



# School Safety Newsletter

Volume 7, Issue 7

February 2020

## School Tip Lines Were Meant to Stop Shootings, But Uncovered A Teen Suicide Crisis

NBC News, February 1, 2020

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/school-tip-lines-were-meant-stop-shootings-uncovered-teen-suicide-n1127876>

Two police officers in Hermiston, Oregon, banged on the front door of a family's home on a Sunday evening in November 2017. When the father answered the door, confused about why the cops were there, the officers quickly brushed past him, telling him they'd received a report that his teenage son was about to kill himself.

One of the son's classmates had submitted a report to SafeOregon, a school safety tip line run by the state police, warning that the teenager was suicidal and that he had shared a picture of himself with a belt around his neck. SafeOregon sent two officers to check on him.

"The dad had no idea about any of this," said Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston, one of several law enforcement and school officials who described the incident to NBC News. "He was out in the living room and had no idea what was going on."

The officers rushed to the teen's bedroom and found him sitting in a chair with a belt wrapped tightly around his neck. He wasn't breathing. Derrick Williams, one of the two officers who responded, said he pulled the teen out of the chair and removed the belt, before performing CPR and a sternum rub, a paramedic maneuver that involves pressing the knuckles of a closed fist into someone's chest. The teen came to and was taken by ambulance to a hospital. He recovered and received outpatient mental health services, police said.

"They basically saved his life because of this tip from a student," said Tricia Mooney, superintendent of the Hermiston School District.

Across the country, as officials look for ways to prevent school shootings, states have started tip lines like SafeOregon — websites, apps and phone numbers that let students anonymously report concerns about classmates. But in many places, reports of students self-harming or feeling suicidal have far outpaced the number of threats against schools, according to annual reports compiled by state agencies, forcing communities to confront a different kind of crisis.

Since SafeOregon launched in January 2017, it has received 540 reports of a suicidal student, compared to 278 reports of a threatened attack on a school. Pennsylvania's Safe2SayPA took in 2,529 reports related to self-harm and 2,184 related to suicidal thoughts in its first six months last year, while threats against schools accounted for 607 reports. Nevada's SafeVoice tip line, launched in 2018, collected 371 suicide threats, 350 reports of self-harm and 248 threats to a school in its first year. In Wyoming, suicide threats were the most common report to the Safe2Tell tip line in 2019, with 239 instances submitted, compared to 45 reports of planned school attacks.

In the aftermath of mass shootings at schools in Parkland, Florida, and Santa Fe, Texas, school districts and lawmakers have poured billions of dollars into efforts to prevent another one. Much of that work has focused on fortifying campuses, adding panic buttons and bulletproof glass, and hiring more officers in schools.

But it's far more likely that a school will lose a student to suicide than see one die in a mass shooting on campus. Five people were killed in a school shooting in 2017, and 30 in 2018, according to NBC News'

*Protecting our  
future through  
information  
sharing*

### In This Issue

- School Tip Lines Were Meant to Stop Shootings, But Uncovered A Teen Suicide Crisis
- Next Monthly Webinar - April 1, 2020
- Student in Custody after 2 Teens Seriously Injured in Stabbing at Mililani High
- Cost of School Threats
- FBI Recommends That You Keep Your Internet of Things (IoT) Devices on a Separate Network
- Other Articles on School Safety

# School Tip Lines Were Meant to Stop Shootings, But Uncovered A Teen Suicide Crisis

## (Continued)

count. The number of children who took their own lives nearly doubled from 2007 to 2017, when there were 3,008 suicides among people ages 10 to 19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Psychologists and counselors say these figures, and the data from the tip lines, should be a wake-up call to a far more likely threat that has not received the same urgent focus.

“School violence is not our only concern,” said David Lillenstein, president of the Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania. “We also have a bigger concern and that’s with mental health and mental well-being. Stronger locks don’t prevent a suicide.”

‘I don’t think I understood the magnitude’

At first, police and school officials in Hermiston were skeptical of SafeOregon, a statewide initiative approved by the Oregon legislature. Edmiston, the police chief, said he initially viewed it as another mandate dumped on local law enforcement. Hermiston High School Principal Tom Spoo feared the tip line would be inundated with bogus reports. But after the November 2017 incident, Spoo said, “I thought, ‘Damn, this thing is going to work after all.’”

SafeOregon operates like many school safety tip lines. Once students submit a tip, whether through a call, the app or the website, a dispatch center reviews whether it’s an emergency and forwards it to police, a handful of school administrators, or both. Spoo has become used to receiving phone calls in the middle of the night warning that a student is in danger of hurting themselves.

“I knew of the mental health issues that we face in this area, and maybe even across the country, but I don’t think I understood the magnitude until you start taking those phone calls,” Spoo said.

The tip line has led to multiple interventions that may have prevented suicides, officials say. In one incident, described in a SafeOregon annual report, a crisis team visited a student’s home and discovered that she and her sister were being neglected, after a friend reported that the student had messaged her about suicide. Another student who talked about wanting to “blow her brains out” was connected with counselors after someone reported her comments through SafeOregon.

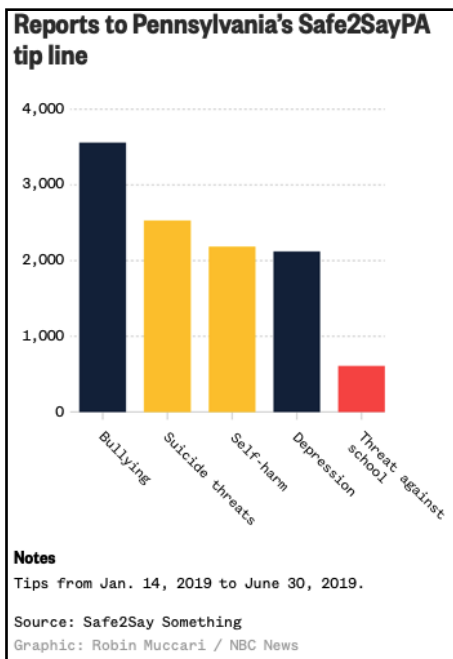
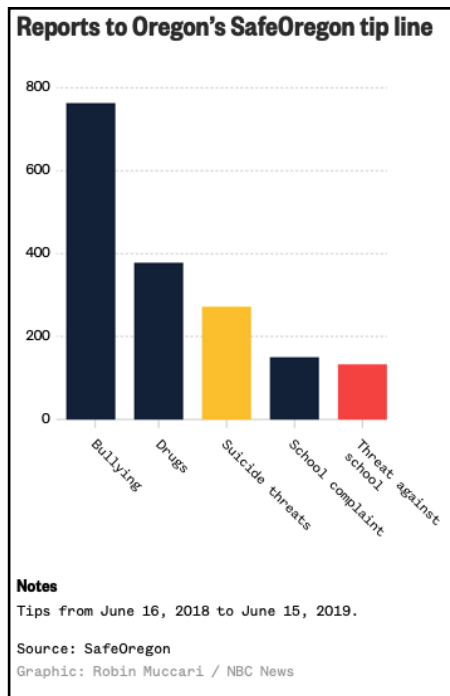
“The number of reports we get is saying that it works,” said Capt. Tim Fox, of the Oregon State Police. “The Hermiston incident says that it works.”

### Teens turn to texting

A key element that makes these tip lines successful, officials say, is that students don’t have to make a phone call or talk to anyone in person.

“Teens today worry about how others see them and are often afraid of being called a ‘snitch’ or fear retaliation for reporting a tip,” said Lily Brown, 16, a high school student in Roseburg, Oregon, who is a youth advocate for the tip line, helping to spread the word. “SafeOregon allows students to report tips in complete privacy.”

In Pennsylvania, 90 percent of tips come through the smartphone app, according to Brittney Kline, director of Safe2SayPA. She credits the tips with preventing multiple students from taking their own lives, including one attempted suicide that was interrupted by police. The Nevada Department of Education held focus groups prior to launching its tip line and found that students said they’d be more likely to reveal their feelings through text, said Christy McGill, director of the department’s Division of Safe and Respectful Learning.



## Monthly Webinars!

First Wednesday of Every Month

at 10 am

(Except January, July, and August).

### Next Webinars

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Each webinar has a round table discussion at the end. Questions are always welcome!

To participate, you must be a vetted member. For more information please email

[isp.schoolsafety@illinois.gov](mailto:isp.schoolsafety@illinois.gov)

## School Tip Lines Were Meant to Stop Shootings, But Uncovered A Teen Suicide Crisis (Continued)

At least 10 states now run school safety tip lines — Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah and Wyoming — and an anonymous reporting system is also available to districts nationwide from Sandy Hook Promise, a nonprofit started by parents of school shooting victims in Newtown, Connecticut. Last month, Iowa’s governor proposed creating the state’s own version.

Many are following in the footsteps of Colorado, which launched its tip line, Safe2Tell, a few years after the Columbine school shooting. Susan Payne, a former Colorado Springs detective, modeled it on Crime Stoppers, an anonymous hotline that people can call to report suspicious activity. Officials from more than a dozen states contacted Payne after the Parkland shooting to learn more about Safe2Tell as they considered launching their own tip lines, she said.

Suicide threats have been the top concern flagged on Colorado’s Safe2Tell each year since 2013. And the number of tips related to suicide and self-harm has been on the rise, from 421 in the 2012-13 school year to 3,668 in 2018-19.

“We don’t even realize we’re in the middle of an epidemic of youth suicide in this country,” Payne said.

### A growing challenge

From 2007 to 2017, the percentage of teens who said they experienced major depression grew from 7 to 13 percent, according to the CDC.

A majority of those who carried out mass shootings at schools have dealt with mental health issues such as depression, suicidal thoughts and post-traumatic stress disorder, according to a 2019 study funded by the Department of Justice. Most suicidal people are not homicidal, yet research has shown that a majority of teens who attacked schools had previously threatened or tried to die by suicide, and about half expected to die in their attacks.

The challenge schools face is helping someone who’s starting to feel depressed long before they consider hurting themselves or others. Sometimes a student is too ashamed to admit they need help, or they’re concerned about exposing a problem at home, said Matthew Wintersteen, director of research in the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Thomas Jefferson University.

Pennsylvania state Sen. Scott Martin, a Republican, is co-sponsoring a bill to require students at public schools to get a mental health screening each year, just as they’re required to get a physical. This way, Martin said, if any flags are spotted, the school can connect the student with counseling services.

“We can’t talk about school safety without also talking about mental health,” Martin said.

### Suicide plans hidden in Google Docs

Beyond tip lines, security software offered by companies such as Gaggle and Securly, installed on school-issued Chromebooks to monitor students’ activities, has also turned up reports of suicidal students. The software is considered problematic by privacy and civil liberties advocates, but both companies claim their products have saved the lives of hundreds of students. Bill McCullough, Gaggle’s vice president of sales, said that while many school leaders buy the software to prevent school attacks, they “woefully underestimate” the children with mental health issues who will be flagged.

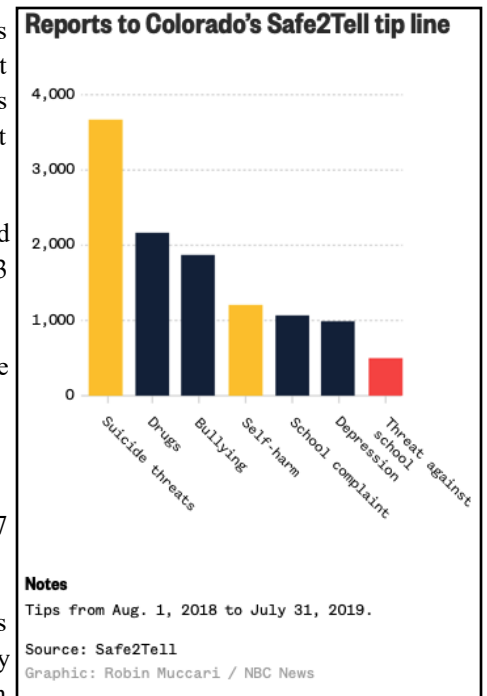
The school district in Wichita Falls, Texas, installed Gaggle three years ago to make sure students didn’t look at stuff they weren’t supposed to online. Since then, the software has helped stop at least four potential suicides, according to Superintendent Mike Kuhrt.

“We heard stories about preventing suicide attempts and other self-harm,” Kuhrt said. “We didn’t know we’d find them that quick and that many of them.”

In one incident, Wichita Falls school officials received an alert from Gaggle about a student’s Google Doc. When school administrators pulled up the file, they initially thought the document was blank. But with help from Gaggle, they realized it contained an elaborate plan of how the student intended to kill himself; perhaps to conceal his plan, he had changed the font color to white.

Kuhrt views software like Gaggle as a necessity to keep up with ways that students communicate. For instance, students will open a Google Doc, share it with their friends, and then use it as a makeshift chatroom, something administrators hadn’t realized. Kuhrt has also seen students type things on their Chromebook using language they hope will get flagged by the automated monitoring system, as a way to quietly report a concern about a friend.

“They’ll write it on a Doc, knowing Gaggle will see it and then their friend will get help without them being considered a tattler,” said Shad



## **School Tip Lines Were Meant to Stop Shootings, But Uncovered A Teen Suicide Crisis (Continued)**

McGaha, chief technology officer for Wichita Falls schools.

Partly because of what the school saw through Gaggle, Wichita Falls hired a new counselor last year for each of its three high schools.

Since SafeOregon went live, the Hermiston school district has also added more counselors and hired a social worker, said Mooney, the superintendent. The district also drafted plans for what to do after a suicide or an attempted one, including bringing in crisis teams. The procedures were put to the test after two student deaths, a homicide and a suicide, in recent years.

“We’re just too practiced,” Spoo, the Hermiston High principal, said. “We know exactly what we’re going to do, the rooms where kids go to grieve, what staff members read to all the kids about it — we’ve actually gotten pretty good at it, and it’s kind of sad, but to me it’s part of our world today.”

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255, text HOME to 741741 or visit [SpeakingOfSuicide.com/resources](https://www.speakingofsuicide.com/resources) for additional resources.

### **Student in Custody after 2 Teens Seriously Injured in Stabbing at Mililani High**

Star-Advertiser, February 24, 2020

<https://www.staradvertiser.com/2020/02/24/breaking-news/police-responding-to-a-report-of-a-stabbing-at-mililani-high-school/>

Two students were stabbed at Mililani High School on February 24, 2020, and police have taken the suspect, also a student, into custody.

The school went on lockdown after police responded to a report of a stabbing at about 10:15 a.m.

An Emergency Medical Services report said two children — a 16-year-old boy and a 16-year-old girl — were apparently stabbed in the upper body. They were treated and transported in serious condition to a hospital.

The two are expected to survive, Shayne Enright, spokeswoman for the Honolulu Emergency Services Department, told the Associated Press.

Lindsay Chambers, a state Department of Education spokeswoman, said the school released students early at 11:30 a.m. after the incident. Parents were directed to the school’s gymnasium and Meheula Parkway for police-facilitated pickups, she said.

Schools Superintendent Christina Kishimoto said in a statement that the department’s priority is supporting the students and families of those affected by today’s incident.

“We are committed to ensuring that our schools continue to be safe spaces for learning, and as such the well-being of our students and staff remains our highest priority,” she said. “This is an evolving situation and we ask that the public please refrain from spreading misinformation.

“We will continue to update parents and the school community with further details as they become available.”

School Principal Fred Murphy sent a letter to parents notifying them of the “unfortunate incident” on campus “resulting in two students being injured and another student being apprehended by police.”

### **Cost of School Threats**

WAOW, February 11, 2020

<https://waow.com/2020/02/11/special-report-cost-of-school-threats/>

Portage County (WAOW) -- Last school year, there were 3,058 threats made to schools in the U.S., according to Educator's School Safety Network.

Wisconsin isn't an outlier.

Wisconsin schools averaged about a threat per day in December 2019. The Stevens Point Area Public School District received six threats of violence that month, including three in one week -- something SPAPSD Superintendent Craig Gerlach has never seen in his career.

"Threats aren't something new. The number of threats we see today has increased significantly," said Gerlach.

The three threats were made during the second week of December, starting at Ben Franklin Junior High. The threat cited Friday the 13th as the day of violence; the threats ultimately caused the school to close.

A third would then be found at Stevens Point Senior High School that same Friday, sending home the students home prematurely.

## **Cost of School Threats (Continued)**

"I know every single officer that works here in this department, and they wouldn't be able to live with themselves if we overlooked a threat like that and something did happen," said Stevens Point Police Department Detective Lieutenant Robert Kussow.

The school didn't believe any of the threats to be credible, but sacrificing the safety of the students was never an option. And although it was a quiet weekend in the district, officials weren't convinced the threats were over.

"We all sat in this room and looked at each other and said 'We're gonna have a problem at SPASH next week,'" said Gerlach.

On December 18, 2019, SPASH's principal received a call. The person made threats saying a bomb was in the school and would go off at noon.

"We were probably within a half-hour of evacuating school at SPASH again," said Gerlach.

But the dedicated detectives would arrest the suspected student, who claimed he did it to get out of school, before an evacuation was necessary.

While some may think it's only a harmless prank, it can wind up bringing you face-to-face with a District Attorney.

"Like in a movie theater you don't cry fire, for obvious the reasons. Panic, right? And in school you don't talk about shooting someone or bringing explosives to a school," said Portage County District Attorney Louis Molepske.

Every time a threat is made to a school, specific protocol is taken to determine its validity and who made it, which also takes up the valuable time of resources.

"You have to have a set reaction and protocol and follow it every time, because the time you don't follow it is a time something bad happens and potentially lives are lost," said Molepske.

Every second, searching backpacks and conducting their investigation is taking away from other pressing issues in the community.

"That specific bomb threat, which we solved in about 2 hours, we spent 52 man hours of officers time to solve that and determine it wasn't legitimate," said Kussow.

Stevens Point police used about 235 work hours, costing the department approximately \$6,256 on the threats made in December -- a bill ultimately passed on to taxpayers.

But the biggest cost doesn't come with a dollar sign; it's the emotional burden it places on the students.

"And that's difficult to measure," said Gerlach.

Each threat causes disruption, which can be hard for young people to overcome.

"It's really hard to focus on geometry when, in the back of your head, there maybe something going on," said SPASH School Psychologist Aimee Burazin.

City, school and law enforcement officials are now looking to create an open dialogue within the community to combat the growing number of threats happening in the district.

On Wednesday, the district is hosting 'School Safety: A Community Conversation,' a forum bringing officials of various backgrounds to speak about the issue.

The forum is from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at SPASH. Those unable to attend can watch it live on the district's YouTube page by clicking <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRpgqraDSMd8uW3IIIRnTf0w>

## **FBI Recommends That You Keep Your Internet of Things (IoT) Devices on a Separate Network**

ZDNET, December 6, 2019

<https://www.zdnet.com/article/fbi-recommends-that-you-keep-your-iot-devices-on-a-separate-network/>

The FBI says owners of IoT (Internet of Things) devices should isolate this equipment on a separate WiFi network, different from the one they're using for their primary devices, such as laptops, desktops, or smartphones.

"Your fridge and your laptop should not be on the same network," the FBI's Portland office said in a weekly tech advice column. "Keep your most private, sensitive data on a separate system from your other IoT devices," it added.

## **FBI Recommends That You Keep Your Internet of Things (IoT) Devices on a Separate Network (Continued)**

The same advice -- to keep devices on a separate WiFi network or LAN -- has been shared in the past by multiple IT and security experts.

The reasoning behind it is simple. By keeping all the IoT equipment on a separate network, any compromise of a "smart" device will not grant an attacker a direct route to a user's primary devices -- where most of their data is stored. Jumping across the two networks would require considerable effort from the attacker.

However, placing primary devices and IoT devices on separate networks might not sound that easy for non-technical users. The simplest way is to use two routers.

The smarter way is to use "micro-segmentation," a feature found in the firmware of most WiFi routers, which allows router admins to create virtual networks (VLANs). VLANs will behave as different networks, even though they effectively run on the same router. A good tutorial on how you can create VLANs on your routers is available here (<https://www.routersecurity.org/vlan.php>).

While isolating IoT devices on their own network is the best course of action for both home users and companies alike, this wasn't the FBI's only advice on dealing with IoT devices. See below:

- Change the device's factory settings from the default password. A simple Internet search should tell you how—and if you can't find the information, consider moving on to another product.
- Passwords should be as long as possible and unique for IoT devices.
- Many connected devices are supported by mobile apps on your phone. These apps could be running in the background and using default permissions that you never realized you approved. Know what kind of personal information those apps are collecting and say "no" to privilege requests that don't make sense.
- Make sure all your devices are updated regularly. If automatic updates are available for software, hardware, and operating systems, turn them on.

Last week, the same FBI branch office in Portland also gave out similarly good advice on dealing with smart TVs by recommending that device owners put a piece of black tape over their smart TV's camera lens.

The FBI claimed that hackers who take over smart TV sets would be able to spy on device owners through the built-in cameras.

While this is prudent advice, it is worth mentioning that there have not been any known cases of this happening -- with hackers taking over a smart TV and spying on its owner through the TV's camera.

### **Other Articles on School Safety**

**Cuyahoga Falls Man Obsessed with Mass Shootings Plotted High School Attack, Called in Hoax to Kansas Elementary School, Feds Say** (February 14, 2020 - <https://www.cleveland.com/court-justice/2020/02/cuyahoga-falls-man-obsessed-with-mass-shootings-plotted-high-school-attack-called-in-hoax-to-kansas-elementary-school-feds-say.html>)

**US Teen Arrested Over Alleged Swatting and Cyberstalking** (February 18, 2020 - <https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/us-teen-swatting-cyberstalking/>)

**Ardmore High School Looks to Crack Down on Violence, Verbal Abuse, Drugs with New Fines Program** (February 21, 2020 - <https://www.kxii.com/content/news/Ardmore-High-School-looks-to-crack-down-on-violence-verbal-abuse-drugs-with-new-fines-program-568095081.html>)

**3 Curie High School Students Taken to Hospitals After Eating Pot-Laced Granola Bars** (February 12, 2020 - <https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/2020/2/12/21135041/curie-metropolitan-high-school-overdoses-chicago-public-schools-cps>)

#### **School Safety Newsletter**

Statewide Terrorism &  
Intelligence Center  
2200 S. Dirksen Parkway  
Springfield, IL 62703  
Phone: 217-558-2661  
E-Mail:  
[Isp.schoolsafety@illinois.gov](mailto:Isp.schoolsafety@illinois.gov)

**Mia A. Ray**  
School Intelligence  
Officer

