



Navigate**360**

*Building safer tomorrows.™*

# **Understanding the Oxford High School Shooting Report: What Went Wrong?**

**OXFORD COMMUNITY SCHOOLS  
INDEPENDENT REPORT ON THE  
SHOOTING AT OXFORD HIGH  
SCHOOL ON NOVEMBER 30, 2021**

*WRITTEN BY*

**JOE HENDRY, PSP, CLEE**

**Senior Director of Onsite Services  
for Navigate360**

While no report is ever perfect, this report was more comprehensive than most. One of the major benefits of this report is that it evaluated preparation, response, and recovery. It was obvious the focus of the report was to place blame for the failure of the behavioral threat assessment process, and I agree with the conclusions of the report drawn by the writers in this area.

As with any report, everyone will continue to have some questions that remain unanswered. Unlike several other reports I have read in response to similar events, this report also places focus on actions taken of staff and students to survive during the event and the plan (ALICE Training®), technology shortfalls, what did work, and documents the unpredictable nature of day-to-day operations that can negatively affect even the most careful planning.

My notes reflect my takeaways from the report beyond the already known failure of the behavioral threat assessment process and who blame was laid upon.

**Joe Hendry, PSP, CLEE**

Senior Director of Onsite Services, Navigate360

## 1. **Lack of professional certified third-party risk assessors led to the catastrophic failure of the behavioral threat assessment process.**

There was a Physical Security Assessment conducted in 2019. This type of assessment is not in-depth enough to identify this type of issue. We identify gaps in almost every education facility we assess in relation to Behavioral Threat Assessment (BTA) and make recommendations based on those findings. If a risk assessment had been conducted in 2019 instead of physical security assessment, the district would have likely been aware of the problems with implementation of BTA two years before the incident occurred. This would have given them sufficient time to place a person officially over the BTA process and implement it correctly.

## 2. **A security grant awarded to the district did not allow for funds to be spent on a risk assessment. Funds could only be spent on physical security measures.**

**This one is a national problem.** A security grant was awarded to the district. It is likely that almost everyone who is a certified expert risk assessor in the field will tell a client to assess first and then make purchases based on the assessment. Under NFPA 3000, the national experts in the fields of law enforcement, fire, EMS, and civilian response have all stated that the first step you take in preparation for a critical event is professional risk assessment.

Instead, the grant specifically stated that it could NOT be used for a risk assessment. Instead, it could only be used for physical purchases. Panic buttons and trauma kits were bought. Once again, an outside professional certified risk assessor would have likely identified the gaps in the BTA process and recommended improvements.

This was the second missed opportunity to prevent the shooting from occurring. The failure of the grant process to permit it to be used for Professional Risk Assessment directly contributed to the failure to discover the gaps in the BTA process.

### 3. The following are notes on the failed BTA process.

1. Superintendent and Administrative Cabinet failed to adopt and oversee threat assessment administrative guidelines with the schools.
2. With no established guidelines or leadership, no effective training occurred.
3. Suicide Intervention policies had not been updated since 2011 and did not meet best practices.
  - **My note:** This is another area a professional risk assessor would have identified. Third missed opportunity.
4. Building-level Administrators, faculty, and staff were unaware of the threat assessment policy or forms.
  - **My note:** This is another area a professional risk assessor would have identified. Fourth missed opportunity.
5. Only a few staff had any training at the building level in BTA and that was only a single day over a period of several years.
  - **My note:** This is another area a professional risk assessor would have identified. Fifth missed opportunity.
6. School Counselors were not handling cases in a consistent way. This is the mark of failure in proper implementation of guidelines and training.
  - **My note:** This is another area a professional risk assessor would have identified. Sixth missed opportunity.
7. Staff stated in interviews that it seemed no one wanted to give (assess???) students a negative permanent record. This is a marked failure of BTA as it shows behaviors were not being properly assessed.
  - **My note:** This is another area a professional risk assessor would have identified. Seventh missed opportunity.

## 4. Inadequate management of security personnel & facility comments.

1. Employee of the school carrying a weapon with no clearly defined role, training, or standard operating guidelines.
2. The district lacks a security director. While not unusual, once a district has more than 4 schools, having a single administrator try to oversee security at all of them creates gaps. Having a security director dedicated to safety and security at all the buildings who is at the cabinet level for the district administration can reduce gaps in training, implementation of policy, record keeping, etc.
3. Both armed staff were off-site. There was a handshake agreement between security personnel and the SRO about one of them being always on-site. But on the day of the event, both were off-site when the shooting occurred. This should have been a formal policy that was being followed and enforced.

**Side note:** It does not appear as if the gunman knew that this had occurred. This is a similar issue that has occurred before at a violent critical incident in Norway (Utoya Island) in 2011. A gunman attacked the island and was actively killing people for an hour before law enforcement arrived. This was due to a plan in which law enforcement would fly in helicopters to the island to address any issues. The day of the shooting, both helicopter crews had been given vacation days. This then caused law enforcement to use small fishing boats to get to the island. This was an unpracticed response which caused some boats to sink with officers on them due to the weight of equipment, which severely delayed the response. Like the Oxford incident, the gunman immediately surrendered when confronted by officers. Also, like the Oxford incident, the gunman did not appear to know that the armed law enforcement response was going to be delayed.

4. There was no card reader on door #5 for SRO or law enforcement entry.

**My note:** All entry doors should have readers. We do not pick the area for an incident and all emergency responders should have access to every entry door without having to use forced entry.

5. The PA System impeded an effective response as it could not be heard in some areas and restrooms. **My note:** A comprehensive mass notification system that is regularly tested (PA, Text, electronic billboards, email alerts) and interconnected was needed. Could have saved a life later in the incident.

## 5. Lack of strong relationships between teachers and students.

We already know that this increases the level of student motivation and learning. They can also be used to enhance security and safety.

1. Gunman shows bullets to students who do not report it to staff.

**My Note:** Students should be trained to report suspicious activity. Students who are not trained to be suspicious do not process the action as a threat. See Something, Say something.

2. **Disagreement with this finding in the report.** “While students can be a valuable source of information about potential threats, it is not the responsibility of school-age children to prevent school shootings.”

**My Note:** We, as a society, all have a responsibility to prevent violence. By not teaching children that we all have a responsibility to keep each other safe, we are reinforcing negative traits in children that will have an adverse effect on society in the long term.

*Comments continue on next page.*

## 6. Use of Nightlocks during the incident.

I heard from some sources that the Nightlocks had stopped the gunman from killing more people during the event. A presentation was given at a large security conference that indicated to attendees that they stopped the gunman from entering classrooms. There is no mention in the report of the gunman attempting to enter any classrooms during the incident. At one point he even walks by an open occupied classroom. He does fire rounds through several doors. This indicates that while this device was used, it did not in any way affect the outcome of the incident any differently than “normal” door locks.

1. In one classroom Nightlocks were unable to be safely installed due to the gunman firing through the doors. Both doors were already locked. Students in the classroom evacuated out the windows during the incident.
2. Students in rooms without teachers took charge and barricaded doors, passed out items to use as countermeasures, and installed Nightlocks. The report does not state that the students locked any doors.

**My note:** The national recommendation from security professionals is that classrooms should be able to be locked using a traditional lockset from the egress side of the door by anyone in the room without the use of fine motor skills. This part of the report indicates that students could potentially not lock the doors. **While the report recommended more Nightlocks be purchased for areas like restrooms, it appears that traditional locksets would have been just as effective at keeping people safe.**

3. The report said that multiple students struggled to use the Nightlock.

**My Note:** This is likely because it is not intuitive and requires fine motor skills to install. Also, professional risk assessors do not recommend training students to use barricade devices as students could use it in the classroom to commit assault, sexual assault, or bullying, and to perpetrate a similar crime as the one that occurred.

## 7. The use of ALICE Training®

From reading the entire report, **all three of the physical responses to a violent critical incident were used- Counter, Evacuation, and Lockdown.** Alert, in both of its forms, was used. **My note:** The only area not fully utilized was Inform, due to another implementation issue that would have been identified during a risk assessment.

- The EOP and ALICE complied with all the applicable legal standards and provided a solid frame for response to the incident.
- The gunman shoots the first 7 victims in 7 seconds. The report states the hallway was full of students due to class passing taking place. This takes place between 12:51:12 and 12:51:19. At 12:51:25 He fires at another student who is running away from him. The report then skips to 12:51:30 before the gunman fires rounds into rooms 245 and 247. This indicates that at that moment the hallway was empty or close to empty as the shooter was not firing at people. The report states that he does not fire at anyone until 12:52:10 when he shoots a student entering the hallway from a courtyard. **My Note:** This indicates that in the first few seconds of the event, students in the hallway initially used the movement concept of counter to create distance to allow for the use of other options in breaking contact. **Because ALICE teaches Counter (movement, noise, distraction, swarming as a last resort) in contact with a threat, this concept of movement allowed students to utilize other options once contact was broken.**
- As Counter was breaking contact with the threat, some students immediately used Evacuation and some students moved into Lockdown in the classrooms. **My Note:** This was happening simultaneously in the same area.
- **The report states that students and staff were using their own judgment on what to do and by doing so saved their own lives in many instances.** **My Note:** As the initial ALERT was given (the gunshots are the real alert under ALICE Training) response began taking place. **The fact that numerous options were being used indicates that there is not one standard response lockdown, but multiple options based on circumstance.**



## 7. Continued...The use of ALICE Training®

- Students and staff used “Inform” to change their response from Lockdown to Evacuation as the gunman passed by their locations. This was done at least in one instance by leaving a classroom, going into a hallway, and exiting immediately out of a perimeter door.

**My Note:** Teachers and Student used their senses to INFORM their response and change it. As the gunman moved further away from their location they changed their response to evacuation.

- **My Note:** Contrary to what had been considered conventional wisdom, large numbers of people running in a hallway did not contribute to an increase in casualties or trampling. This is not addressed in the report, but the fact that it is not mentioned likely means it did not occur. The report does state that teachers and students physically forced others to exit or to get into classrooms. I observed these behaviors hundreds of times in drills. These actions of removing potential victims from open areas were never detrimental to response and improved survivability in drills. Their actions also confused the gunman as the movement and noise likely interrupted his OODA Loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act).
- **My Note:** Student survives by using the movement concept of counter in a restroom with the gunman. The gunman had just executed a student in the restroom when he told the other student to leave a stall and motioned for him to get next to the victim on the ground. The student does not comply and as the gunman motions with the firearm, he runs behind the shooter’s back and out of the door of the bathroom. This is what has been observed in drills and as part of the scientific study of response. **Movement by potential victims in contact with the threat interrupts the dynamics of response during the threat.** In a scenario like this, the gunman is now actually having to move through the OODA Loop and respond to the people who they originally thought were victims. This delay in processing allows potential victims to move to other responses. In many instances in drills, the gunman cannot recall people running past him leaving classrooms. In this case, it allowed for survival during contact and a move to evacuation and then lockdown to a safe location.

## 7. Continued...The use of ALICE Training®

- Students used doors and windows for evacuation. Some students who evacuated congregated just outside of the school and had to be told by staff to keep running. **My Note:** While evacuation was very effective, **it appears that rally points off campus were missing as part of the training with students. This is another area that would have been identified in a full-scale risk assessment.** Students evacuating may not have staff with them (obviously this happened in classrooms with this incident). Without designated rally points off-campus, students do not have direction on where to go to begin regaining accountability or where to remain safe.
- The report holds a recommendation for not using the words “Drill” or “Lockdown” when giving a real Alert. This confused people who initially could not determine if it was a drill or if they were being told to only lockdown. **My Note:** “Initiate ALICE Protocols” followed by information on the threat allows people choose which of the multi-option responses to use, not just one.
- **Staff did not assign someone to use the camera system during the event and act as the “Inform” part of the response. This may have been able to save an additional life** if it could have been heard in the restroom where the student was killed (there was no speaker in the restroom). The gunman had moved far away from the restroom at one point during the incident. If the students had been able to hear information during the incident as to the threat’s location, they would have had the opportunity to leave the restroom, cross a short distance to an exit, and leave the school grounds. **My Note: This is an area that would have been discovered in a risk assessment.** Both the lack of INFORM in announcements during the incident and lack of speakers.
- After the shooter was apprehended, the principal was prevented by Law Enforcement from making further announcements (INFORM). This kept students, staff, and teachers in the dark about what was occurring. **My Note:** This is a problem that should be addressed in planning the response process. Keeping people at a heightened level of awareness can cause recovery problems and add to stress levels unnecessarily. Continuing to inform people in lockdown what is occurring and directing them on what actions to take as a scene is secured by law enforcement is part of establishing unified command and the Incident Command System (ICS).

## 8. **It does not appear from the report that rally points or the Notification Center was planned.**

The report did say that recovery did not go well. The report does not expand on the Continuity of Operations Plan as it does the Emergency Operations Plan. An indication of this is that students and staff in interviews said they were told to evacuate to the Meijer Store. When they arrived, the Meijer Staff were unaware that they were a rally point or Notification Center. Since a Notification Center is where recovery begins (along with law enforcement interviews, initial mental health services, potential off-site casualty collection point, notification of dead, wounded, or missing students and staff, and reunification) this likely adversely effected recovery in its earliest stage. **My note:** There should have been training and, at minimum, a Memorandum of Understanding between the District and the Meijers Store. **This would have been discovered if a risk assessment had taken place.**

## FINAL NOTES

While the failure of the Behavioral Threat Assessment (BTA) process is the focus of the report, it misses the much larger picture. **The failure to conduct an unbiased third-party Risk Assessment of the district would have likely discovered not only the problems with BTA, but several other issues documented in the report.** These would include the gap in ALICE with INFORM, the problem with the panic button system not working as advertised, problems with the notification systems (Public Address), purchase of products for securing doors over upgraded interior locks, etc.

**If prevention of violence and other issues is the goal, then the first focus of prevention is professional risk assessment.** This identifies the gaps in plans, training, and physical security, and prioritizes how to plug them with changes and expenditures. Risk assessments inform Educational Administrators of the safety and security issues a district faces and gives them solutions as a way forward. **If you do not assess it, you will never solve it.**