

Threats and Incidents of Violence in Schools:

A Mid-Year Analysis of 2017 -2018 School Year

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The Educator's School Safety Network

Overview and Summary

In 2015 The Educator's School Safety Network published its first report on bomb threats and incidents in U.S. schools. The continual escalation of threats and violent incidents in schools prompted an expansion of research in 2016 to be inclusive of all threats of violence and violent incidents that occur in schools.

The Educator's School Safety Network (ESSN), a national non-profit school safety organization, has compiled the most current information on violence in America's schools to determine the scope and severity of the threats and violent incidents that schools face. This abbreviated report is an initial analysis of what has occurred from the beginning of August to the end of December 2017, the first half of the current school year.

The Educator's School Safety Network believes it is critical to stop speculating or relying on "expert impressions". Instead, the nature, scope and severity of threats and violence in schools must be objectively and factually determined. As a result, this report has two important purposes:

1. To provide the educational and law enforcement communities with the most current data and analysis available on the rate, frequency, severity, scope, and nature of threats of violence along with actual gun and bomb incidents in the United States. While components of the report are longitudinal in nature, the primary thrust of the document is to provide an up to date analysis of reported threats and incidents in schools that have occurred in the first half of the 2017-2018 academic school year.
2. To provide school officials and law enforcement responders with an overview and understanding of the critical trends and warning signs that have emerged from an analysis of recent incidents. Because data collection and analysis is on-going and will continue into the next school year, issues and concerns are still emerging; however there are recommendations and areas of concern that must be immediately addressed.

Summary of Key Findings

The analysis of violent threats and incidents for the first half of the 2017-2018 school year demonstrated several key findings similar to those from previous years:

1. There is a significant increase in the number of actual incidents of violence. When compared to the same time period last year, schools have experienced a 59% increase in violent incidents.

	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	
Threats	878	961	9.5% increase
Incidents	64	100	59% increase

2. Violent threats and incidents occur daily in U.S. schools.

From August to December 2017, there were more than 1,061 threats of violence, an average of 10.9 per day.

This is a 12.6% increase when compared to the same time period last school year.

An average of one violent incident occurred each day of the school year so far.

The first half of the 2017-2018 school year saw at least 956 threats of violence and 105 incidents, **almost half of which**

involved a gun being found or fired in a school. Equally frightening, but much harder to measure, is the sheer number of school-based attacks that were thwarted somewhere on the spectrum of targeted violence. At least a dozen potential attacks (11.4% of all incidents) were identified between August and December of 2017. Many of these planned attacks were alarmingly close to actual implementation.

3. A small number of states of concern account for the majority of threats and incidents of violence that occur in the U.S.

While violent incidents or threats have occurred in 48 of the 50 states so far this school year, **10 states accounted for 48% of all the threats and incidents** that have occurred so far.

Twenty states account for more than 70% of all threats and incidents. In the “top 10” states of concern, the number of threats and/or incidents is statistically significant for a number of reasons. These include the sheer number of incidents or threats, the type of events that occurred, and the total of events or incidents per capita, when compared to the population of the state.



4. The rate of incidents and threats changed dramatically for some states in a short period of time.

Several states experienced dramatic increases in the number of threats and/or incidents during the first half of the 2017-2018 school year. While states that previously experienced high rates of threats may have had slight decreases, in most cases, states with previously low rates of threats or incidents had significant increases during this time period that elevated their rankings for the first half of the year.

Fall 2017 'Top Ten' States of concern			
	Fall '17	Fall '16	Threats and incidents increased:
California	#1	#6	62.5%
Pennsylvania	#2	#2	14.8%
New York	#3	#5	33.3%
Florida	#4	#4	-3.7%
Illinois	#5	#10	44.0%

Continued: Fall 2017 'Top Ten' States of concern

Washington	#6	#17	91.0%
Ohio	#7	#1	-39.7%
Texas	#7	#3	-30.5%
Michigan	T9	#8	-8.3%
Wisconsin	T9	#12	13.8%

Details on the study audience, methodology, and limitations

Intended Audience

This report is primarily informational and must not replace appropriate training, but rather should draw attention to the need for it. Educators in particular have not had the benefit of bomb incident or crisis response training, even though the data would indicate that it will most certainly be needed. While school leaders and emergency responders are the primary audience for whom this information is relevant, parents, community members, and other school stakeholders also have a clear interest in the safety and security of their school communities.

Data Collection Methodology

Other than this series of reports, there is no publically accessible national data on current threats and incidents of violence in schools. This document is built on a data set that is a compilation of violent incidents and threats that have occurred in U.S. schools as reported from media sources.

During the study period of November 2011 through November 2014, data for the longitudinal component of the study was initially collected from the School Safety News website (formerly www.schoolsafetynews.com). School Safety News was a national organization that in addition to other services, compiled data on specific safety related issues that occurred in U.S. schools based on information reported in the media. These incidents were categorized and/or sorted by the nature of the incident, date, and geographic location. School Safety News data from November 2011 through December of 2014 was

used by ESSN researchers to compile a data set consisting of all bomb related incidents occurring at a school during that time period. As of December 2014, this data resource was no longer available. The data set used for analysis from that point forward was compiled directly by ESSN researchers in a similar fashion using media sources and focused only on bomb threats and incidents.

Starting in August of 2016, reports of all violent incidents and threats in schools were reviewed and data collected on the date, location, type of incident, type of school, how the threat or incident was delivered/discovered, and the response protocol enacted. Additional information such as perpetrator sex and age, and other specific or unusual findings were also incorporated when available. This data was verified and aggregated to arrive at the findings incorporated in this report. Data collection for the 2017-2018 school year began August 1, 2017 and is ongoing with the final study results for the 2017-2018 to be published in July 2018.

Limitations of the Study

It is highly unlikely that all violent incidents and threats in schools have been included in the data set. In fact, it is likely that numerous incidents have been either not been reported, or inadvertently missed by the data collection methods used. Rather than undermining the findings, this potential “under-reporting” only seeks to emphasize the significance of the data found in the study.

For the purposes of this study, “violent incidents” and “threats of violence” were defined as those with the potential for loss of life, such as explosive devices, firearms, and other potentially lethal devices such as knives etc. Lower levels of school violence, such as fights, harassment etc. were not included in this study. That is not to minimize the importance or impact of these less-violent incidents, but rather that they are not consistently reported and/or available to the general public.

All data sets (longitudinal, 2015-2016, 2016-2017) have similar limitations in that they are based on reports made in local and/or national media. This means that while multiple media reports were used to verify and update the accuracy of information related to an incident, if no information was released by the school or the incident was never reported in any fashion, then it is not included in the data set.

The dates in which schools start and end their academic year vary widely. In an attempt to maintain consistency, data from June, July, and August are not included in the longitudinal

study, as the number of schools in session during those months is inconsistent compared to September through May, when nearly all schools are in session.

For additional information and training opportunities:

www.eSchoolSafety.org

For the full report, or an executive summary, go to: www.eSchoolSafety.org/concern

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