

# **A Review of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Massacre: A Threat Assessment Perspective**

Parkland, FL  
February 14, 2018



Gehrand Public Safety Consulting  
Bloomington, Illinois

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# Disclaimer

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The information in this document is gathered from open or public sources. Every effort has been made to provide a fair, complete and accurate review of the incidents related to the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018. This document is intended to be informative in nature, and local authorities should always be consulted before implementing new policies, procedures, and plans.

This document specifically focuses on issues related to the threat assessment process and should not be considered an evaluation of the overall response of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the Broward County Sheriff's Office, or any other response agency.

All suspects are considered innocent until convicted in a court of law.



Gehrand Public Safety Consulting  
Bloomington, Illinois  
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## Introduction

As distasteful as it is to critique and criticize someone's actions before and during horrific events, it is a well-established practice for the emergency response professions (e.g. police, fire, emergency medical services, and emergency management) to learn from incidents occurring at other locations. For example, the fire service learned ways to improve building designs and fire codes for elementary schools from the Our Lady of Angels Elementary School fire on December 1, 1958. The police service learned from the Columbine School Shooting in April 1999 that during active shooter incidents police could not afford to wait for the arrival of special weapons and tactics (S.W.A.T.) teams to stop an active shooter. The medical profession has a long history of learning from their experiences in war, and pre-hospital care has benefitted greatly from the lessons learned during conflicts from around the world. Sir Winston Churchill once said, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Consequently, learning from tragic incidents is one mechanism where we can learn so the mistakes of the past are not repeated, and our response is more efficient and effective before, during, and after such events.

The reader is reminded that our focus in this review is on the threat assessment process and to identify areas where they may improve on their team's operations. There are a variety of theories and practices on forming and operating a threat assessment team, and schools should thoroughly evaluate their chosen threat assessment process before implementing any new practices. As always, check with local authorities and legal counsel before initiating new procedures. In this review, the reader needs to accept there may be more than one interpretation on the circumstances described in this review.

On February 14, 2018, Nikolas Cruz, a former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland Florida is alleged to have entered the school with a gun and began shooting, ultimately killing 14 and injuring another 15 students, faculty, and staff. The massacre at Stoneman Douglas High School is the deadliest school shooting since the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in 2013 where 20-year-old Adam Lanza entered the school in Newton Connecticut and killed 20 children and six adults. Prior to entering the elementary school, Lanza is believed to have shot and killed his mother who worked at the school.

While the exact motive for the massacre at Stoneman Douglas is unknown at the time of this report, the date of February 14<sup>th</sup> may be significant in the mind of the shooter from an historical perspective. Both international and domestic terrorist organizations have long been known for striking on a significant date in history to bring greater attention to their cause. In the Parkland School massacre, we can only speculate what motivated Nikolas Cruz to kill and injure his former schoolmates unless he

explains his motivation to determine if February 14<sup>th</sup> has any specific significance in his attack. For the purposes of review, we can speculate the date is significant to Nikolas Cruz and he committed his horrific acts on this date at least in part for one of the following historical reasons.

For centuries, February 14<sup>th</sup> has been celebrated in many nations including the United States as St. Valentine's Day, the annual day of love, gifts, and flowers for loved ones. Many people are greeting loved ones, and couples demonstrate their love for each other on this date. Carrying out his attack on this date could be the result of an unsuccessful romantic relationship by Cruz where he was motivated to carry out his attack on a day when others were displaying a love he was denied. Cruz and his last girlfriend broke up in 2016, and after the death of his adoptive mother in 2017, he made it known to the family he was staying with that he was lonely and wanted to have a girlfriend. Unfortunately, most of Cruz's acquaintances were apprehensive of him and few girls would pay any attention to him, and certainly would not have a relationship with him.

Another possible explanation is that February 14, 1929, is the date of the famous St. Valentine's Day Massacre on Chicago's North Side when seven prohibition era gangsters were gunned down by in a Lincoln Park business on Chicago's North Side. Cruz was bullied by others, and in some instances was physically attacked by classmates. Even his younger half-brother and his friends had a history of harassing and bullying Cruz. After the shooting the younger Cruz acknowledged he resented his older brother because he was favored by their adoptive mother. Cruz also had a growing history of violence and a fascination with guns, and it is possible in Cruz's mind he was retaliating for injustices done to him in a 1920s style gangster style of retribution.

February 14, 2018 is also the ten-year anniversary of the 2008 shooting at Northern Illinois University (NIU) in DeKalb Illinois. In this tragic event, Steven Kazmierczak opened fire in a crowded lecture hall on the NIU campus, and before killing himself Kazmierczak killed five students and injured another 17. Kazmierczak was a former student at NIU but had no connection to the killed and injured NIU students. Because Kazmierczak took his own life as police were entering the building we have no way of knowing his exact motives.

All these incidents could have influenced Cruz on the date he chose to carry out his carnage at Stoneman Douglas High school. School shooters seldom carry out their plans on the spur of the moment, and in most cases, there is a long and progressively worsening set of circumstances that move the potential shooter along a pathway to violence. Fortunately, in threat assessment we have a potential for identifying a potential school shooter on their pathway to violence and acting on that potential threat in an effort to prevent an incident from occurring.

## **Methodology**

In this analysis of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school shooting we will review open-source information to identify areas of potential improvement which can be applied to our own threat assessment process. There are other discussions arising out of this incident worthy of review and analysis, but we are restricting our review and discussion to how threat assessment protocols and procedures could be improved. We must also acknowledge the news articles and public information as we know them now may not be accurate once the full investigation is completed.

All information in this review has been taken from public and open-source information. For the first few weeks following the incident the news media was flooded with information but as time passes little new information is released. Additionally, after such some horrific incident emotions are running high and there are a variety of changes proposed in a hope to prevent similar incidents from occurring. Unfortunately, the answers for preventing school shootings are multi-dimensional and involve all levels of government and the public working in a collaborative effort to address the variety of societal problems which influence such events. It is hard to look at the details of such a tragic event empirically and draw conclusions based on facts and not emotions or personal agendas. But, the reader should keep in mind that solutions to active shooters are multi-dimensional and will not be totally corrected by the threat assessment process alone.

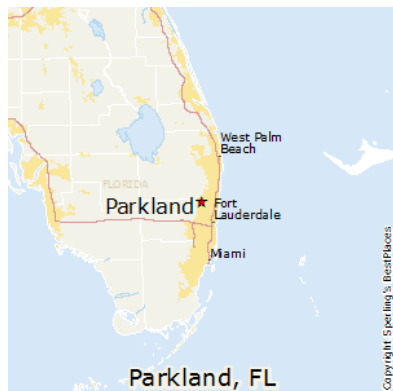
In this document we are focusing on the threat assessment process by examining what we can identify from the shooter's background and environment that may have influenced a threat assessment team. In part, to help organize our review we will be using the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Threat Assessment model involving the four distinct areas of a school shooter's life, plus a brief discussion of the school, the community he is from, and the incident itself. In looking at all these areas we hope to get a snapshot of the forces at work in the life of this school shooter which may have influenced his actions leading up to the February 14<sup>th</sup> carnage.

During the first few days after an incident such as this the facts and details are repeated frequently, and there is seldom way to determine exactly who obtained the information from the original source. In other cases, materials are a combination of previous news articles which have been synthesized to create another article. We are not assuming all facts reported by public sources are accurate, but in this review we are not attempting to prove any level of guilt or accountability for any person or organization involved. We are discussing processes and procedures, which if not accurately

reported in the news can still be worthy of consideration to determine ways we can improve our own efforts to make our own processes more effective.

Let us first consider the community Cruz was from and how that may have influenced his actions at Stoneman Douglas High School.

### **Parkland Florida**



Parkland Florida is in northern Broward County, approximately 50 miles north of Miami. CBS News described Parkland as a bedroom community with a population of 31,000 inhabitants in 2016 and was named Florida's Safest City in 2017. The U. S. Census Bureau reported that Broward County had a population of 1,909,632 people in 2016, making it the second-most populous county in Florida and the 17th-most populous in the United States. Broward County is one of the three counties that make up the Miami metropolitan area,

which was home to an estimated 6,012,331 people according to the 2010 census.

The area is an affluent suburb and media sources report the average home value in Parkland is \$600,000. In contrast, the United States Census Bureau reported in January 2018 the average home value in the United States is \$382,700. Similarly, the average annual income in Parkland is reported by media sources as being \$128,292, while the average income in the United States in 2016 was \$59,039 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Census Bureau reported the average income for 2016 in Parkland was the highest income reported in all previous years.

Parkland's favorite son is Anthony Rizzo, a First Baseman for the Chicago Cubs baseball franchise. Rizzo attended and played baseball for Stoneman Douglas High School, and still has a home in Parkland. Active in both baseball and football during high school, Rizzo played for football coach and school monitor Aaron Feis, who was killed during the shooting while saving three girls from the killer's rampage.

## The School

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is a public high school and part of Broward County Public School District. Stoneman Douglas has grades 9-12 and in 2016 had 3,158 students and was ranked better than 92% of all high schools in Florida. The school has 129 full-time teachers and a School Resource Officer (SRO) from the Broward County Sheriff's Department.



The school is comprised of ten main buildings plus parking lots, a baseball field, track and other athletic areas. Westglades Middle School is located west of and adjacent to Stoneman Douglas and sits along the path taken by students going to Wal-Mart or McDonald's from the high school. Cruz attended Westglades Middle School until he was removed for disciplinary and behavioral reasons in the eighth grade.

Local media reported that the Broward County Schools are involved in a large-scale project to improve the safety and security in all their schools. One of the improvements reported to have been completed at Stoneman Douglas was to install a six-foot high fence around the school with electronic locks on the gates to assist in conducting a lockdown to the campus. Video systems, Active Shooter training and police presence on campus were also either implemented or upgraded for Stoneman Douglas in recent years.

Teachers from Stoneman Douglas interviewed immediately after the massacre reported that before the shooting they felt very secure at the high school because they had high fences, gates, police and school security personnel, and conducted Active Shooter drills annually with the Broward County Sheriff's Department. Like many other schools, they did not expect an Active Shooter incident to occur at their school in this community.

The gates in the fence are kept locked during the day, except for one-hour before school begins and one-hour before classes are dismissed for the day. Cruz, as a former student would have known that all gates were opened before classes began and end each day help facilitate the students and employee's ability to travel to and from the parking lots unimpeded. Once unlocked, someone would have unfettered access to all the buildings on the campus because all exterior building doors are unlocked when students are present.

Another security gap reportedly known by the students including Cruz was that all gates to the fence unlock as soon as the fire alarm is activated. While the fence and gates were new and part of a



planned enhanced security initiative, the gates unlocking automatically were arguably part of Cruz's plan to escape.



*Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School*

### **The Accused**

It is difficult to understand a young person's potential pathway to violence, let alone collect and analyze their behaviors and predict their future actions, and this review is no different. In this review we have the benefit of hindsight and many persons investigating and reporting on the past actions of Nikolas Cruz. To help organize our review we will be looking at various aspects of the accused's life and environment, using a model described in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's work, *The School Shooter: The Threat Assessment Perspective* (© 1999). In their work, the FBI provided four aspects of the youth's life which should be examined in order to make informed conclusions about their potential pathway to violence.

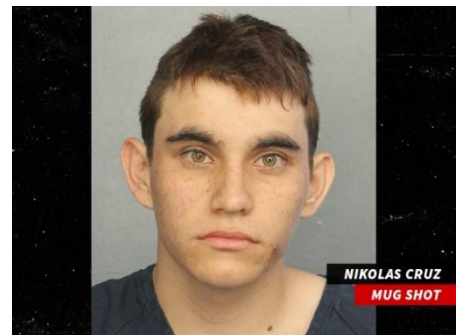


- The personality of the student
- The family dynamics
- The social dynamics
- The school dynamics

In this review we will break down information into these four areas as an effort to consolidate the information into a more concise form whereby we can gain a clearer understanding of the events before and during the massacre on February 14, 2018. A reminder to the reader, a threat assessment is not as simple as checking items from column one and column two to determine if someone is a threat but is more involved and is more of an art form than a pure science. People do not always act as they should, and behaviors and motivations are often not fully understood. Anyone experiencing a lot of emotional turmoil in their lives with few coping skills are very unpredictable and can act illogically and not as expected. Additional mental health issues and problems with cognitive development adds to the complexity of understanding what Cruz may have been experiencing. With that in mind, let us first consider the personality of Nikolas Cruz.

### **The Personality of the Student**

The accused is Nikolas Cruz, a 19-year old former student of Stoneman Douglas High School. Cruz has a history of mental health concerns that his adoptive mother tried to get him help for over the years. Lynda Cruz stated that Nikolas has Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, anger management issues, and behavior disorders. Cruz received mental health treatment on multiple occasions from the school system and the Henderson Mental Health Center in Broward County. By the time he was three he was diagnosed with developmental delays and when he was six he witnessed his father's death. As he grew older he became preoccupied with war, death, and killing according to his school records. He stopped receiving mental health assistance from both his school and the local mental health service provider by January 2017.



Cruz, often described as socially awkward and a loner also had a long history of concerning behaviors beginning years before the shooting at Stoneman Douglas. At one time a neighbor took a video of Cruz standing outside of his home's back door, dressed only in boxer shorts and a red baseball style hat, shooting what is believed to be a BB-gun. There are other stories of Cruz walking around his

neighborhood taking target practice with his BB-gun. Cruz reportedly enjoyed hunting, shooting, and talked about joining the military after high school. People who knew Cruz stated he frequently engaged in reckless activities and enjoyed taking chances.

In February of 2017 two events occurred in Cruz's life which some speculated were warning signs that were ignored. One event was Cruz purchasing the AR-15 style long-gun he used during his rampage at his former high school. While gun ownership is not in and of itself always a warning sign of violence, his preoccupation with wars, guns, and killing combined with his previous mental health problems is a warning sign which was ignored. The second event was when Cruz told one of his friends, "I swear to God I'll shoot up this school." Unfortunately, in the first event the fact Cruz received mental health treatment along with his alarming and concerning behaviors were not recorded in the data base used by the state for clearance before someone can purchase a gun. In the second event, according to one ABC News report the student who Cruz made the statements to did not report the incident because Cruz apologized to his classmate for the comments.

Another glimpse into Cruz's personality can be achieved by reviewing the person's social media presence and other online activities. The media reported that Cruz's social media and internet activities showed he frequently made racial epithets toward African-Americans and Muslims. This anti-African-American and Muslim attitude was also present in the drawings on his backpack seen before and after the shooting. His social media footprint provided potential ties to White Supremacist organizations that were found on his computer, and he singled out the police and anti-fascist protestors as deserving of his vengeance. In another example of his online presence reported by the news media, Cruz reportedly stated in a YouTube video, "I wanna shoot people with my AR-15, I wanna die fighting shit tons of people, I am going to kill law enforcement one day, they go after the good people."

In another internet posting by Cruz, a Bail Bondsman in Mississippi reported to the FBI's Public Access Line in September 2017 a posting on his website which stated, "I'm going to be a professional school shooter." The poster stated his name was "Nikolas Cruz" but gave no further details. The FBI reported they were unable to identify the person "Nikolas Cruz" because when the complainant deleted the post and the information providing identifiers to where the message was sent from was destroyed. The FBI did not attempt any further inquiry into who Nikolas Cruz may be because the message was not perceived as a threat as it was too vague. It appears this information was not recorded within the FBI databases anywhere because in January 2018 when the FBI Public Access Line received another call on Nikolas Cruz, with full identifiers, the two calls were not connected as being from this Nikolas Cruz.

The state of Florida was involved with Cruz and his family for several years. In a Florida Department of Families and Children report they stated that Cruz had a low level of risk because he was residing with his mother, receiving in-home mental health treatment, and was attending school. The therapist said he was no threat to anyone else or himself. All these reasons by the Department of Families and Children gave for Cruz being a low risk ended months before the shooting at Stoneman Douglas as Cruz stopped his mental health treatment, was kicked out of school, and his mother died. In another investigation by the State of Florida Department of Children and Families they determined he was not a threat to himself or others despite the fact his mother reported to them he was writing hate signs on his book bag and talked about buying guns. None of this information was entered into the database used for gun purchases.

The Broward County Sheriff's Department had multiple reports on Cruz over several years and responded to the Cruz home frequently for problems with Nikolas and his half-brother Zachary. The number of calls to the Cruz residence varied between 25 and 39 times depending on which news source you are reading. In February 2016 the sheriff's office also reportedly received third-hand information that Cruz threatened to shoot up his school. This information was forwarded to the School Resource Officer at Stoneman Douglas for follow-up. Five months later Cruz was reported to the same School Resource Officer to have attempted suicide, was involved in self-harm, and told others he wanted to buy hunting guns. No action was reported as being taken.

### **The Family Dynamics**

In keeping with the FBI model, we need to examine the family dynamics of the shooter. In the case of Nikolas Cruz, he and his younger half-brother were both adopted as infants. There has been no media coverage on the background of the natural parents of Nikolas Cruz, but both Nikolas and his half-brother Zachary were adopted by Lynda and Roger Cruz soon after they were born. Both boys were adopted through a private adoption, and Lynda and Roger Cruz insisted the boy's birth mother get prenatal care, which they paid for, stay away from drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes.

Roger worked in advertising and Lynda was a stay at home mother. Roger traveled a lot for work, but when he was at home his entire life revolved around the boys. They built large outdoor play equipment for the boys as well as put an addition on their home so the boys would have a playroom. By all accounts they were loving and devoted parents with adequate financial means to provide for the boys. Roger Cruz died in 2004 of a heart attack, and Lynda died of Pneumonia in November 2017.

Prior to Roger Cruz's death, friends of the family reported a very positive, strong relationship between Nikolas and his adoptive father. One friend of Nikolas stated to news media there was a marked difference in Nikolas's behavior after the only father he knew passed away. The New York Times reported that Cruz also had a very strong bond with his adoptive mother Lynda, despite the long record of calls to the police for assistance in dealing with Nikolas. Lynda Cruz was an attentive and loving mother, and after her death people reported that Nikolas seemed to be lost without her.

Some media reports assert that Lynda would frequently call the police for advice on dealing with Nikolas. From 2008 to 2017 CNN News reported that the Broward County Sheriff's Office was called to the residence 45 times for concerns about Nikolas or his half-brother Zachary. From 2010 up to the time of her death in November 2017, the Broward County Sheriff's Office reported having been called to the residence 20 times, but other media sources claim their researched showed the sheriff's department responded 39 times to the residence. Regardless of the correct number of calls to the residence, the calls were usually labeled as "mentally ill person", "Child/Elder Abuse", "Domestic Disturbance", and "Missing Person" but seldom was there a written report generated on the call.

Despite having all the advantages of loving and caring parents, a nice home, and good schools to attend Nikolas had problems from a very young age. Neighbors reported observing concerning behaviors since he was very young, yet he was also described as quiet, shy, would not talk to people and kept his head down all the time. When he was a child he is alleged to have hit other children and in one incident Cruz locked himself in a neighbor's house and allegedly destroyed a toy train set. There was another incident where Cruz threw a rock at another child hitting him in the eye. His room reportedly had holes in the walls because when he got angry he would punch the walls. Cruz was seen killing toads with spear-like objects and then dissect the animals. In one incident Cruz was seen standing over a dog with a menacing expression while the dog convulsed and was foaming at the mouth. The report further stated that once Cruz knew someone was watching him he became concerned for the dog's health. Cruz frequently was seen shooting his BB gun at squirrels, birds, and other animals, and at one time reportedly texted another boy that he had "12 kills" that day. At one time a neighbor was shown by their son an Instagram post by Cruz where he said he wanted to shoot up a school, and after that incident the parents of the neighborhood children would encourage their children to stay away from Cruz. Because it is held that the best predictor of violence is a history of violence, it is unfortunate little to none of this was reported the authorities prior to the shooting.

After the death of Lynda Cruz, both Nikolas and Zachary moved in with a family friend, Roxanne Deschamps in Lake Worth Florida. The short time Nikolas was living with the Deschamps was reportedly turbulent for both Cruz and the Deschamps family. Media sources reported arguments over Cruz's guns which the Deschamps disapproved of him possessing, even though Cruz purchased and possessed the guns legally. Cruz argued he had a right to have his guns and refused to get rid of them. There was one violent confrontation between Cruz and the Deschamps resulting in both sides calling the sheriff's department complaining about the other. The Deschamps reported he had a lot of weapons and she was afraid if he came back. The Deschamps reported to the sheriff's dispatcher that Cruz put a gun to several person's head including to Roxanne's. Roxanne Deschamps also reported that Nikolas dug a hole in the back yard to bury a gun, and that he had a bulletproof vest. Nikolas called the sheriff's office to report he had been kicked out of the home and the Deschamps 22-year old son threatened to kill him and was talking to the dispatcher about having recently lost his mother. After several weeks living in the home of his mother's friend, Cruz moved out on November 29, 2017 and moved in with a former classmate from Stoneman Douglas.

Two interesting events still evolving while this review is being compiled, are that Roxanne Deschamps has filed a petition with the court to be appointed the Executor of Lynda Cruz's estate, which would give her control over an estate estimated to be close to one-million dollars. A second event is that Nikolas's half-brother was involuntarily admitted to a psychiatric institution based on Roxanne Deschamps testimony on February 15, 2018, the day after the shooting. An interesting twist is that Zachary Cruz was evidently released from the hospital because he was arrested on March 19<sup>th</sup> for trespassing to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School after he climbed over the school's fence and was riding a skateboard on the school grounds. In a statement to the police, Zachary stated he wanted to think about the incident and "soak it all up". Zachary had been barred from the school and grounds and is currently on \$500,000 bond.

After being kicked out of the Deschamps home, Cruz convinced a former high school friend to persuade his parents into allowing him to move into their home. The Jesse Snead family in Pompano Beach Florida permitted Nikolas to move in, but with rules. In a televised interview, Jesse Snead acknowledged both he and his wife were avid shooters and had no objections to Nikolas bringing his guns into their home. They required Nikolas to purchase a gun safe and keep his guns locked inside which he did. Jesse Snead believed he had the only



key to the gun cabinet, but after the shooting realized Cruz must have had another key to the safe. The Snead's acknowledged they noticed some depression in Cruz but did not feel it was unusual given that both of Cruz's parents had passed away. The Snead's required Nikolas to get a job and he worked at a Dollar Tree store and required him to obtain his GED which he was doing. Cruz got along well with the family but was quiet and reserved. The family felt that Cruz was not a threat to anyone, he got along well with their boys and that he seemed to love and cared for their animals (two dogs and several cats) and they knew of no past incidents of cruelty to animals. The Snead's felt Cruz was making efforts to improve his life and they believed he was making progress in getting his life back in control.

### **The Social Dynamics**

According to news reports, Nikolas Cruz had a turbulent and challenging youth. The New York Times reported that Cruz was harassed, bullied, ganged up on, beaten up by other children, and had few if any friends. Cruz's younger half-brother Zachary, told the Southern Florida Sun Sentinel that as a child he and his friends would pick on the much smaller Nikolas and would hit Nikolas on occasion. Despite being taken in by the Snead family, it appears Cruz had no attachment to any adult role models, and many former classmates and teachers told the media they feared Cruz could be violent and avoided him. As Cruz grew older he gained a reputation for violence and people began to avoid him completely.

Cruz was a member of the school's Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) for a short time while he was at Stoneman Douglas, and often told others he wanted a career in the military. The Washington Post reported Cruz followed a variety of online gun groups and some sources reported Cruz was a member of these groups as well. His computer footprint showed he participated in a YouTube chat group which discussed bombs and bomb making. Cruz posted Instagram photos of large number of guns on his bed which many of his fellow students and former friends had seen. One source reported Cruz had at least ten legally purchased long-guns. At the time of the shooting, the other long guns were reportedly secured at an unnamed persons home and not immediately accessible to Cruz.

In addition to gun and bomb related websites, CNN News reported Cruz was part of a chat group that discussed killing Mexicans, keeping black people in chains and cutting their throats, and discussed his ongoing hatred for gays and his desire to kill them. This was in addition to the hate symbols and racial slurs drawn on his backpack.

School counselors, Department of Families and Children, and the family who took in Cruz after his mother died all reported that Cruz was lonely but want other relationships. He had a girlfriend at one time, but that relationship ended in 2016. After the breakup Cruz posted pictures on Snapchat of

him cutting his arms and comments about how he wanted to purchase a gun. All these acts were documented in the Department of Families and Children report but not acted upon.

Cruz was known for being socially awkward and had trouble with other students in school and was frequently seen walking around school alone. He seldom talked to others and had been the victim of bullying and harassment by other students including his younger half-brother. In one unreported incident, Cruz was seen at school holding what appeared to be a dead bird by his genitalia during class. It was suspected that he kept the dead bird in his lunch box at school. In the January 2018 tip to the FBI, the caller stated Cruz took a dead bird home and dissected it in the kitchen to see what was inside.

USA Today reported that Cruz's former classmate, Ethan Trieu said that Nikolas changed dramatically after his adoptive father's death. Trieu said Cruz became reserved, fell into the wrong crowd, and began acting out in class including throwing of pencils at teachers. Cruz was bullied and began to get his own reputation of being violent. People began to stay away from Cruz and not talk to him at all. Trieu stated that the "community failed him".

### **The School Dynamics**

Cruz told other students he had attended several schools and was expelled from two private schools and held back twice. He was described as "lost", "lonely" and "violent" by the school officials. Counseling was not helping Cruz, and ultimately, he was transferred to Cross Creek School in Pompano Beach during his eighth-grade year. Cross Creek is a school for students with behavior problems with about 150 students, and Cruz hated being there because he felt it was for stupid students. Finally, despite having documented his morbid preoccupations with guns, behavior problems, and previous problems in school he was admitted to Stoneman Douglas High School on January 13, 2016. While attending the Stoneman Douglas Cruz was a source of concern for both students and teachers and continued receiving counseling through the school. He completed the tenth grade at Stoneman Douglas, but after a string of fights and concerns about his behavior he was removed from the high school a little more than a year later in February 2017.

### **The incident, February 14, 2018**

The morning of February 14<sup>th</sup> Nikolas Cruz told the Snead family he was not going to work because he did not work on Valentine's Day. After getting up, Cruz removed a plaster cast from his right hand, where he had previously sustained a "boxers fracture" which is generally caused by punching



something. Cruz removed the cast from his hand once before and a new cast was put on, but today he removed the cast before carrying out his plan at Stoneman Douglas.

Cruz arranged for an Uber ride to pick him up at the Snead's house and take him to the high school, arriving around 2:21 PM. The driver reported to the police later that he last saw Cruz walking toward the "1200 Building" with a black duffle bag and back pack.

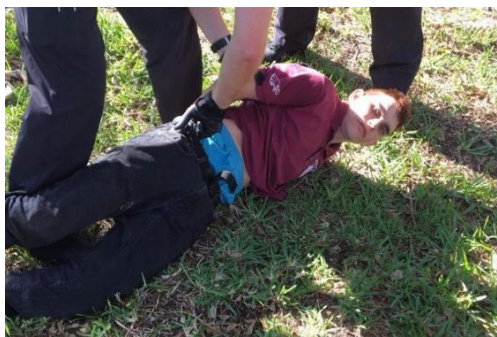
The school is surrounded by a six-foot high fence blocking off the school from the student and employee parking lots. Cruz, as a former student would have known that all gates are unlocked approximately one-hour before classes are released for the day. In addition, Cruz could have known, or at least suspected that once the fire alarm was activated all gates would unlock automatically to allow for evacuation of the buildings.

The high school campus has ten main buildings along with parking lots, tennis courts, baseball diamond, and a track. It is surrounded by a six-foot fence separating the school buildings from the parking lots. The Westglades Middle School is located just west of Stoneman Douglas High School.

The "1200 building" is a three-story building containing mostly freshman level classes. Stoneman Douglas had 3,158 students in 2016, and at the time of the shooting the 1200 Building had approximately 900 students attending classes in the building's classrooms.

After Cruz entered the east stairwell doors he removed a rifle from a duffle bag and encountered another student in the stairwell. Cruz told the other student to leave as things were going to get "messy" very soon. The student left the area and searched for one of the school's monitors, while Cruz finished getting his gun and equipment ready for his rampage. There is no indication or speculation as to why Cruz did not shoot the student, but the student who fled the building found a school monitor, Mr. Fie, who was later killed during the shooting. While Fie was checking Cruz's status at the school and was alerting other school officials, Cruz opened fire inside of the 1200 Building.

Cruz entered the building through the east stairwell, and after either pulling a fire alarm or activating one of his smoke grenades which activated the fire alarm, he began shooting people on the



first floor as they exited their classrooms. He shot into several classrooms while walking down the hallway, turning around at the west end and walked back to the east stairwell while shooting into other classrooms and at students who were trying to flee. Cruz went up the east stairwell to the second floor to continue his shooting spree. After firing more rounds, he went up the west stairwell to

the third floor and continued shooting into more rooms killing several more people. He put down his rifle, backpack, and a bulletproof vest on the third floor and exited the building with the rest of the students. He traveled west past the Westglades Middle School and on to Wal-Mart where he got a drink at the Subway located inside of the store. He left Wal-Mart and stopped for a few minutes at the McDonald's a few blocks away. He was arrested without further incident approximately 40 minutes later while he was walking down a quiet residential neighborhood in Coral Springs.

When the shooting was over, 17 Stoneman Douglas students and employees were dead and another 14 were injured. The victims ranged from 14 to 49 years of age. Twelve of the 17 victims were found inside of the school, two were outside the school, one student was found along a road, and two died at a local hospital. The Stoneman Douglas High School Massacre was one of the deadliest school shooting in the United States, second only to the Sandy Hook School Shooting in 2012. Some media sources, such as USA Today reported the shooting lasted only three minutes, while other news media sources report the shooting lasted up to ten-minutes.

During the shooting, the lone School Resource Officer who is assigned to the school by the Broward County Sheriff's Office, arrived outside the building and took up a position of cover. Whether or not the officer acted appropriately is not a focus of this review, but the record shows the officer remained outside of the 1200 Building and arranged for responding officers to obtain access to the video system, provided a floor plan for the school, and gave keys to other responding officers.

On February 16, 2018 in Rob Schmitt's article, Fox News reported that Cruz claimed demons in his head made him do it. Regardless of why he did it, many students reported that when they heard Cruz was the shooter they were not surprised.

### **Additional Background Information**

In addition to those items reviewed above, the following items are connected to the incident and are deserving of our consideration when reviewing a threat assessment perspective to this incident.

On September 24, 2017, the FBI received a call on their Public Access Line from a video blogger about someone who posted on his blog that he wanted to be a "professional school shooter". The blogger, a 30-year-old bail bondsman from Mississippi, stated the person posting the message gave his name as Nikolas Cruz, but the FBI reported the information was too vague and did not know where the "Nikolas Cruz" lived at and consequently did not follow-up on the tip.

On January 5, 2018, forty days before the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School, the FBI Public Access Line received another call concerning a Nikolas Cruz. The caller, who described himself as

someone close to Nikolas Cruz, reported Cruz had multiple-guns, has been demonstrating erratic behaviors, posting disturbing social media postings, and the caller stated Cruz was a potential school shooter. The caller stated he knew Cruz and provided Cruz's full name and identifiers to the FBI. The FBI acknowledged they did not forward the information to the Miami Field Office, nor did the name Nikolas Cruz get connected to the September 2017 call from the Mississippi where the name Nikolas Cruz was used.

Several responding police agencies reported the School Resource Officer, and three additional Broward County Deputies did not enter building but took up defensive positions around the building. According to some reports, the location of the shooter was unknown, and some officers thought the gunshots were outdoors. Ultimately, Coral Springs Police Officers along with a Broward County Sheriff's Office deputy who arrived later, and a Sunrise Florida PD officer entered the school to engage Cruz, but Cruz had already fled with the students evacuating the building.



Other media reports revealed that an outside consultant previously warned the Broward County Sheriff's Office their radio system was outdated and would not provide the needed capabilities in a large-scale event. This may be contributing factor as to why officers took up defensive positions and set up a perimeter rather than entering the building. Some reports alleged that communications between the officers in the field and the commanding officer for the Broward County Sheriff's Office were ineffective and hard to understand.

According to the ABC News the Broward County School Superintendent Robert Runcie stated on February 19<sup>th</sup> that "everyone is working in silos and there is no information sharing." He was referring to his belief that the Department of Families and Children, law enforcement, psychiatrists, and the school district were not communicating between themselves and therefore information on Cruz was not available and no one had a complete picture of what was happening in Cruz's life. Runcie believes it was this lack of interagency communication that allowed Cruz to escalate in his behaviors and resulted in the February 14<sup>th</sup> massacre.

According to ABC News Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel blamed the "Baker Act" for allowing Cruz to remain free, and that the ability to involuntarily admit someone to a mental health facility needs to be reviewed because Israel believes the law should be rewritten to allow officials to involuntarily admit someone to a mental health facility with a lower burden of proof than is currently required under

Florida law. Sheriff Israel also expressed concern that the mental health records were not reported to the state and because of this Cruz was able to legally purchase the gun he used at Stoneman Douglas.

USA Today reported the Parkland Florida shooting was the fifth school shooting where a fire alarm was activated causing an evacuation and as students exited their classrooms they were shot. There is concern among law enforcement and emergency planners that nefarious persons may employ a false fire alarm as a diversionary tactic to get students out of their classrooms and into areas where they are better targets. One such incident was on March 24, 1998 in Jonesboro Arkansas where two school shooters activated the school's fire alarm system, and as students were evacuating the building they were shot by classmates concealed outside behind the school in the woods.

On February 23, 2018, Governor Rick Scott announced a major plan to keep Florida students safe at school which included but is not limited to a requirement for every school to develop their own threat assessment team which will be composed of a teacher, local law enforcement officer, human resource officer, a Department of Children and Families employee, a Department of Juvenile Justice employee, and the principal. The team is required to meet monthly to review any potential threats to students and staff at the school. This legislation has not yet been introduced into the Florida legislature and did not discuss existing laws dealing with confidentiality of school, police, and mental health records.

### **Lessons Learned**

While some may see this as criticism, looking at past incidents for areas of improvement is an effective way for officials to determine what actions they may have room for improvement in for their own threat assessment processes. However, it should be kept in mind that we are using public documents which may or may not be completely accurate and that we are not attempting to evaluate the response capabilities of any agencies or organizations related to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School massacre.

It should be remembered by the reader that threat assessment is more of an art form than a pure scientific process with predictable results. Humans are not always predictable, and the reader should accept that different reviewers may have different interpretations of how to improve upon their own threat assessment process.

**Lesson Learned #1: Create and institutionalize a multi-disciplinary threat assessment team.**

Threat Assessment Teams have proven effective not only in preventing school shootings, but also in identifying students or others who need services to help them regain their footing on being a productive student and member of society. The main goal of the team is to determine if someone is on a pathway to violence, and it is imperative the team be multidisciplinary while having the official support and backing of the school district or governing body of an institution of higher education. In addition, a threat assessment team is responsible for developing an appropriate threat management plan based on verified facts and behaviors, and coordinating the services being provided to the person of concern and to victims and targets of the person of concern.

The Broward County School Superintendent identified this area of improvement when he stated that everyone was working in their silos and no one was talking to each other nor coordinating all, or at least most of the efforts to assist Cruz. In the Stoneman Douglas massacre, if a threat assessment team was in place for the school district they would have had access to all school records which would have included the mental health and disciplinary history of Nikolas Cruz. It is conceivable that a properly formed threat assessment team would have been aware of the changes in Cruz's behaviors and when he stopped receiving mental health counseling.

In addition, a Broward County Sheriff's Officer was the School Resource Officer for Stoneman Douglas High School, and probably would have been on a threat assessment team. While a member of the threat assessment team, the deputy could have brought forward the information previously given to him about Cruz and the warning signs he was displaying. In addition, he would also have had access to the Broward County Sheriff's Department logs and known about the large number of calls from the Cruz home. In addition, before Cruz was readmitted to high school the threat assessment team would have known about the services he was provided as part of the school's mental health intervention, and the concerns expressed by faculty, staff, and students would have been identified and considered before he was allowed to attend Stoneman Douglass in the tenth-grade. Obviously, the behaviors which ultimately resulted in him being removed approximately a year later would also have been considered along with the more recent contacts to the Cruz home by the Broward County Sheriff's Department and Cruz's social media posts.

There can be little doubt a properly formed and operated threat assessment team would have been able to identify enough warning signs to act, regardless of the information recorded at other locations (i.e. FBI, State of Florida Department of Families and Children). It is conceivable there would have been sufficient information to have Cruz involuntarily admitted to a mental health facility, or at least more closely monitored his behaviors including whether he was continuing his mental health therapy.

In our review, we found the State of Florida has no requirement for a threat assessment team in either K-12 schools, or in higher education. The media reported that Governor Rick Scott introduced a plan on February 23, 2018, which in part required threat assessment teams in elementary and secondary schools, however it did not mandate threat assessment teams for higher education. He also proposed that specific disciplines be represented on those teams, excluding a mental health professional. It is important that the threat assessment team is multidisciplinary and have adequate experience, training, and authority to carry out their duties. Each school is unique and therefore a threat assessment team from one school may not be identical to another school's team.

**Lesson Learned #2: Formalize your threat assessment team and standardize your threat assessment process.**

There are several resources schools can use in developing a threat assessment team and process for the school. A threat assessment process is different than a criminal investigation or a mental health evaluation. All three processes have their own purpose and methods, but the process you use in a threat assessment should be standardized so all cases in the school are treated the same. A formal and standardized process allows the school to evaluate the potential pathway to violence based on behaviors by the person of concern and are behavior based, and information should be verified before accepting it as factual.

Your threat assessment team should be trained on the standardized process developed by the school, and they need to operate under the authority of the school board, or chief executive officer of the institution of higher education. In the perfect world, each institution would have a single team to allow for a consistent response in the threat assessment process, so all persons of concern are treated equally regardless of the circumstances. Deviation from the formal standardized process should not be permitted except in cases of extreme emergency where there is imminent threat to life or safety of

others, and immediate police intervention is necessary. Once the situation is brought under control, the threat assessment process should then be initiated.

**Lesson Learned #3: Fully integrate the threat assessment team in the school including all relevant stakeholders.**

Threat assessment teams need to be fully integrated into the school system. Whether in the elementary and secondary school setting, or at an institution of higher education, it is imperative to involve all the relevant stakeholders in the process. In the elementary and secondary schools that can include, but not be limited to the school principal, a teacher, mental health provider, nurse, and law enforcement or security. Other school or local resources can be included based upon the specific circumstances of the threat assessment inquiry including a specific teacher, parents, clergy, etc.

At an institution of higher education, the core threat assessment team can include police/security, an administrator, student life, residential life, health service/student counseling, student discipline or human resources, and local resources as determined on a case by case basis.

The entire institution, regardless of whether you are in a K-12 school, or an institution of higher education, needs to have everyone involved to some extent. Students, teachers and employees are the front line for threat assessment because they see and interact with the students and employees daily. Students need to be involved because they will see and hear things that faculty and staff may not hear for months. Students may be exposed to leakage of information by the person of concern which faculty and staff may never be exposed to. An institution's support services (health services including mental health services, academic advisors and guidance counselors, human resources, administration, and law enforcement or security) must all be involved because they provide expertise and resources which may otherwise not be available or fully utilized.

In all environments it is important that everyone, faculty, staff, students, family members and loved ones are aware of the basic tenants of the threat assessment process, including but not limited to,

- The threat assessment process is not adversarial.
- People need to be trained on recognizing the warning signs.
- Who do you report a person of concern to?
- Be sure to develop and involve relevant resources.
- Don't forget the victims and targets of the person of concern.

There is a lot of media coverage discussing how neighbors, fellow students, teachers, and others around Cruz suspected he was on a pathway to violence. The caller to the Federal Bureau of



Investigation's Public Access Line in early January 2018 clearly articulated a number of behaviors they observed which caused them to suspect Cruz was a threat to himself and others. It is imperative that everyone in the school community are provided with the tools to recognize warning signs of a person on a pathway to violence, which would include an awareness of suicide, depression, and mental illness.

To be an efficient threat assessment team, they need to have the information from the greater school community as quickly as possible. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the threat assessment team to have a clear line of communications from the students, faculty, staff, parents, the institution, and public on who they can report if someone's behavior is concerning or alarming.

Efficiency also depends upon having the correct people conducting the assessment. It is important that the core threat assessment team be qualified, is multi-discipline, and has experience in conducting threat assessments, while not being overly large which can prevent meeting quickly in an emergency. The threat assessment team must also have the authority to act and access to resources which can be applied to the situation as needed to help the person of concern reduce their potential for violence.

Finally, the threat assessment process includes looking out for the interest of the victims and targets of the person of concern. In mental health counseling and the police response to threats, their focus is on the "client" or "suspect" and making a diagnosis or proving the elements of a crime. In the threat assessment process, the focus is not just on the person of concern, but also any victims or targets, and the best interest of the school or college/university.

To some extent the threat assessment process institutionalizes the African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child" where raising a child is more of a communal activity where many are involved in raising a child. This is especially true in the school setting because of the amount of time students spend at school and away from home and parental influences. Higher education has long known of the stresses and perils of the college years, especially when living away from home. With the loss of the long-standing support structures present for the K-12 students, there are new anxieties and stresses not previously experienced by the incoming college student.

**Lesson Learned #4: Establish a plan for working within the mental health confidentiality laws while conducting a threat assessment.**

There is tremendous debate over who can share what information with who during a threat assessment. The two major federal laws impacting a threat assessment process are the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA), and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). There are also state laws dealing with confidentiality of information between doctor/therapist and patient, Court proceedings and police records of juveniles, and state school codes which contribute their own set of complexities to operating a threat assessment team. Finally, the courts have influenced the practice and processes of all those who can contribute to a truly effective threat assessment team. For mental health professionals the most notable case law impacting confidentiality is the Tarasoff decision (Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California (17 Cal.3d 425)) in 1976, which has since been codified in many states.

The result has been a lot of confusion for schools, police, and parents and what can and cannot be done. Fortunately, in most cases during an imminent threat, or in some cases when a reasonable belief exists that someone poses a threat to themselves or others the confidentiality rules are circumvented by a perceived risk to others.

It is imperative that a threat assessment team clearly identify what laws and regulations are applicable to their location and situation, and when you can and cannot release information. In some situations, a therapist who is bound by confidentiality may not be able to say much during a threat assessment inquiry because the person of concern is obtaining mental health services from the same therapist who is sitting on the threat assessment team. In these incidents the therapist may remain quiet listening to the other team members and at some point, the balance between confidentiality and public safety is tipped and the therapist is required break confidentiality. In other cases, law enforcement may be restricted on what out-of-school incidents and behaviors may be released to the school or outside of authorized law enforcement and court representatives. But, given the right set of circumstances law enforcement can act unilaterally or in conjunction with the local prosecutor's office and take someone into custody. Schools are constantly balancing the need for confidentiality with their obligation to maintain a safe and secure school, but in some cases a school must act in conjunction with other local agencies. In some situations, schools can partner with outside resources (i.e. police, mental health providers) to become part of the "school" through intergovernmental agreement or other legal documents.

The system of government we have in the United States relies heavily on local and state governing bodies to pass laws rather than the federal government passing sweeping legislation dictating actions to local, county, and state governments. Consequently, every school and jurisdiction will have its own unique operating environment in which to operate their threat assessment team. It is imperative that the threat assessment team work collectively and collaboratively to develop an operational process whereby they can effectively conduct their work to identify persons of concern and develop a threat management plan where they can reduce the vulnerability of the school and the entire community.

**Lesson Learned #5: Schools should be aware of, and institute antibullying campaigns and interdiction to reverse the effects of victimization.**

Bullying has long been related to a variety of school and mental health issues which can extend well past the elementary and secondary school years. Victims of bullying can experience depression, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, changes in sleep and eating habits, a loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities, withdrawal from family and friends, health complaints, decreased academic performance, or drop out of school entirely. Some of these problems can extend into and throughout adulthood impacting many aspects of their lives. Bullying was once thought to be primarily in elementary schools but has been found to exist in high schools and higher education as well. Many authorities on bullying and its effects on children also believe those who are bullied may resort to bullying and in some cases those who have been bullied will resort to violence as a form of retaliation against the injustice they have experienced.

In the case of Nikolas Cruz, there was a long history being bullied at school, and even at home by his younger brother. In many other school shootings, the shooters have reported being bullied and the shooting was their form of retaliation against the school and individuals who they perceive have done them harm. One of the most notorious school shootings which had speculation that bullying was in part a motivating factor was the 1999 Columbine Shooting where Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold entered Columbine High School in suburban Denver and began shooting students. Most school shootings since have at least speculated the cause of the shooting was the shooter having been bullied by others in school.

Schools should strive to be environments free from all forms of harassment and violence and should initiate programs to identify acts bullying and strive to eradicate it from the schools. It is also important to interrupt the cycle of violence, and schools at all levels should provide a therapeutic environment where victims and perpetrators can receive mental health services to reverse the effects of bullying and to stop bullying others.

Colleges and universities should be equally concerned with bullying and the residual effects of bullying from a student's younger years. In addition to prohibiting bullying at their institution, higher education should make sure they have supportive services for victims of bullying to help break the cycle of violence and to reverse the effects of having been bullied.

#### Lesson Learned #6: Don't confuse affluence with safety.

Many people erroneously assume affluence in people or communities will result in a crime free community or a safe school. It has been clearly shown that violence and school shootings can take place anywhere and in any socio-economic condition. In the case of the school shooting in Parkland Florida, the average home value is 63% higher than the national average, and the average personal income is 72% higher than the average individual income in the United States. The city of Parkland Florida was rated the safest city in Florida by the National Council for Home Safety and Security in 2017 and was designated the third safest city in Florida in 2018.

In addition, Parkland School had security fences, gates, video surveillance systems, dedicated school monitors, a School Resource Officer (sworn police officer), and practiced active shooter drills routinely. Stoneman Douglas students, teachers, and parents all felt a sense of security at the high school and felt they had taken all the steps necessary to keep their school safe.

The Cruz family itself was relatively wealthy compared to many. They had a large home including an in-ground pool and dedicated play areas for the boys both inside and outside the home. The estate left by Roger, and then by Lynda was estimated to be approximately a million dollars by some media sources, which included a small trust fund for the boys that Lynda Cruz won for them after their adoptive father died of a heart attack.

Nikolas Cruz was not the first child from a wealthy family whose children carried out acts of violence. One early case was in May 1924 where Richard Loeb, the son of a wealthy Jewish lawyer who was a senior executive at Sears Roebuck & Company, and Nathan Leopold, a child prodigy also from

Chicago, kidnapped and killed Loeb's cousin Bobby Franks. Both were academically gifted, and after their trial conceded they kidnaped and killed Bobby Franks to see what it would be like to kill someone.

Another, more recent case of wealthy children committing acts of violence was the case of Lyle and Erik Menendez who killed their parents in August of 1989 in their Beverly Hills mansion. While there have been some allegations of physical and sexual abuse of the boys by their father, these complaints have never been proven.

In threat assessment, do not erroneously equate affluence in the community, the school, or the family as being an indication that violence will not occur. The best predictor of future violence is a history of violence, and not how much money someone may, or may not have. The days people assume school violence is only in economically disadvantaged areas is over, and the reader should not equate violence as being a phenomenon restricted to the poor or unemployed.

**Lesson Learned #7: Examine the family component, but don't assume a loving and caring family support network will solve all problems.**

Every indication points to the fact that both Roger and Lynda Cruz were loving and caring parents, totally devoted to their children. Prior to Nikolas's birth, the adoptive parents ensured his birth-mother had prenatal care, avoided drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes, and the adoptive parents were in the room when Nikolas was born. Once they found Nikolas's birth-mother was pregnant again, they immediately began the private adoption process to adopt his half-brother Zachary.

Roger Cruz was in marketing and traveled a lot for his work. When he was at home Roger's entire life focused around the boys spending as much time as he could with them. Lynda was a stay at home mother and her whole life was focused on the boys telling neighbors the boys made their life complete. The boys had all the advantages that money could provide.

By the age of three, the parents knew that Nikolas had developmental delays and they sought outside assistance for him. At the age of six Nikolas found the only father he knew dead in the house, and friends and neighbors reported Nikolas had a major shift in personality after that. Lynda sought out help for Nikolas from the school, mental health providers, and even had a history of calling the sheriff's department to talk to an officer about how to handle Nikolas's violent verbal and physical outbursts. Nikolas was often called a "momma's boy" because he and his mother had such a close bond despite his frequent violent outbursts towards his mother.

After the shooting Zachary told investigators while they were growing up he and his friends would harass and pick on Nikolas because he was smaller. Potentially this contributed to Nikolas's developing anger and rage against others. Zachary acknowledged he was jealous of his brother because he felt Nikolas was the favorite son and his mother would often make him take Nikolas with him when he went out.

After the death of Lynda Cruz in November 2017, both boys lived with the Deschamps family which was very turbulent and unstable for both boys with frequent arguments over Nikolas's guns. Nikolas left the Deschamps' home after about a month and moved in with the Snead's, the family of a boy he knew from school. The Snead's stated Nikolas demonstrated signs of depression which they did not feel was unusual for someone who had lost both parents. However, while at the Snead's Nikolas followed the family rules (including locking up his guns in a gun safe in the home), got a job, attended classes to complete his GED, and showed affection towards the two dogs and multiple cats in the Snead's home. The Snead's felt Nikolas was progressing on making a better life for himself.

**Lesson Learned #8: Fully utilize the security present, and upgrade security as necessary.**

The Broward County Public Schools realized they needed to increase the safety and security in their schools, mostly due to school shootings across the nation and an incident in 2016 where a former student walked into Coral Springs school cafeteria with a loaded 9mm handgun stuck in his waistband. The incident ended without injury or death, but the incident re-emphasized the need for enhanced security and they continued to implement their \$11.6 million school security upgrade, including at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Improvements at Stoneman Douglas included six-foot fences surrounding the school along with electronic locks on all gates, upgrades to their digital recording system, and exterior door security.

Unfortunately, it appears most students, including Nikolas Cruz knew that gates were routinely unlocked and unsupervised an hour before school begins or lets out for the day. In addition, predictably due to fire code regulations, once the building fire alarm systems are activated all gates are automatically unlocked to allow for evacuation.

Benefiting from the perfect vision of hindsight, we can say that Cruz exploited these weaknesses that allowed him access to the buildings inside of the security fence shortly before classes were let out

for the day. The flaws in the security measures also allowed Cruz to flee the school after he carried out the shootings by allowing him to escape the grounds.

**Lesson Learned #9: The threat assessment process should include response to imminent threats and responding to an active shooter.**

The threat assessment process should also include a plan for responding when you suspect an imminent threat or attack. Whether acting unilaterally or as a threat assessment team, the school needs to ensure a mechanism is in place whereby law enforcement can be immediately contacted and efficiently respond to the threat. A long-standing maxim in emergency management is, “the worst time to meet your local first responders is during the emergency”, which holds true for schools developing their threat assessment team. Some questions which should be answered as either part of the threat assessment process, or part of your emergency management planning are:

- Who is authorized to contact law enforcement and under what circumstances?
- Who is authorized to activate the school’s response (i.e. lockdown or evacuation)?
- How will your school respond in an active shooter?
- Are you trained in the Incident Command System?
- What facilities for emergency response agencies are established?
- How will you communicate with local first responders?
- Do local responders have access to digital recording systems, building keys, floor plans, etc.?
- Have you trained on Active Shooter or lockdown plans?
- How will you communicate with the students, faculty, staff, administration?
- How will you accomplish reunification for parents and students?
- How will you communicate with stakeholders?

Schools should work with local police, fire, and emergency management on their emergency response plans. By involving local response agencies in the school emergency planning the school will not have to develop their plans in a vacuum. One of the major lessons learned from the September 11, 2001 attacks was that the nation needed a single mechanism for responding to domestic incidents. The Federal government has a plan for response to large scale incidents by federal agencies and all states have a plan for state resources to work collaboratively within the federal plan. All counties should have an emergency plan which will merge seamlessly into the state plan. Ultimately, local planning merges into the county planning effort which means that schools, colleges, and universities planning should merge seamlessly into the local and county plans already in place. Additionally, schools and institutions of higher education can draw upon the expertise and experience of local and county resources in



developing the school's plans. Schools, colleges, and universities are part of the community where they are located, and by drawing upon the local planning and resources you don't have to develop your planning on your own.

Another area of concern would be in the communications during the crisis. It was reported in the media that as Cruz was loading his rifle another student observed Cruz, and Cruz told him something bad was going to happen. While fleeing the building after encountering Cruz, the student found School Monitor Aaron Fei and notified him of Cruz loading the gun in the east stairwell of the 1200 Building. Fei contacted the main office to report what he was told and to check on Cruz's status on school grounds. We do not know whether anyone was communicating with the School Resource Officer or the Broward County Sheriff's Department before the shooting began.

However, media sources reported that in 2015 an outside consultant warned the Broward County Sheriff's Office that their radio system had outlived its usefulness and likely would not be adequate during an emergency involving large numbers of officers. The consultant also cautioned the sheriff's department that other agencies in the county were not able to communicate between themselves. It was also reported the radio system was ineffective in some areas, including inside some of the county schools.

Communications are often criticized after major incidents, and the Stoneman Douglas massacre in no exception. It is not the purpose of this review to discuss the capability of the communications for the Broward County Sheriff's Police, but it is a reasonable caution to the reader to ensure your school can communicate in some manner with local first responders. Schools should have a communications plan internally, and externally with local first response agencies.

This would also be an appropriate time to remind the reader to be sure school personnel are trained and proficient in the principles of the Incident Command System, the local interoperable communications plan, and the mass casualty plan for your jurisdiction.

**Lesson Learned #10: Be aware of significant dates in history which may be a point of concern for persons with anger towards special groups or events.**

For many years, federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies have accepted that persons motivated by a specific ideology may chose a certain date to carry out their attack to bring increased awareness to their acts. Those of us attending a university in the 1970s probably remember the annual spring event called Hash Wednesday on April 20<sup>th</sup> where participants smoked cannabis, listened to

music and partied throughout the day. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, April 20 is more closely associated with the birthday of Adolph Hitler and white supremacist groups may select this date as their target date. April 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> are also associated by militia and white supremacist groups as the anniversary of the Branch Davidian shootout with federal agencies in 1993. Also, on April 19, 1995 Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols detonated a Ryder truck bomb outside of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, partially in response to the federal agents raid on the Branch Davidian compound outside of Waco Texas.

International and domestic terrorist target the use of specific dates to commemorate past events, but others who feel they have been wronged may also choose specific dates to help bring attention to their perceived injustices and help to reinforce their justification for acts of violence. While it may not always be the case for someone committing an act of horror at a school, during a threat assessment if a specific date is discussed by the shooter it may be valuable to examine the date to help identify a motive for their violence.

### **Closing Thoughts**

The use of threat assessment teams has proven effective in many states and locations, and with the benefit of hindsight to the Stoneman Douglas High School massacre the reader can see where a properly staffed, trained and empowered threat assessment team in place the events of February 14, 2018 may have ended differently. It is well documented that school shooters do not commit their acts on the spur of the moment, but rather plan and prepare for extended periods of time. During these periods of planning and preparation the shooter can often be identified, and appropriate action taken; assuming the threat assessment team has the entire school and extended school community engaged and knowledgeable about the threat assessment process.

In the case of Nikolas Cruz, it is extremely likely a threat assessment team would have known about his school disciplinary record and mental health counseling, as well as the frequent calls for police assistance at the residence by the Broward County Sheriff's Department. The School Resource Officer had additional information on Cruz's threats, as did Lynda Cruz who conceivably would have been interviewed by the threat assessment team at some point before her death in November 2017. Ultimately, if the Federal Bureau of Investigation properly documented and followed up on the call to their Public Access Line in early January 2018, the Miami Field Office would have been given the information, who most likely would have contacted the Broward County Sheriff's Department since the

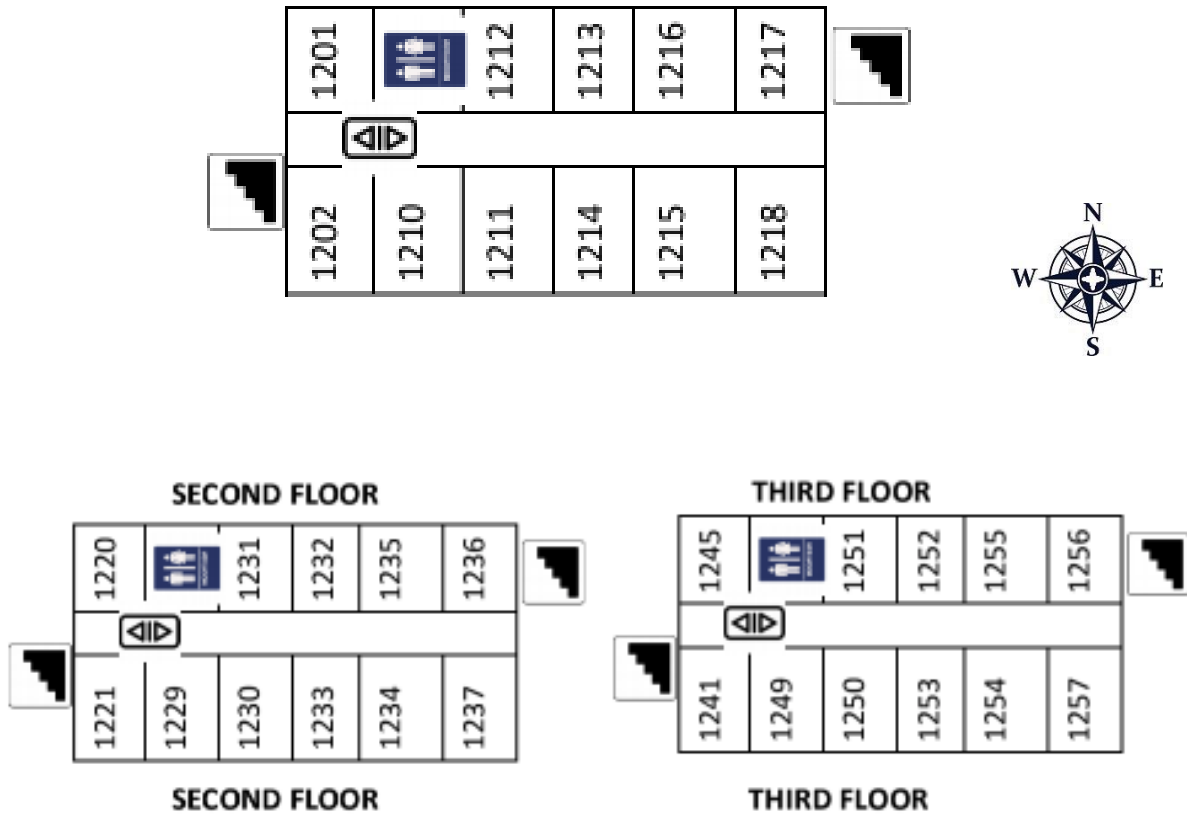
Cruz's lived in Broward County and the sheriff's office had a school resource officer at the high school Cruz previously attended. The call received by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in January 2018, approximately six-weeks before the shooting, had details with sufficient specificity to warrant further investigation and would certainly would have included at least an inquiry into local police records. Conceivably the call to the Federal Bureau of Investigation from September 2017 could have been connected to the call received in January 2018. At this point, a strong criminal case or mental health hearing most certainly would have been initiated and perhaps his assortment of guns confiscated under either federal or state law and additional criminal detention or mental health confinement ordered.

The threat assessment process can be a challenging, frustrating, and time-consuming effort even in the best of situations. In some states a threat assessment team in schools and institutions of higher education is required by law. In other states the school, college, or university may understand the goals and objectives of the threat assessment process and having realized the threat assessment process has tangible benefits they implemented a team for their institution.

Obviously, not all events before and during the acts of Nikolas Cruz were discussed in this review, but we have endeavored to discuss the major issues identified to assist other schools, colleges, and universities in evaluating their own threat assessment process. Whether you focus on the issues discussed in this review or have chosen your own lessons learned, it is important to review your own threat assessment process considering recent incidents, research, and best practices to look for areas of improvement within your processes.

## **Timeline of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Massacre**

- Cruz tells the Snead's that he does not go to school on Valentine's Day when they try wake him up in the morning.
- 2:06 PM-Uber driver picks up Cruz at his residence.
- 2:21 PM – Uber driver drops off Cruz at Stoneman Douglas High School. The Uber driver last saw Cruz walking toward the “1200 building” with a black duffle back and backpack.
- Seen by a 15-year-old student in east stairwell of 1200 bldg. Student saw Cruz loading the rifle and Cruz told the student “You better get out of he here, things are going to start getting messy” (Florida Today). Student fled and told Aaron Feis, one of monitors and a Football coach who was later killed protecting 3 girls from being shot by Cruz.
- Pulled fire alarm or set off smoke grenade to activate the fire alarm system.
- Entered first floor from the east stairwell, walked down first floor hallway randomly shooting students in the hallway and shooting into rooms 1215, 1216, and 1214. Cruz turn around and walked back shooting into rooms 1216, 1215, and 1213, then into west stairwell.
- Took west stairwell up to second floor, walked down hallway randomly shooting students in the hallways and shooting into room 1234. Passed by rooms he found locked.
- Walked up to third floor via east stairwell, killed 6 people in the hallway and discarded an AR-15 rifle, black duffle bag, backpack, ballistic vest, ammunition, gas mask and extra magazines in the stairwell.
- Joined students as they fled the building down the east stairwell.
- Shot over 100 rounds while he was inside of the Freshman Building.
- Fled area with other students past tennis courts, Westglades Middle School, and continued heading west.
- 2:50 PM - Went to Wal-Mart, about ¼ mile way on Holmberg Road, got a drink at Subway inside of Wal-Mart.
- Left Wal-Mart and walked to McDonald's (Shoppes of Heron Lakes).
- 3:00 PM left McDonald's
- 3:40 PM school began dismissing students who were in lockdown situation but not directly impacted by shooting in Freshman building.
- 3:41 PM, approximately 40 minutes after leaving McDonald's he was walking along a residential street in the Pelican Point subdivision in Wyndham Lakes, when a Coral Springs police officer stopped him. Cruz was subsequently arrested.
- 4:59 pm SWAT still clearing school
- 5:39pm, reunification of impacted students begins.



# 1200 Building Floor Plans

“Freshman Building”

Stoneman Douglas High School

Parkland, Florida



Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

1200 Building

East Stairway Entrance



Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

1200 Building

East Entrance, north side





Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

1200 Building

West Entrance, North exposure