
Education — Failures and Family Involvement

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This document focuses on school shooters' negative experiences with school personnel, whether these involved academic failures, disciplinary actions by administrators, or other conflicts. In some cases, the perpetrators clearly targeted school personnel in response to perceived injustices. In other cases, there may have been no direct connection between their negative experiences and victim selection. Even in these cases, however, failures, frustrations, and conflicts may have combined with other factors to put the perpetrators on the path of violence. A second focus is the involvement of family members in education, primarily in terms of employment in the field, but also in terms of their own academic achievements. As discussed in my book School Shooters: Understanding High School, College, and Adult Perpetrators, in some cases there may have been a connection between family involvement in education, the distress and conflict caused by the perpetrators' academic failures, and the selection of both venues (e.g., type of school) and victims (e.g., family members). Finally, education-related targets are noted; family members involved in education who were targeted are listed in parentheses. It is not assumed in all cases in which shooters had relatives involved in education that this was a factor in the attacks. Nonetheless, because school shootings occur in educational settings, this document presents information regarding both the families' connections to education and the perpetrators' experiences in education. The table below is divided into four sections; within each section, the ordering of items is chronological by attack date.¹

1 [This document includes incidents up to 2016; we hope in a future revision to extend the coverage up to the present. — Ed., 2025]

Perpetrator	Failure / discipline / conflict	Family involvement	Education-related targets
<i>Secondary school shooters</i>			
Michael Slobodian	Two teachers contacted his mother about his skipping classes		Intended to kill both teachers; one he did not find, but he killed the other
Robert Poulin	Academic struggles Failed first assignment previous spring	Mother: lunchroom supervisor Father: schoolteacher	(Contemplated killing mother) (Contemplated killing father)
Brenda Spencer	Disliked school Fought with father about attending “Severe scholastic problems” led to switching schools, then switching back again Vandalized elementary school (same one she attacked) Truancy	Father: university audio-visual technician	
James Kearbey	Was failing all subjects	Father: schoolteacher	Shot principal and two teachers; not clear if they were specifically targeted
Heather Smith	Obsessive about grades; slit wrists when they dropped slightly Lost race for vice-president		
Floyd Warmesley	Suspended twice that year		Targeted principal
Kristofer Hans	Was failing French	Father: school psychologist	Intended to kill French teacher
Nicholas Elliot	Dyslexic	Mother: school nurse	
Eric Houston	Placed in special education Molested by teacher The teacher who molested him also failed him in the class, which meant Houston could not graduate		Targeted and killed the teacher who molested and failed him
Scott Pennington	Low grade on midterm exam devastated him; fought with teacher to get the grade raised; she refused to change it		Killed the teacher who gave him a low grade

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Clay Shrout	Grades declined to Cs, Ds, and Fs English teacher called mother about major assignment Shrout did not hand in Suspended for bringing stun gun to school, given fifty hours of community service	Grandfather: college instructor Mother: on three PTAs, was president of one Mother: former schoolteacher Mother: Sunday school teacher Father: Sunday school teacher	Intended to kill English teacher and assistant principal (Killed mother) (Killed father)
Toby Sincinco	Expelled from school Returned on probationary status Suspended again, pending expulsion		Shot teacher
Jamie Rouse	Falsely accused of truancy Feared he would fail twelfth grade Hadn't taken courses necessary to go to college	Grandparent: schoolteacher Grandparent: schoolteacher Aunt: schoolteacher Uncle: schoolteacher	Talked of shooting principal Tried to shoot coach Intended to kill teachers
Barry Loukaitis	Grades had declined Detention for repeated tardiness Hated vice-principal Hated algebra teacher		Talked of killing vice-principal Shot algebra teacher
Evan Ramsey	Explosive temper in school Suspensions twelve disciplinary infractions one year five infractions the next year	Foster mother: school superintendent	Killed principal
Luke Woodham	Suspended multiple times in sixth and seventh grades Repeated ninth grade	Mother: had been a teacher	(Killed his mother)
[Grant Boyette] <i>[not a shooter; told Woodham to attack]</i>		[Mother: schoolteacher]	[Plotted with peers to kill certain teachers]
Michael Carneal	Five disciplinary infractions in three months before shooting		Talked of taking over the school Talked of shooting administrators
Andrew Golden	Minor disciplinary issues Tired of teachers' "crap"		Shot a teacher

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Mitchell Johnson	Disciplinary infractions Several in-school suspensions		Shot one of the teachers who had disciplined him (not clear if accidental or deliberate)
Andrew Wurst	Struggled academically Eighth grade: mostly Ds and Fs		
Kip Kinkel	Repeated first grade Third grade: special education Fourth grade: diagnosed with learning disability Two-day suspension for kicking peer in head Three-day suspension for throwing pencil at peer Academic disappointment to his parents Homeschooled at one point Suspended pending formal expulsion hearing	Mother: schoolteacher Father: schoolteacher	(Killed mother) (Killed father) Committed school shooting day after suspension
Eric Harris	Suspended for hacking Complained that education forces conformity, goes against human nature, turns people into robots		
Dylan Klebold	Suspended for hacking Suspended for defacing locker Defiant, hostile, intimidating toward teachers	Mother: had been a teacher; worked at community college	
Seth Trickey	[No known academic or disciplinary issues]	Grandfather: high school teacher Grandmother: elementary school teacher Great aunt: elementary school teacher Great uncle: high school teacher Great uncle: high school teacher Great uncle: teacher	
Nathaniel Brazill	Suspended by school counselor on the last day of school		Returned to school the same day, intending to kill the school counselor, but ended up killing a teacher who wouldn't let him see his girlfriend

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Andy Williams	Minor discipline for goofing off in class Frequent truancy Neglected homework, grades declined Erased voicemail messages from the school to his father; intercepted his report cards before father could see them Detentions for tardiness and skipping classes Enraged when reprimanded by teacher in class a few days before his attack		
Jason Hoffman	In special education some years Repeated twelfth grade Conflict with dean of his high school Did poorly in class at community college		Tried to kill dean he had grudge against
Robert Steinhäuser	Rude to teachers; did not take discipline well Failed exams Aspired to career with computers; failed his computer class Chronic tardiness, reprimanded Failed twelfth grade twice Expelled for forging physician's note		Targeted faculty and administrators, killing twelve teachers and a vice-principal
Jeffrey Weise	Repeated eighth grade Some sources say he repeated grades twice or more On homebound instruction: some reports he was angry about being kicked out, but there are many contradictory reports about why he was out of school		Shot one teacher; unclear if he specifically targeted her
Alvaro Castillo	Attended Durham Technical Community College; outcome unknown	Father: custodian in elementary school; severe pressure on kids to succeed academically Sister and her boyfriend attended Durham	(Killed his father)

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Eric Hainstock	Academic struggles, special education Repeated sixth grade Out-of-school suspension and in-school suspension shortly before attack Multiple legal charges for aggressive behavior at school shortly before attack		Targeted and killed principal Tried to shoot a teacher
Sebastian Bosse	Repeated grades three times Hated school Thought about dropping out		
Douglas Chanthabouly	Received special education services		
Asa Coon	Suspended ten days previous year Suspended shortly before attack Angry at teacher whose class he was failing		Sought out and shot the teacher whose class he was failing
Pekka-Eric Auvinen	Grades declined as he got older		Shot head teacher; unknown if he targeted her
Tim Kretschmer	Repeated a grade Struggled academically: tutored in German, English, math, science Complained teachers didn't call on him enough and gave unfair grades Desperate about his lack of success		Shot some teachers, but unclear if they were specifically targeted
Robert Butler	Received long suspension following arrest on school property		Returned to school the same day and shot the vice-principal and principal
T.J. Lane	Attended alternative school; not known if this was his choice or how he felt about it		
Jose Reyes	Significant academic struggles; did first-grade work in sixth grade, special education		

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Karl Pierson	Speech and debate coach demoted Pierson from his position as team captain Suspended for inappropriate behavior in class Sent home from school multiple times for inappropriate behavior Grades plummeted to Ds and Fs Grades poor, graduation in jeopardy	Mother: worked for Douglas County School District	Intended to kill his speech and debate coach and other specific people whose names have been redacted in his journal
Jaylen Fryberg	Suspended a week before the attack for fighting Suspended from football team for fight	Mother: school board vice-president	
Jesse Osborne	Expelled from middle school for attacking student with hatchet; subsequently homeschooled		
<i>College shooters</i>			
Wesley Clow	Was in danger of not graduating due to poor academic performance		Killed professor
Charles Whitman	Lost military scholarship due to poor grades Wanted to be a mechanical engineer; gave up Wanted to be a career marine officer; gave up Wanted to be an architectural engineer; gave up Wanted to be a real estate agent; gave up Wanted to be a lawyer; gave up Decided to drop out; changed mind	Wife: school teacher Mother-in-law: schoolteacher	(Killed wife)
Edward Allaway	Conflict with coworkers at university Felt persecuted Became combative Wanted to work elsewhere on campus	Sister: university secretary	Shot coworkers
Gang Lu	Failed to win prize for best dissertation Failed to become professor, blamed his professors for not getting letters of recommendation mailed in time Threatened to sue university		Shot personnel in his department at the university

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Valery Fabrikant	Years of conflict with university Accused university of unethical research/publication practices Accused university of financial fraud Insubordinate behavior Threatened university personnel Sued the university		Targeted university personnel
Wayne Lo	Fined for disciplinary infraction in residence hall Said he had power to bring the campus to its knees	Mother: schoolteacher	Threatened to kill residential staff Committed random attack on campus
Frederick Davidson	Felt mistreated by professors Believed professors conspired to keep him from getting jobs Thesis was turned down once; feared it would be turned down again		Shot members of his thesis committee
Peter Odighizuwa	Attended Ohio State University; did not earn degree Severe conflict with law school Filed grievance against professor Filed grievance against staff in financial aid office Belligerent with professors Had Ds and Fs his last semester Decided to withdraw from law school		Targeted university personnel
Robert Flores	Severe conflict with university Complained to dean that he wasn't called on enough in class Dean warned him twice that his behavior was so inappropriate that he could be expelled Failed rotation in pediatric nursing Failed another class Conflict with another professor		Killed the three professors he had conflicts/failures with

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Biswanath Halder	<p>Attended New York University; did not earn degree</p> <p>Attended University of Massachusetts; did not earn degree</p> <p>Attended Boston University; did not earn degree</p> <p>Sued Case Western Reserve University</p>		Sought to kill university personnel
Seung Hui Cho	<p>Removed from class due to behavior</p> <p>Professor Bean recommended he drop class; Cho was livid and yelled at Bean</p> <p>Campus police twice said leave women alone</p>		On day of attack, sent letter to English department expressing his rage toward Professor Bean
Steven Kazmierczak	<p>Dropped out of courses at community college</p> <p>Received degree in sociology from Northern Illinois University (NIU)</p> <p>Chastised by professor/mentor for inappropriate behavior on department discussion board</p> <p>Complained about graduate school</p> <p>Significant career confusion: considered computer science, political science, sociology, law school, public administration</p> <p>Started graduate program in sociology at NIU, but the department underwent changes, resulting in Kazmierczak's transfer to Illinois University</p>	<p>Sister: completed graduate degree at university he was attending at time of his attack; she may have been employed in special education</p>	Committed attack at former university (NIU) in auditorium where he had had most of his sociology classes
Matti Saari	<p>Due to relocations, had to change schools at least six times</p> <p>Dropped out of upper secondary school</p> <p>Dropped out of vocational school</p> <p>Dropped out of another school</p>		
O'Dane Maye	<p>Withdrew from university several months before his attack</p>		Returned to university to shoot random people
Amy Bishop	<p>Failed to get tenure</p> <p>Appealed the decision and lost</p> <p>Sued the university</p>	Father: college professor	Shot colleagues in her department

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One Goh	Failed to graduate from nursing program Fought with administration about tuition refund		Intended to kill woman he blamed for not getting his tuition refund
Chris Harper-Mercer	Attended alternative high school Enrolled in El Camino College for two years; outcome unknown Was enrolled at Umpqua Community College		
Mainak Sarkar	Conflict with professor		Killed professor
<i>Aberrant adult shooters</i>			
Robert Smith	Reportedly repeated grades		Considered killing teachers
Tyrone Mitchell	Childhood school experiences unknown Took university classes but apparently never earned a degree	Fiancée: preschool teacher Sister: teacher's aide	Attacked his former elementary school
Laurie Dann	In special education classes in middle school Did very poorly in high school; resorted to cheating to get by Transferred from Drake University to University of Arizona, where she did poorly, was put on academic probation Dropped out of UA Then re-enrolled, and withdrew Dropped out of a class at Northwestern University Then withdrew or failed to complete other courses there Went to the University of Wisconsin, but completed no courses	Self: studied to be elementary teacher Sister-in-law: schoolteacher	Tried to burn down two elementary schools, committed school shooting at one of them

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Patrick Purdy	Repeated fifth grade Dropped out of school at fifteen At nearly sixteen, enrolled in adult education program, but dropped out the next day Completed some classes at college and technical school, but quit a welding class		
Marc Lépine	Failed two classes at St. Laurent Junior College Dropped out of program Enrolled in two summer classes but dropped them before they started Studied computers but left program before completion Rejected by École Polytechnique in 1987 Rejected by École Polytechnique in 1989	Mother: university student	Attacked École Polytechnique
Thomas Hamilton	Angry that teachers warned students away from his camps/clubs Conflicts over use of space at schools		Attacked local school where teachers had warned students about him
Jillian Robbins	Dropped out of high school Never attended college	Mother: college instructor and administrator Stepfather: college professor Argued with mother about education	Attacked school mother had attended and worked at, and where stepfather taught
Kimveer Gill	Dropped out of Vanier College after one semester Dropped out of Rosemont Technology Centre after six months	Father: college professor Mother: attended Vanier College Argued with parents about education	Considered attacking Vanier College, but shot people at another college
Jiverly Wong	Struggled with learning English as a second language		Targeted people in his former classroom
Bruco Eastwood	Failed to graduate high school Failed GED test		Failure to get GED prevented him from joining military, and he committed attack shortly afterwards

Perpetrator	Failure / discipline / conflict	Family involvement	Education-related targets
Adam Lanza	Several school changes to meet his needs Homebound instruction Failed to get degree from Western Connecticut State University Cried, called himself a loser for not being able to handle the work Attended Norwalk Community College; did not earn degree	Mother: home-schooled Lanza; volunteered at Sandy Hook Elementary School Father: instructor at two universities Stepmother: university librarian Grandmother: elementary school nurse	(Killed mother)
John Zawahri	In high school, defiant, disruptive, poor grades Transferred to alternative school Removed from school for psychiatric evaluation in response to his threatening a teacher; he was arrested and placed in a residential program		
Elliot Rodger	Took class at Pierce College; dropped out Attended Moorpark College; dropped out Re-enrolled at Moorpark; completed one class; signed up for three classes the following semester, dropped one, stopped going to the other two, but showed up for the final exams Enrolled at Santa Barbara City College; finished some classes, dropped others; did not earn degree		
Aaron Ybarra	Dropped out of cyberschool without receiving diploma Took courses at Edmonds Community College; did not earn degree	Mother: administrative services manager in community college (same one Ybarra attended and did not graduate from)	

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<i>Non-school shooters</i>			
Stephen Morgan	<p>Several school changes in adolescence; took extra half-year to graduate high school</p> <p>Two semesters at University of Colorado, then left</p> <p>Took course at New York University</p> <p>Signed up for classes at University of Colorado; outcome unknown</p> <p>Registered for class at University of Colorado, but withdrew</p>	Father: graduated from Harvard Business School and had taught there	Morgan did not commit a school shooting, but he had considered doing so at Wesleyan University. Instead, he stalked a young woman he knew from New York University who attended Wesleyan and gunned her down while she was off campus.
Jared Loughner	<p>Dropped out of high school before his senior year; enrolled in Pima Community College</p> <p>Campus police intervened five times due to his disruptive behavior in class</p> <p>Kicked out of a class due to inappropriate behavior</p> <p>Suspended from Pima pending a mental health evaluation that would clear him to return</p> <p>Extremely hostile toward Pima</p> <p>Made video titled “Pima Community College School — Genocide”</p>		Loughner was enraged toward Pima Community College but for some reason did not commit his attack there, choosing instead to do so at a public event involving Gabrielle Giffords.
James Holmes	<p>Struggled academically during first year in Ph.D. program</p> <p>Failed oral exam</p> <p>Decided to drop out of the program</p> <p>Reported homicidal thoughts to psychiatrist at University of Colorado, stating he wanted to kill people to make up for his failure</p> <p>Psychiatrist received threats from Holmes</p>	<p>Grandfather: schoolteacher</p> <p>Grandmother: school librarian</p> <p>Father had degrees from three prestigious institutions (Stanford, UCLA, and Berkeley)</p> <p>Father’s success may have exacerbated Holmes’s sense of failure</p>	Holmes had threatened people at the University of Colorado, but despite his hostility toward the institution chose instead to commit a rampage attack at a movie theatre. [SS.1]