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**Lessons Learned  
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# LESSON LEARNED

## School Safety: Improving Information Sharing between School District and Law Enforcement Officials

### SUMMARY

School administrators and law enforcement officials should consider establishing protocols for exchanging student criminal and disciplinary records. Information sharing can assist school and law enforcement personnel with identifying potentially dangerous individuals and with preventing attacks at schools.

### DESCRIPTION

On April 20, 1999, two students at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado began an armed assault that resulted in 15 deaths and 24 injuries. The incident lasted for approximately 47 minutes during which the two heavily armed seniors fired on their teachers and fellow students, scattered homemade explosives throughout the school, and exchanged gunfire with law enforcement personnel before committing suicide.

Columbine High School administrators and Jefferson County Sheriff's Office officials did not exchange information regarding the criminal and disciplinary records of the perpetrators prior to the attack. Columbine's principal suspended the two perpetrators in October 1997 for hacking into the school's computer system, but did not notify law enforcement officials. Three months later a Jefferson County deputy arrested the perpetrators for breaking into and stealing contents from a van, but the Sheriff's Office did not report the arrests to school administrators. In March 1998, parents of a student at Columbine filed a complaint with the Sheriff's Office regarding a threat against their son posted on the Web page of one of the attackers. The Sheriff's Office reported the complaint to the School Resource Officer at Columbine but did not notify school administrators. School and law enforcement personnel might have investigated the perpetrators and prevented the attack if this information had been exchanged.

The Columbine Review Commission recommended that school administrators and law enforcement officials establish protocols for exchanging the criminal and disciplinary records of students to the extent permitted by state and federal law. Timely information sharing may assist school and law enforcement personnel with identifying potentially dangerous individuals and with preventing attacks.

### *Implementation*

In 2000, Colorado enacted legislation to clarify what information can be shared between the state's school administrators and law enforcement officials. The statute:

- Authorizes law enforcement personnel to request the disciplinary and attendance records of students under investigation;

- Authorizes principals or superintendents to obtain students' records maintained by local and state law enforcement agencies;
- Requires prosecuting attorneys to notify a principal whenever a delinquency petition is filed against a student in juvenile court;
- Requires principals to be notified whenever a student under the age of 18 is convicted of a crime of violence, a crime involving controlled substances, or a crime that would subject the student to mandatory expulsion; and
- Requires school administrators to report criminal offenses committed against teachers and school employees to law enforcement officials.

The Colorado General Assembly also required school boards to adopt written information sharing agreements with law enforcement agencies. However, these laws proved difficult to implement; a year later, many school districts and law enforcement agencies still had not developed written agreements. In May 2001, the Colorado Attorney General's Office developed a model agreement to assist in the development of information sharing agreements.

#### **CITATION**

Colorado Attorney General's Office. *Colorado School Violence Prevention and Student Discipline Manual: Revised Edition*. Sep 2004.

[https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content\\_id=18736](https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=18736)

Colorado Attorney General's Office. *Colorado Juvenile Information Exchange Laws: A Model for Implementation*. May 2001.

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Columbine Review Commission. *The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission*. May 2001.

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