



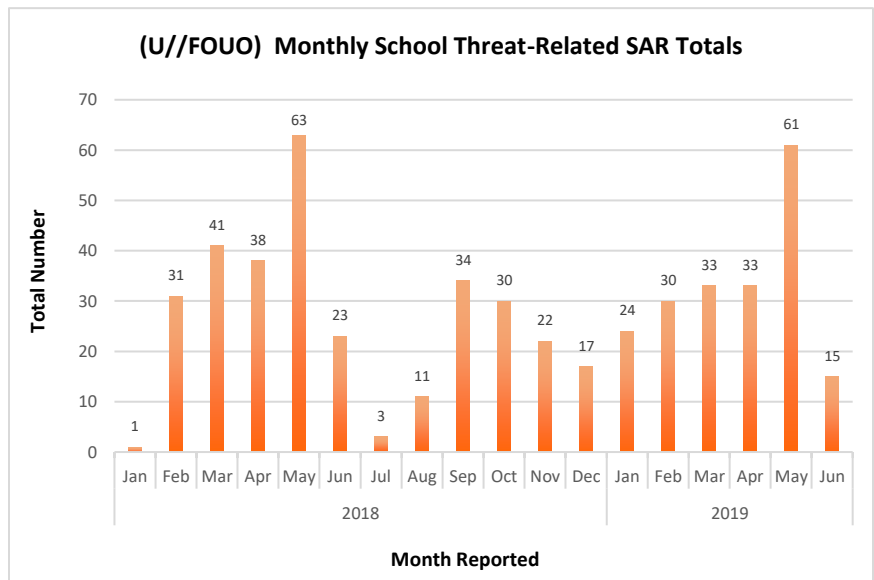
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(U//FOUO) San Diego Regional Perspective: School Threat-Related Suspicious Activity Reporting Trends

(U//FOUO) The SD-LECC developed this product to evaluate the trends in suspicious activity reports (SARs) submitted to the SD-LECC related to school threats in San Diego and Imperial Counties between January 2018 and June 2019. After duplicate SAR submissions and five SARs related to threats to schools outside the San Diego region were removed, information available at time of submission for 510 SARs was analyzed to identify threats and trends. School threat-related reporting in this bulletin is not comprehensive but is intended to increase regional partners' situational awareness regarding regional school threats.

(U//FOUO) Fluctuations in school threat-related SARs between January 2018 and June 2019 reflect school attendance and holidays with spikes in reporting often following high-profile national school shootings. Male juveniles were the primary subjects who made school threats and predominantly targeted middle schools or high schools where they were enrolled likely due to personal grievances associated with the school. Subjects most often conveyed threats in person referencing the use of a firearm likely due to the common use of firearms to commit mass violence and the potential to cause fear. Additionally, subjects questioned about the threats often claimed the threats were shared as a joke potentially to distance themselves from negative ramifications and/or avoid further scrutiny that may indicate a legitimate plot.

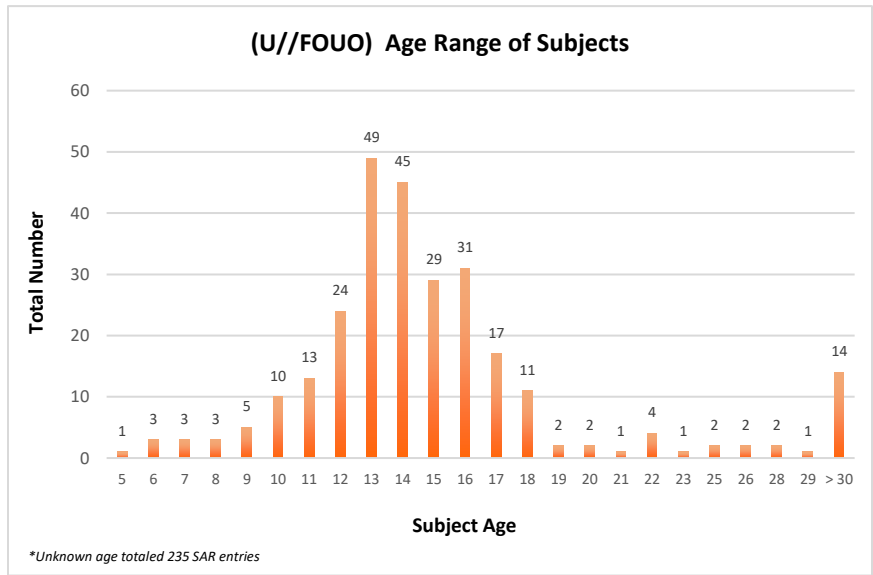
- (U//FOUO) San Diego regional school threat-related SARs fluctuated throughout the reporting period with the highest recorded numbers in May 2018 and May 2019. The fluctuations may be attributed to a variety of factors. SARs seemingly mirror school attendance with dips in reporting during summer and winter vacations and increases in reporting when schools are in session. In addition, large volumes of SARs often followed various national high-profile school



shootings, including the February 2018 Parkland, Florida high school shooting; the May 2018 Santa Fe, Texas high school shooting; and the May 2019 Highlands Ranch, Colorado STEM school shooting.^{1,2} Finally, the development and implementation of the SD-LECC school threats SAR initiative in May 2018 in partnership with multiple regional agencies and organizations, including the Psychiatric Emergency

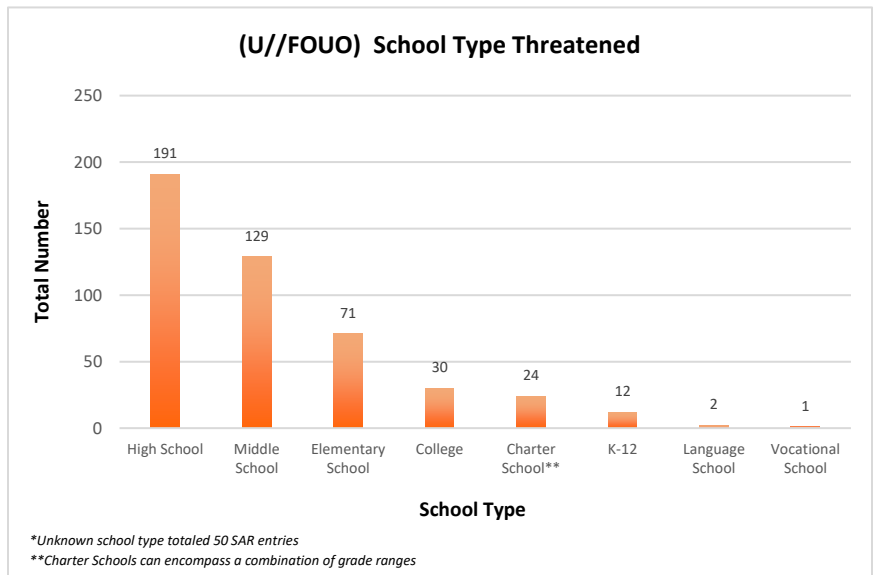
Response Team (PERT) and the San Diego County Office of Education, probably maintained relatively consistent levels of reporting due to consistent outreach and awareness campaign efforts.ⁱ

- (U//FOUO) According to available data, both male and female subjects of varying ages issued school threats during the reporting period. Approximately 67 percent of school threat SARs identified the subject as male, while 8 percent identified the subject as female. The remaining 25 percent of SARs did not specify the gender of the subject due to reporting limitations or anonymous reports to regional law enforcement agencies lacking gender descriptors. Of the



275 SARs with information on the subjects' ages, subjects ranged in age from 5 to 59 years old with approximately 65 percent identified between 12 and 16 years old. Additionally, in SARs with identified subjects, a majority of subjects targeted the schools where they were enrolled. Other subjects included former or expelled students, current or former employees, parents of current or former students, and individuals with no identified connection to the school. In addition, some schools were opportunistically targeted by national online threat campaigns or other anonymous individuals.

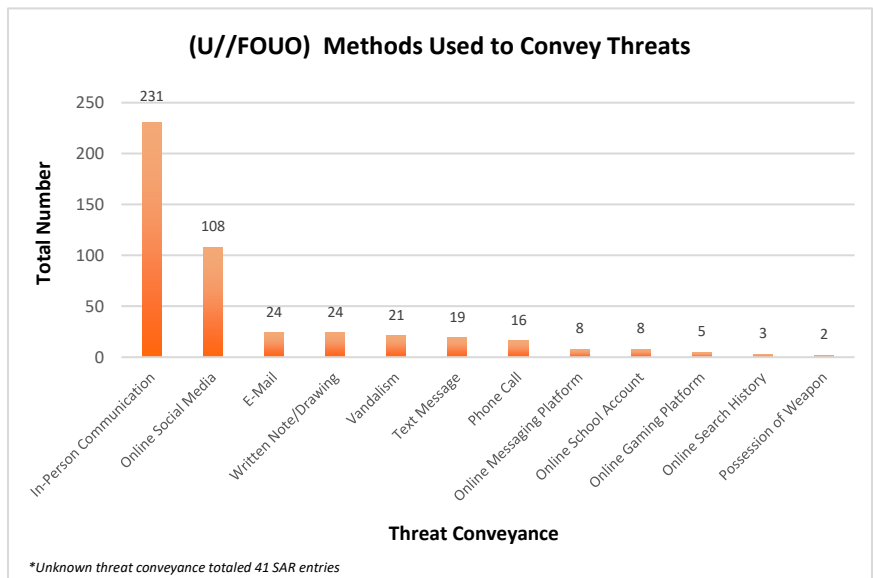
- (U//FOUO) Of the 460 SARs identifying a specific school, the types of regional schools threatened encompassed all levels from elementary schools to colleges. Regional middle schools and high schools were the most common targets, which corresponds with the most common ages of identified subjects from 12 to 16 years old. Geographically, school threats targeted schools throughout San Diego County, while limited instances of school threats were also reported in Imperial County, which may be due to lack of reporting or lower number of overall incidents.



- (U//FOUO) During the reporting period, 444 SARs specified a desired method of attack with approximately 91 percent referencing shooting as the intended attack method; nearly five percent threatening bombings; approximately three percent referencing attacking with an edged weapon; and

ⁱ (U//FOUO) Refer to *A Collaborative Response to School Threats: A San Diego Regional Model* for additional information.

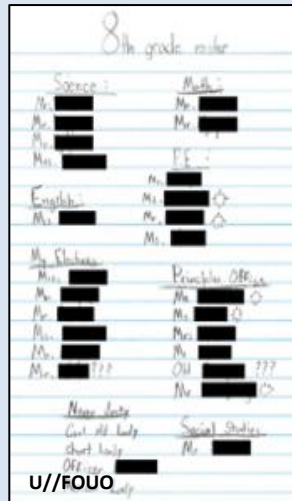
one percent threatening either arson, poison, or a large-scale fight. The method in which threats were conveyed also varied. Of the 469 SARs identifying the method used to convey the threat, nearly 50 percent were communicated in-person, which includes directly spoken threats and threats overheard by a second party. Approximately 33 percent of threats were conveyed online predominantly through various social media platforms but also via e-mail, online gaming platforms, online messaging platforms, online school accounts, and online search histories indicative of preoperational activity. Written notes with threatening language or violent, descriptive drawings represented five percent of threats, while vandalism committed by predominantly unidentified threat actors accounted for nearly four percent. Mobile communications, including phone calls or text messages, to school staff or current students totaled approximately seven percent, and less than one percent of threats were documented after the discovery of a subject in possession of a weapon on school grounds.



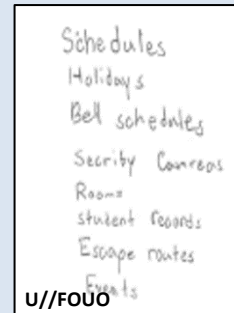
(U//FOUO) San Diego Regional School Threat Examples



(U//FOUO) The subject in the above image posted the photo of himself holding a fake firearm to Facebook^{USBUS} with a caption quoting a rap song about being a shooter. A student reported the image to school administrators. While being interviewed by law enforcement, the subject claimed the post was a joke but admitted to intentionally cropping the orange tip of the firearm so viewers believed he had access to a real firearm.



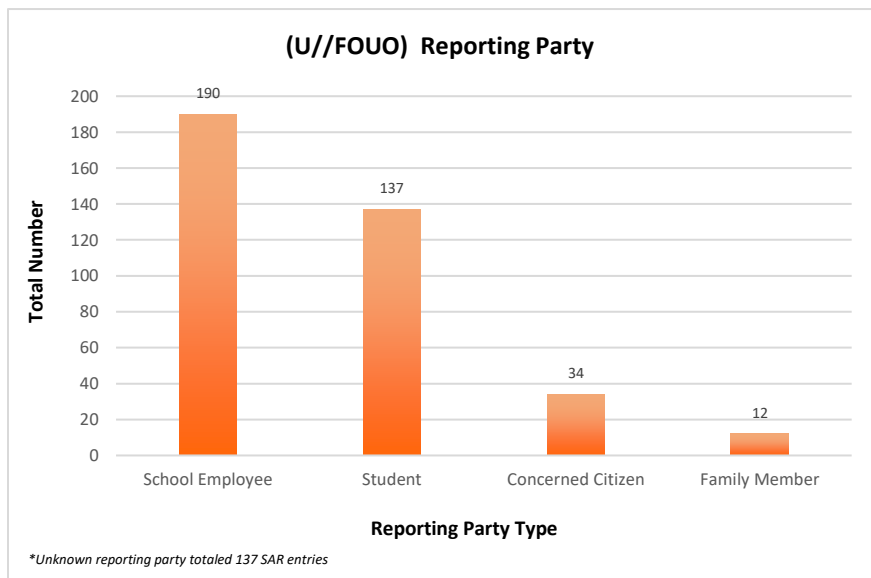
(U//FOUO) A teacher confiscated a folder from a subject attending a San Diego regional middle school as he passed the folder to another student. Inside the folder, the teacher located multiple documents, some of which are pictured above. The folder contained a school map; an alleged "hit list;" a school calendar of events; and a second list highlighting reported preoperational activity, such as identification of school cameras, bell schedules, and escape routes. The subject's social media also indicated potential domestic extremist sympathies.



- (U//FOUO) Assessing the motivating factors that contribute to an individual threatening violence and/or planning violent action remains difficult. Based on available information, the identifiable motivation of subjects who targeted regional schools varied. A substantial number of juvenile subjects admitted to making a school threat when confronted by an authority figure but claimed the threat was a lapse in judgement and shared only in jest. According to available law enforcement investigations, a limited number of juvenile subjects were motivated by retaliation related to either a personal grievance or gang-related activity. Although reporting is minimal, a majority of the subjects who had a clinically diagnosed mental health issue and provided information to law enforcement claimed they issued a threat of violence as a response to being bullied by peers and/or other students. Additionally, adults who targeted regional schools were motivated by various factors, including circumstances related to a domestic violence incident, making threats to school staff for frustration with school actions, or were current or former employees threatening retaliation for a perceived wrongdoing.

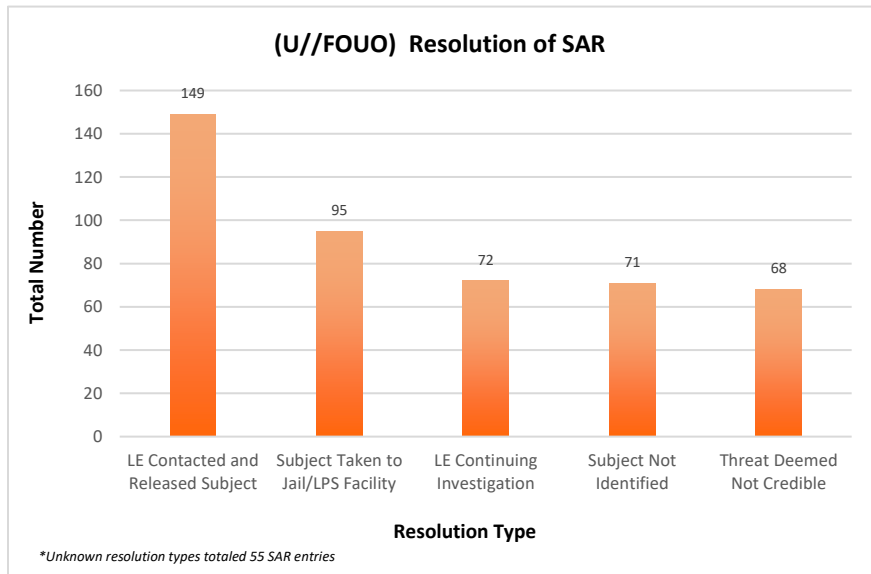
(U//FOUO) During the reporting period, school employees accounted for a majority of individuals who reported threats of school violence, whereas students reported threats of violence but at a lesser frequency potentially due to fear of retaliation or other consequences. The majority of school threat-related SARs were resolved by law enforcement interviewing but not arresting the subject likely due to the difficulty for law enforcement to prove a subject was actively plotting violence against the school when the subject verbally denied the accusation and limited available evidence supports the subject’s potential plans for violence.

- (U//FOUO) The majority of reporting partiesⁱⁱ were present when the threat was made, although some incidents involved individuals reporting information told to them by another party or individuals repeating rumors as legitimate threats. Of the 373 SARs with an identified reporting party, approximately 51 percent were school employees who often were the target of or overheard a threat of violence, were the recipient of threatening emails, or identified written communications depicting mass violence. Students accounted for nearly 37 percent of those who reported threats and predominantly observed the threats on social media or overheard them while on school grounds. Concerned citizens reported nearly nine percent of threats, which often pertained to violent postings online. Family members accounted for three percent of those who reported threats most notably after identifying potential preoperational activity via suspicious online search histories.



ⁱⁱ (U//FOUO) During data collection, the reporting party was documented as those who initially identified the threat, which may have been different from the party who notified law enforcement or submitted the SAR.

- (U//FOUO) Depending on the severity of the reported threat and the amount of available information, SARs were resolved through a variety of means. Of the 455 SARs with a reported resolution at time of submission, approximately 32 percent of subjects were contacted by law enforcement and released often to the custody of their parents following a permissible search of the subject’s residence to ensure weapons if present were properly stored and unable to be accessed. Nearly 21 percent of subjects were taken into custody for criminal charges after probable cause was determined or were detained at an LPS facilityⁱⁱⁱ for an emergency mental health evaluation due to the subjects’ perceived capability to harm themselves or others. At the time of SAR submission, approximately 16 percent of the SARs were documented as ongoing law enforcement investigations, and an additional 16 percent lacked enough information for law enforcement to identify a subject. Of note, 15 percent of threats were determined to be unfounded predominantly due to alleged retaliatory reporting or the spread of unsubstantiated rumors.



(U) Outlook

(U//FOUO) Threats of violence targeting San Diego regional schools will likely continue to predominantly originate from juveniles capitalizing on or attempting to emulate high-profile incidents of mass violence. While current regional school threat-related SAR trends indicate threats are often conveyed in person, the growing dominance of online platforms as a communication method will likely help increase individuals’ exposure to violent activities, ability to receive tactical and/or preoperational guidance, and ability to issue threats of violence. Individuals threatening acts of mass violence against schools may also begin to consider non-traditional weapons to avoid reporting regulations or age requirements, such as those associated with purchasing firearms or large quantities of explosive precursors. Law enforcement will likely continue to encounter investigative impediments when responding to school-related threats due to the difficulty in determining an individual’s motivation and/or potential for violence and willingness to carry out the threat.

(U) Possible Pre-Operational Attack Planning Indicators

(U//FOUO) The following includes a non-exhaustive list of potential indicators of identified behaviors and preoperational activities that public safety personnel may identify related to targeted school threat violence. While individually, the activities may constitute lawful and constitutionally protected behavior, the presence of multiple indicators or additional circumstances may indicate a threat.

- (U//FOUO) Reports from family and friends of an individual’s fascination with mass violence

ⁱⁱⁱ (U) LPS facilities operate under the Lanterman-Petris-Short (LPS) Act, a California state law regulating involuntary psychiatric detention.

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- (U//FOUO) Individuals seeking approval and/or potential assistance from peer groups to commit mass violence
- (U//FOUO) Reports from family, friends, or school officials regarding online activity indicative of preoperational planning
- (U//FOUO) Social media messages and posts promoting violent action, including altering images of schools to portray fictitious shooting events or to warn of an impending attack
- (U//FOUO) Individuals in possession of attack plans, which may include school maps, a schedule for populated events, and target lists
- (U//FOUO) Individuals overtly sympathizing with suspects responsible for previous acts of violence
- (U//FOUO) Individuals exhibiting repetitive and escalating erratic behaviors, including violent outbursts threatening acts of violence against schools
- (U//FOUO) Reports of increased interest in or desire to access firearms or other weapons
- (U//FOUO) The occurrence of a stressor or grievance, such as financial strain, issues at work or school, conflicts with friends or family, or mental health incidents, combined with advocacy or threats of violence

(U//FOUO) To report suspected school threat-related activities, directly contact the appropriate local law enforcement agency. After law enforcement has been notified of the threat, submit a suspicious activity report by visiting <https://sd-lecc.org/> and selecting "Submit School Threat SAR." For urgent threat reporting or imminent threats, call 911.

(U) For comments or questions regarding this product, please contact the SD-LECC at (858) 495-7200 or info@sd-lecc.org.

(U) Your feedback is important to us and we encourage you to fill out a customer survey, accessible through the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SDLECC1914>

(U) Endnotes

¹ (U): Non-Profit Education Platform; *Education Week*; "School Shootings in 2018: How Many and Where"; 25 July 2019; <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/school-shootings-2018-how-many-where.html>; accessed on 30 July 2019.

² (U); Internet News; *The New York Times*; "Here's the List of School Shootings so Far in 2019"; 9 May 2019; <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/09/us/school-shootings-2019.html>; accessed on 30 July 2019.