Education: Failures and Family Involvement

Compiled by Peter Langman, Ph.D.

This document focuses on school shooters’ negative experiences with school personnel, whether that 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 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 that 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 family’s connection to education as well as the perpetrators’ experiences in education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Failure / Discipline / Conflict</th>
<th>Family Involvement</th>
<th>Education-Related Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Slobodian</td>
<td>Two teachers contacted his mother about his skipping classes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intended to kill both teachers; one he did not find, but he killed the other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Poulin</td>
<td>Academic struggles Failed first assignment previous spring</td>
<td>Mother: lunchroom supervisor</td>
<td>(Contemplated killing mother)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brenda Spencer</td>
<td>Disliked school Fought with father about attending “Severe scholastic problems” led to switching schools, and then switching back again Vandalized elementary school (same one she attacked) Truancy</td>
<td>Father: schoolteacher</td>
<td>(Contemplated killing father)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Kearbey</td>
<td>Was failing all subjects</td>
<td>Father: schoolteacher</td>
<td>Shot principal and two teachers; not clear if they were specifically targeted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heather Smith</td>
<td>Obsessive about grades; slit wrists when they dropped slightly&lt;br&gt;Lost race for vice-president</td>
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<td>Floyd Warmsley</td>
<td>Suspended twice that year</td>
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<td>Targeted principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kristofer Hans</td>
<td>Was failing French</td>
<td>Father: school psychologist</td>
<td>Intended to kill French teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicholas Elliot</td>
<td>Dyslexic</td>
<td>Mother: school nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eric Houston</td>
<td>Placed in special education&lt;br&gt;Molested by teacher&lt;br&gt;The teacher who molested him also failed him in the class which meant Houston could not graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td>Targeted and killed the teacher who molested and failed him</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott Pennington</td>
<td>Low grade on midterm exam devastated him; fought with teacher to get the grade raised; she refused to change it</td>
<td></td>
<td>Killed the teacher who gave him a low grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay Shrout</td>
<td>Grades declined to Cs, Ds, and Fs&lt;br&gt;English teacher called mother about major assignment Shrout did not hand in&lt;br&gt;Suspended for bringing stun gun to school, given 50 hours of community service</td>
<td>Grandfather: college instructor&lt;br&gt;Mother: on three PTAs, was president of one&lt;br&gt;Mother: former schoolteacher&lt;br&gt;Mother: Sunday school teacher&lt;br&gt;Father: Sunday school teacher</td>
<td>Intended to kill English teacher and assistant principal&lt;br&gt;(Killed mother)&lt;br&gt;(Killed father)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toby Sincinco</td>
<td>Expelled from school&lt;br&gt;Returned on probationary status&lt;br&gt;Suspended again, pending expulsion</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shot teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamie Rouse</td>
<td>Falsely accused of truancy&lt;br&gt;Feared he would fail 12th grade&lt;br&gt;Hadn't taken courses necessary to go to college</td>
<td>Grandparent: schoolteacher&lt;br&gt;Grandparent: schoolteacher&lt;br&gt;Aunt: schoolteacher&lt;br&gt;Uncle: schoolteacher</td>
<td>Talked of shooting principal&lt;br&gt;Tried to shoot coach&lt;br&gt;Intended to kill teachers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 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  
 12 disciplinary infractions one year  
 5 infractions the next year | Foster mother: school superintendent     | Killed principal                                                  |
| Luke Woodham | Suspended multiple times in 6th and 7th grades  
 Repeated 9th grade | Mother: had been a teacher               | (Killed his mother)                                               |
| [Grant Boyette] | [not a shooter; told Woodham to attack]                                                        | [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                                                    |
| 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  
 8th grade: mostly Ds and Fs                                                               |                                        |                                                                  |
| Kip Kinkel    | Repeated 1st grade  
 3rd grade: special education  
 4th grade: diagnosed with learning disability  
 2-day suspension for kicking peer in head  
 3-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                       |
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<tr>
<td>Eric Harris</td>
<td>Suspended for hacking</td>
<td>Complained that education forces conformity, goes against human nature, turns people into robots</td>
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<td>Dylan Klebold</td>
<td>Suspended for hacking</td>
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<td>Mother: had been a teacher; worked at community college</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Suspended for defacing locker</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Defiant, hostile, intimidating toward teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seth Trickey</td>
<td>[No known academic or disciplinary issues]</td>
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<td>Grandfather: high school teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother: had been a teacher; worked at community college</td>
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<td>Nathaniel Brazill</td>
<td>Suspended by school counselor on the last day of school</td>
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<td>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</td>
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<td>Andy Williams</td>
<td>Minor discipline for goofing off in class</td>
<td>Frequent truancy</td>
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<td>Frequent truancy</td>
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<td>Neglected homework, grades declined</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Erased voicemail messages from the school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>to his father; intercepted his report cards</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>before father could see them</td>
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<td>Detentions for tardiness and skipping classes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Enraged when reprimanded by teacher in class</td>
<td>a few days before his attack</td>
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<td>Jason Hoffman</td>
<td>In special education some years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tried to kill dean he had grudge against</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Repeated 12th grade</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conflict with dean of his high school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Did poorly in class at community college</td>
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<td>Robert Steinhäuser</td>
<td>Rude to teachers; did not take discipline well</td>
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<td>Targeted faculty and administrators, killing 12 teachers and a vice-principal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Failed exams</td>
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<td>Aspired to career with computers; failed his computer class</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chronic tardiness, reprimanded</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Failed 12th grade twice</td>
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<td>Expelled for forging physician's note</td>
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<td>Jeffrey Weise</td>
<td>Repeated 8th grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shot one teacher; unclear if he specifically targeted her</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Some sources said he repeated grades twice or more</td>
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<td>On homebound instruction: some reports he was angry about being kicked out, but there are</td>
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<td></td>
<td>many contradictory reports about why he was out of school</td>
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<td>Alvaro Castillo</td>
<td>Attended Durham Technical Community College; outcome unknown</td>
<td>Father: custodian in elementary school; severe pressure on kids to succeed</td>
<td>(Killed his father)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>academically</td>
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<td>Sister and her boyfriend attended Durham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eric Hainstock</td>
<td>Academic struggles, special education</td>
<td></td>
<td>Targeted and killed principal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Repeated 6th grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tried to shoot a teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Out of school suspension and in-school suspension shortly before attack</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Multiple legal charges for aggressive behavior at school shortly before attack</td>
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<td>Sebastian Bosse</td>
<td>Repeated grades three times</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hated school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thought about dropping out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Douglas Chanthabouly</td>
<td>Received special education services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asa Coon</td>
<td>Suspended ten days previous year</td>
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<td>Sought out and shot the teacher whose class he was failing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suspended shortly before attack</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Angry at teacher whose class he was failing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pekka-Eric Auvinen</td>
<td>Grades declined as he got older</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shot head teacher; unknown if he targeted her</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tim Kretschmer</td>
<td>Repeated a grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shot some teachers, but unclear if they were specifically targeted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Struggled academically: tutored in German, English, math, science</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Complained teachers didn’t call on him enough and gave unfair grades</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Desperate about his lack of success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Butler</td>
<td>Received long suspension following arrest on school property</td>
<td>Returned to school the same day and shot the vice-principal and principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>T.J. Lane</td>
<td>Attended alternative school; not known if this was his choice or how he felt about it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jose Reyes</td>
<td>Significant academic struggles; did 1st grade work in 6th grade, special education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karl Pierson</td>
<td>Speech and debate coach demoted Pierson from his position as team captain</td>
<td>Mother: worked for Douglas County School District</td>
<td>Intended to kill his speech and debate coach and other specific people whose names have been redacted in his journal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suspended for inappropriate behavior in class</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sent home from school multiple times for inappropriate behavior</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Grades plummeted to D’s and F’s</td>
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<td>Grades poor, graduation in jeopardy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jaylen Fryberg</td>
<td>Suspended a week before the attack for fighting</td>
<td>Mother: School Board Vice President</td>
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<td>Suspended from football team for fight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jesse Osborne</td>
<td>Expelled from middle school for attacking student with hatchet; subsequently homeschooled</td>
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**College Shooters**
<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Wesley Clow</td>
<td>Was in danger of not graduating due to poor academic performance</td>
<td>Wife: school teacher</td>
<td>Killed professor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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               | 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 |
| 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             |
<p>|              |                                                                                                |                                                 | Committed random attack on campus               |</p>
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| 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 |
| Biswanath Halder   | Attended New York University; did not earn degree  
Attended University of Massachusetts; did not earn degree  
Attended Boston University; did not earn degree  
Sued Case Western Reserve University |                                            | Sought to kill university personnel         |
| Seung Hui Cho      | Removed from class due to behavior  
Professor Bean recommended he drop class; Cho was livid and yelled at Bean  
Campus police twice said leave women alone |                                            | On day of attack, sent letter to English department expressing his rage toward Professor Bean |
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<td>Steven Kazmierczak</td>
<td>Dropped out of courses at community college</td>
<td>Sister: completed graduate degree at university he was attending at time of his attack; she may have been employed in special education</td>
<td>Committed attack at former university (NIU) in auditorium where he had had most of his sociology classes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Received degree in sociology from Northern Illinois University (NIU)</td>
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<td>Chastised by professor/mentor for inappropriate behavior on department discussion board</td>
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<td>Complained about graduate school</td>
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<td>Significant career confusion: considered computer science, political science, sociology, law school, public administration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Started graduate program in sociology at NIU, but the department underwent changes, resulting in Kazmierczak's transfer to Illinois University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matti Saari</td>
<td>Due to relocations, had to change schools at least six times</td>
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<td>Dropped out of upper secondary school</td>
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<td>Dropped out of vocational school</td>
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<td>Dropped out of another school</td>
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<tr>
<td>O’Dane Maye</td>
<td>Withdrew from university several months before his attack</td>
<td></td>
<td>Returned to university to shoot random people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amy Bishop</td>
<td>Failed to get tenure</td>
<td>Father: college professor</td>
<td>Shot colleagues in her department</td>
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<td>Appealed the decision and lost</td>
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<td>Sued the university</td>
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<td>One Goh</td>
<td>Failed to graduate from nursing program</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intended to kill woman he blamed for not getting his tuition refund</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fought with administration about tuition refund</td>
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<td>Chris Harper-Mercer</td>
<td>Attended alternative high school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Enrolled in El Camino College for two years;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>outcome unknown</td>
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<td>Was enrolled at Umpqua Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainak Sarkar</td>
<td>Conflict with professor</td>
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<td>Killed professor</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ABERRANT ADULT SHOOTERS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Smith</td>
<td>Reportedly repeated grades</td>
<td>Fiancée: preschool teacher</td>
<td>Considered killing teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Childhood school experiences unknown</td>
<td>Sister: teacher’s aide</td>
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<td>Tyrone Mitchell</td>
<td>Took university classes but apparently never earned a degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>Attacked his former elementary school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laurie Dann</td>
<td>In special education classes in middle school; resorted to cheating to get by</td>
<td>Self: studied to be elementary teacher</td>
<td>Tried to burn down two elementary schools, committed school shooting at one of them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transferred from Drake University to University of Arizona, where she did poorly, was put on academic probation</td>
<td>Sister-in-law: schoolteacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dropped out of UA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Then re-enrolled, and withdrew</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dropped out of a class at Northwestern University</td>
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<td>Then withdrew or failed to complete other courses there</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Went to the University of Wisconsin, but completed no courses</td>
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<td>Patrick Purdy</td>
<td>Repeated 5th grade</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dropped out of school at 15</td>
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<td>At nearly 16, enrolled in adult education program, but dropped out the next day</td>
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<td>Completed some classes at college and technical school, but quit a welding class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Failure / Discipline / Conflict</td>
<td>Family Involvement</td>
<td>Education-Related Targets</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 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/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 |
| 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) |
| Name           | Failure / Discipline / Conflict                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Family Involvement                                                                                      | Education-Related Targets                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

**Non-school Shooters**

| Name           | Failure / Discipline / Conflict                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Family Involvement                                                                                      | Education-Related Targets                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stephen Morgan| Several school changes in adolescence; took extra half-year to graduate high school  
Two semesters at University of Colorado, then left  
Took course at New York University  
Signed up for classes at University of Colorado; outcome unknown  
Registered for class at University of Colorado, but withdrew | 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. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Failure / Discipline / Conflict</th>
<th>Family Involvement</th>
<th>Education-Related Targets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jared Loughner</td>
<td>Dropped out of high school before his senior year; enrolled in Pima Community College</td>
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<td>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.</td>
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<td>Campus police intervened five times due to his disruptive behavior in class</td>
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<td>Kicked out of a class due to inappropriate behavior</td>
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<td>Suspended from Pima pending a mental health evaluation that would clear him to return</td>
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<td>Extremely hostile toward Pima</td>
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<td>Made video titled “Pima Community College School — Genocide”</td>
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<td>James Holmes</td>
<td>Struggled academically during first year in Ph.D. program</td>
<td>Grandfather: schoolteacher</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>Failed oral exam</td>
<td>Grandmother: school librarian</td>
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<td>Decided to drop out of the program</td>
<td>Father had degrees from three prestigious institutions (Stanford, UCLA, and Berkeley)</td>
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<td>Reported homicidal thoughts to psychiatrist at University of Colorado, stating he wanted to kill people to make up for his failure</td>
<td>Father’s success may have exacerbated Holmes’s sense of failure</td>
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<td>Psychiatrist received threats from Holmes</td>
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