2021, https://www.nrm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CSB-Act-Letter.pdf; and Coalition for Smart Safety, letter to Chuck Schumer et al., August 13, 2021, https://www.njng.org/uploads/digital-library/Luke%20and%20Alex%20School%20Safety%20Act%20Final%20Letter%20final.pdf. “The bill encourages the use of threat assessments and violence risk assessments, which are of great concern to us; the evidence regarding the efficacy of these practices is sparse at best. The bill also encourages that behavioral intervention teams avoid “inappropriately limiting or restricting law enforcement’s jurisdiction over criminal matters, or attempting to substitute the behavioral intervention process in place of a criminal process or to impecce a criminal process, when an individual of concern’s behavior has potential criminal implications.” This language suggests that behavioral intervention teams should report concerning student behavior or behavior that has “potential” criminal implications first to criminal authorities rather than initiating what evidence and best practice show works—a comprehensive in-school process where a school team seeks to identify and address the root cause of this behavior.”

28. Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, “Opposes S. 391 H.R. 1239, the EAGLES Act of 2021,” October 26, 2021, https://civilrights.org/resource/opposes-s-391-h-r-1239-the-eagles-act-of-2021. “Threat assessment systems, such as the system advanced in the EAGLES Act, criminal-ize children, further harm marginalized communities, and interfere with proven and evidence-based efforts to build positive relationships in schools and climates conducive to learning and child well-being. Our children deserve positive solutions to keep them safe in schools, but the EAGLES Act takes a misguided approach that would codify the National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) within the U.S. Secret Service and advance harmful policies instead of evidence-based positive supports that enablesafe, healthy, and inclusive schools climates.”


31. Linda Poon, “CityLab Daily: There’s a Movement to Defund School Police, Too,” August 24, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-24/citylab-daily-there-s-a-movement-to-defund-school-police-too. “When the Minneapolis School District voted to end its decades-long contract with the local police department in June, it didn’t only mark a crucial point in the ongoing protest to defund the police. It was also part of a long national fight to end school resource officer programs, which have become one of the fastest-growing assignment divisions in law enforcement. For years, advocates argued that police presence fails to make schools safer; rather, they say it results in sending a disproportionate number of non-White students into the justice system at an early age.”


37. CBS Los Angeles, “Goldstein Investigates.”


44. Education Week “School Shootings This Year: How Many and Where,” January 5, 2022, https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-this-year-how-many-and-where/2022/01