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How Students Can He

AVERT SCHOOL

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While School Resources Officers (SROs) are key figures in school safety, other partners—such as parents, teachers, and students—can play critical roles in averting school violence. The Winter 2017 issue of the *Journal of School Safety* featured how the Police Foundation's Averted School Violence (ASV) database is yielding valuable lessons for school safety.

This article features incident reports from that database about how students—who, based on an ongoing analysis, are often the first to learn about a threat of violence (see Figure 1)—can play a key role in preventing school violence. The article also highlights select findings from the analysis of incidents that have been entered into the ASV database as they relate to students. By studying lessons learned from individual incidents of averted violence and comprehensive data from all reports in the ASV database, we can learn new ways about how to protect students and staff. The ASV database was created by the Police Foundation, and funded by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ).

The incident reports summarized below are drawn directly from the ASV report library found at <https://www.asvnearmiss.org/reports/>. We encourage you to visit the database to learn more about averted acts of violence in schools, and to complete an incident report for averted acts of violence that may have happened in your school community. The ASV database provides invaluable learning opportunities for those responsible for the safety of our schools, and by submitting reports, you can play a vital role in growing the lessons learned to benefit schools and communities nationwide.

The Role of Students in Preventing School Violence – Two Incident Reports

Student Sees Peer Carrying Gun at School, Alerts SRO

Case Summary:

The suspect became upset over alleged rumors spread about him at school. He believed that the person behind the rumors is his ex-girlfriend, and plans to shoot her, before unloading “on the rest of the school,” according to police. The suspect stole a 9mm semiautomatic handgun from a family member, according to police. A female student saw the suspect carrying a handgun in his waistband around 12:00 P.M. and alerted an SRO, who confronted the boy about the weapon. The potential student shooter was apprehended around 12:17 P.M., and the police found a loaded gun concealed in his waistband. The student, who remains unidentified, was booked into juvenile detention. The 16-year-old was charged with three counts of weapons possession. The charges are possession of a weapon with intent to assault, having a weapon in a restricted area, and possession by a minor.

How was the attack averted? The would-be perpetrator was tackled/ physically restrained.

The attack was averted by: A peer, other law enforcement, and the SRO.

Weapons that were going to be used in attack: Handgun/pistol.

How many suspects were involved with the plot? One.

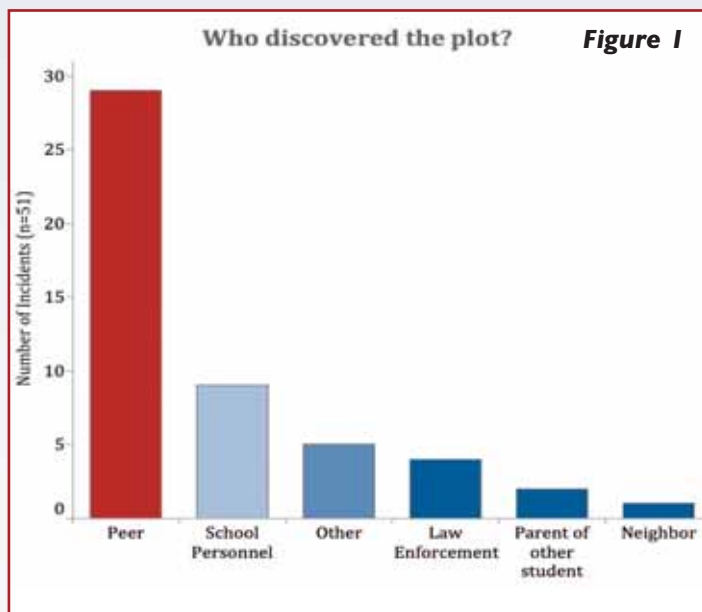
Lessons learned from this planned attack:

Summary: “The quick response by law enforcement officers and school officials most certainly prevented this terrible tragedy from occurring,” police said in a statement. “Police say training and emergency drills regarding school shooters may have averted a tragedy.” “The student that reported the gun is being hailed a hero.”

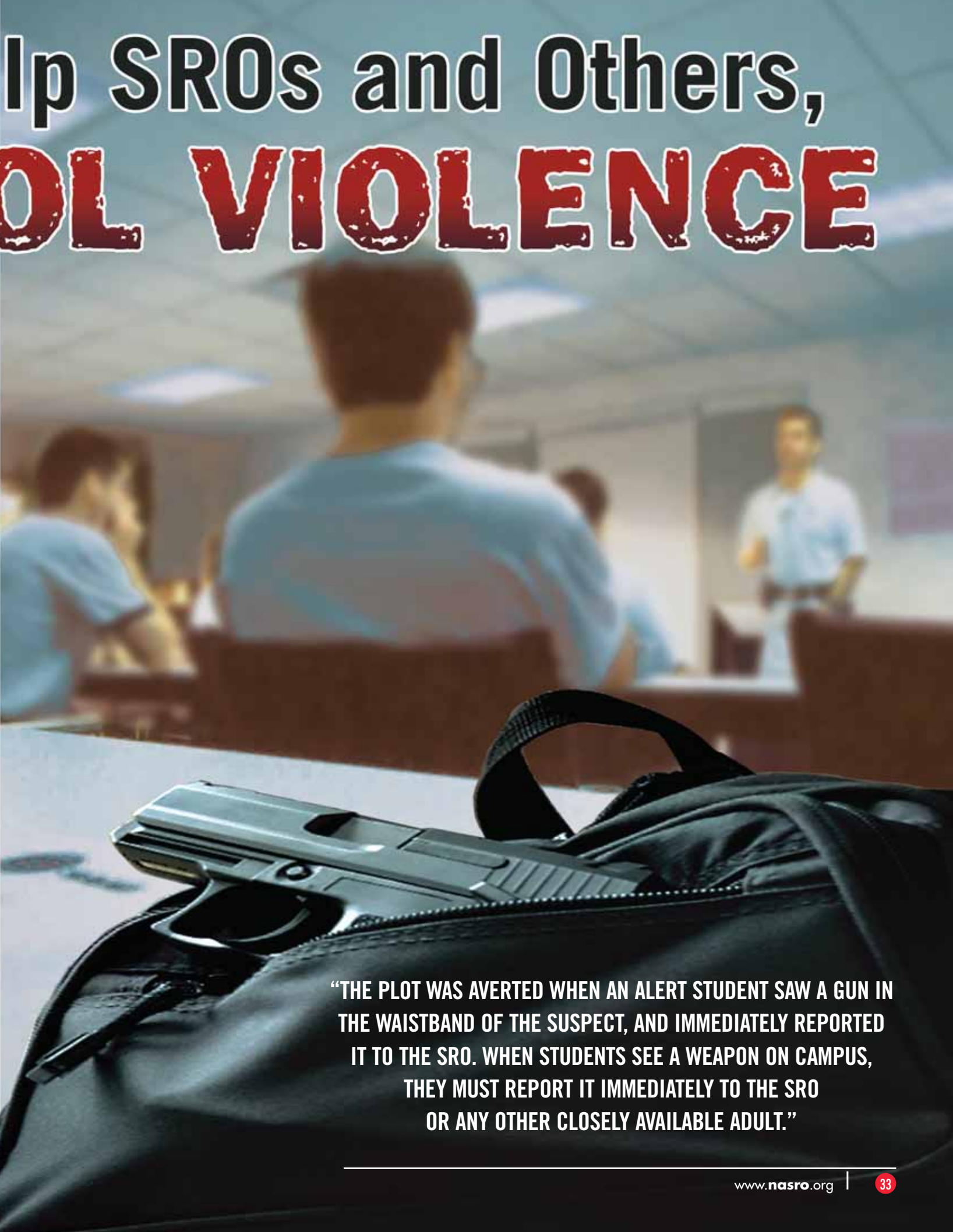
Students: This planned shooting was averted when an alert student saw a gun in the waistband of the suspect, and immediately reported it to the SRO. When students see a weapon on campus, they must report it immediately to the SRO or any other closely available adult.

Parents: The suspect stole a 9 mm handgun from a family member. Parents that own guns must keep their firearms securely locked.

School: The school had trained for active shooters and other emergencies. Police credit this training to the averting of this shooting. All schools should train for active shooter incidents and other emergencies so the response is quick and decisive in an actual incident.



Help SROs and Others, Reduce School Violence

A handgun is lying on a black bag in the foreground. In the background, a classroom is visible with several students sitting at desks, looking towards the front of the room. The lighting is bright, and the overall scene is slightly blurred, emphasizing the gun in the foreground.

“THE PLOT WAS AVERTED WHEN AN ALERT STUDENT SAW A GUN IN THE WAISTBAND OF THE SUSPECT, AND IMMEDIATELY REPORTED IT TO THE SRO. WHEN STUDENTS SEE A WEAPON ON CAMPUS, THEY MUST REPORT IT IMMEDIATELY TO THE SRO OR ANY OTHER CLOSELY AVAILABLE ADULT.”

Police: The SRO's immediate response to the report of a gun was key in their ability to apprehend the student before he was able to carry out his planned attack.

Students Alert SRO to Fellow Student's Violent Social Media Posts

Case Summary:

A 17-year-old male student posted online about his dissatisfaction with various individuals at his high school, according to court records and social media. He posted, "When the bullets get to flyin' better hope you're on the right side. Gunna happen too, bet on it. I can only take so much." Three days later he posted that he was waiting for the "perfect opportunity to go through with this." He also posted, "You're a [expletive] person who doesn't deserve the life you have been given, that's why I want to take it from you so badly." He additionally posted a tweet that day that said, "Going ghost, just remember the warnings." The student sent a text to another student saying: "The whole community of [my high school] has made me feel pain and I'm going to make all of them feel it just how I feel it every day," according to an affidavit.

The 17-year-old student found a 15-year-old student to help him carry out the plan. According to the prosecutor, the two students planned to call in a bomb threat to their high school and then shoot people as they come out of the buildings. Students reported the threats that the student made on social media to the SRO and other administrators at their high school. One student provided the principal with copies of the text messages he exchanged with the male student.

The student who plotted the violence was brought to the principal's office, where he admitted that he was having thoughts of harming others. The principal saw messages on the student's phone in which he said he is going to round up those who had hurt him and "put a bullet in their head." Deputies searched the potential student attackers' houses and determined that they had access to firearms for their planned attack.

How was the attack averted? Would-be perpetrator's social media post/entry/video was reported.

Weapons that were going to be used in attack: Firearm.

How many suspects were involved with the plot? Two.

Lessons learned from this planned attack:

Students: A student received a threatening text, and showed it to the SRO. When students become aware of a threat or a plot, they need to tell a responsible adult as soon as possible.

School: Failed to adequately dispel rumors about a third suspect, which was distressing to students and parents. Schools need to have a good communication plan and actively dispel rumors.

Police: Took the threat seriously and acted immediately. Anyone who hears about any school-related threats and plots must take them seriously and then immediately begin an investigation.

Recommended changes to school procedure to prevent attacks in the future:

Several days after the arrest of the second suspect, at least one parent received a distressed text message from a student that there was a third plotter. It took the parent 15 minutes to get through to the school. An email was sent later that afternoon to dispel the rumor.

Schools must continue to monitor social and other media for rumors, and if discovered, communicate immediately to students, parents, and the community to dispel the rumors and restore calm.

Police Foundation's Ongoing Analysis of Averted School Attacks

Incidents such as the two summarized, provide valuable data on the nature of averted school attacks, perpetrators, school security, and prevention mechanisms. In order to better understand averted attacks on a larger scale, school violence experts Dr. Peter Langman and Dr. Jeffrey Daniels, in coordination with the Police Foundation, are analyzing a sample of these and other incidents of averted violence. Two preliminary findings from the Police Foundation's ongoing analysis as it relates to students, are presented below.

Who Discovered the Plot

A variety of people discovered school shooting plots (see figure 1). Most commonly, peers discovered and reported the plot (29 cases). In four cases, the plot was discovered by law enforcement (other than SROs), and school teachers discovered three plots. Two plots each were found by the following individuals: school counselors, school administrators, parents of the suspect, and parents of other students. Other school faculty/staff discovered one plot (a school bookkeeper), and one was discovered by a neighbor. Finally, one plot was discovered by a drug store employee (who developed photos of the suspect's arsenal), one by a gun store owner, and one by an unknown social media follower.

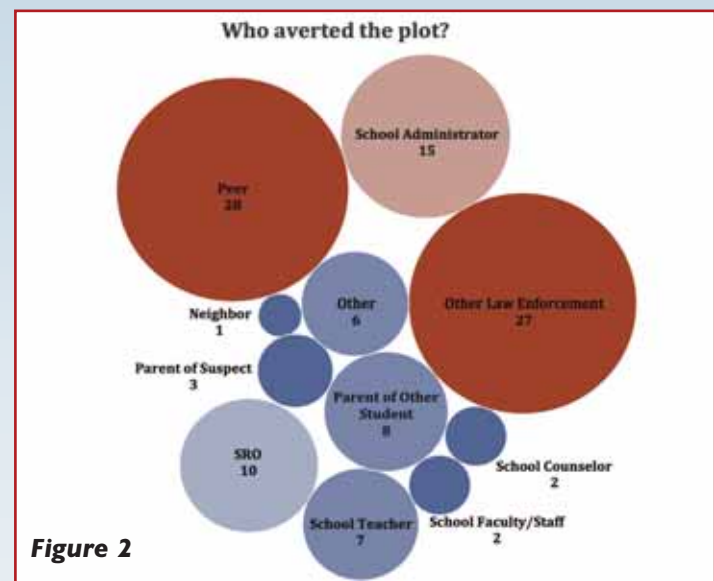


Figure 2

Who Played a Role in Averting the Plot

Generally, multiple individuals played a role in the process of averting these violent attacks. This role encompasses every step from reporting a threat to preventing an attack. The individuals identified (see Figure 2) played a variety of these roles in averting attacks: students played a role in preventing 28 incidents; other law enforcement officers (27); school administrators (15); SROs (10); school teachers (7); parent of other student (8); other person (6); other school faculty/staff member (2); parent of suspect (3); school counselor (2); neighbor (1).

A future article will discuss how school staff and parents have worked with SROs to avert school violence, as well as the Police Foundation's completed analyses of averted school violence attacks.

About the authors: Sarah Solano is a Project Assistant for the Police Foundation. Ms. Solano manages the ASV database and online system, leads project marketing and outreach, and provides additional day-to-day project coordination. Ms. Solano is a 2018 NASRO School Safety Conference Breakout Trainer. Frank Straub is the Director of Strategic Studies for the Police Foundation, serving as the project manager and providing strategic oversight. John Rosiak is an educator, trainer, and facilitator who has supported school/law-enforcement partnerships around the country since the 1980s. He is the founder of Prevention Partnerships, www.rosiakassociates.com.