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**PROFILING RECENT SCHOOL THREATS:**

School threats affect all educational levels, including elementary, middle, and high schools. Recently, in October 2026, three middle school students from San Bernardino County were arrested for posing with a gun in front of the junior High School and posting it on social media. There were also two 15-year-old girls, from Riverside County, California, which were arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit murder and a mass shooting at a local High School.

**THE INCIDENT:** The students allegedly spent months researching past school shootings and were planning a revenge-motivated mass shooting targeting the campus of a High School in Southern California. During the months long planning, the students compiled a targeted hit list containing the names of teachers, students, and administrative members the suspects intended to kill. However, local police authorities were contacted because the social media tech company Meta flagged internal messages and other dangerous digital communications between the two girls on social media and alerted the FBI and other local law enforcement agencies. Their investigation found that the students were discussing how to acquire firearms and even researching age limits and hunting license restrictions to circumvent the law in gaining access to firearms. When local detectives and federal agents served search warrants on their Riverside County residences, they uncovered physical evidence proving the girls had moved past **"just talking about the incident"** and were looking to actively commit this school shooting. The search warrant at the students' homes revealed the girls were in possession of physical campus maps, detailed execution plans, and notes on how to bypass California gun laws and age restrictions.

**RARE FEMALE SHOOTERS:** It is highly usually for female high school students to plan this type of criminal behavior out. School shootings perpetrated or plotted by girls remain an extremely rare anomaly, rather than a rising trend, both in California and across the United States. But

currently you cannot specifically profile a school shooter or say it is only males who do this and never females. It could be anyone at any given time, with no prior history of any conduct of school trouble or suspension, ties to gangs or any disruptive behavior at school.

**PROFILING BEHAVIOR CUES:** Comprehensive research by organizations including the FBI, the U.S. Secret Service, and leading criminologists demonstrates that there is no single "profile" or definitive checklist that can accurately predict who will become a school shooter. Instead of a signal uniform personality type, experts look at a combination of situational, psychological, and behavioral risk factors which include:

**Traumatized students:** Driven by severe distress, failure, and profound alienation, these individuals typically come from highly dysfunctional backgrounds involving neglect, substance abuse, or physical and sexual abuse.

**Psychotic students:** Experiencing a break from reality or symptoms of schizophrenia spectrum disorders, these individuals often come from intact, non-abusive families but struggle with paranoia, hallucinations, or deteriorating mental illness.

**Psychopathic students:** Characterized by narcissism, sadism, and a severe lack of empathy, these individuals exhibit a calculated approach to violence and an obsession with weapons, a desire for dominance or fame, independent of any home-life trauma.

***KEY NOTE:** One thing that is always seen across all typologies, is a history of **severe depression, suicidal ideation, or an acute emotional crisis** (such as a breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend, suspension from school, or severe bullying) is present in the vast majority of cases.

**UNDERSTANDING THREAT ASSESSMENT:**




**Behavioral Warning Signs:** Because psychological profiles vary with students, threat assessment by professionals is critical to a school staff which focuses heavily on dynamic behaviors rather than static traits. A few critical pre-attack indicators include:

**Leakage of Intentions of Committing a Shooting:** Up to 85% to 87% of K-12 shooters leak their plans ahead of time. This includes making direct threats to peers, posting alarming content or photographs of weapons on social media, or writing manifestos. Mass school shootings are rarely spontaneous acts of passion. They typically involve weeks or months of logistical

coordination, tactical research, and organizing timelines. One of the facts of school shootings is that the majority of youth perpetrators have a pre-existing interest in firearms and typically obtain their weapons by taking them from family members who did not store them securely.

**Social Isolation and Grievance:** Perpetrators frequently experience profound social marginalization or bullying. They often harbor a deep sense of injustice and view themselves as the ultimate victims, using violence as a symbolic way to reclaim power or notoriety against injustice.

**SCHOOL SAFETY THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM:** School safety threat assessment teams are critical today because they shift a school's safety strategy from reacting to an ongoing crisis to proactively preventing violence before it occurs. In 81% of violent school incidents, at least one other person had prior knowledge of the attacker's plan. This is why it is critically important in understanding what is a threat and what counts as a school threat and why there is a need for school threat assessment teams. I highly recommend schools create monitored and anonymous reporting channels where student bystanders or teachers can report concerns safely.

**WHY ONGOING TRAINGING IS NEEDED:** Safety at the school can never be taken lightly and safety initiatives and training cannot be a "one-and-done" thing or a workshop at the start of the school year and never seen again. Ongoing training is critical to keeping a safe school. Schools need to understand the landscape of student communication, social media risks and trends, and behavioral science changes rapidly. Ongoing training keeps teams updated on new research, legal guidelines, and threat indicators, such as encrypted chats or new online platforms which staff needs to be aware of. Threat assessment does not start and end with the core team, but every single staff member, from teachers and administrators to bus drivers and cafeteria workers, need regular refreshers in school safety training to recognize subtle changes in a student's behaviors to maintain a safe school. This is an unfortunate reality that we live with today. Make sure you report anything that you hear or see that can be labeled as a threat to the school or students to the proper authorities, because you never know where the investigation will lead to.

**About the Author:** *Sherman Garnett Jr is a school safety expert and training consultant and a retired Law Enforcement Officer with over 17 years of experience, working in various assignments, including as a School Resource Officer, along with experience in emergency preparedness and school safety training. He is the author of the newly released book,* ***School Safety & Security Awareness 2026 Edition****, which equips schools with practical frameworks to prevent and manage campus crises, dealing with student violence, illegal drugs, and school safety prevention on campus and more. Learn more about setting up training for your school and grab your copy of the book today at* ***Sherman Garnett & Associates - Home***