Proposal
K-12 School-Based Mass Shootings in the United States
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Mass shootings of children and their teachers while in school is a uniquely American phenomenon. Despite the frequency of their occurrence, there is a corresponding absence of a comparable large body of research. There are several reasons for this; but the absence of research limits the ability of policy makers to make decisions based on scientific principles supported by quantifiable, objective evidence rather than emotion and opinion. The research that does exist primarily focuses on the perpetrator or their motivation. This study aims to expand this base of knowledge through a more macro level analysis of the offense itself using the school as the unit of analysis. Incorporating a spatial approach, the purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive analysis of selected variables associated K-12 school-based mass shootings.

Mass shootings of children in school evokes a visceral response. With each occurrence, solemn intonations of “thoughts and prayers” permeate the airwaves. The perpetrator in these incidents is alternately denounced as criminal or characterized as mentally ill. Both of these characterizations carry the inference that prevention efforts should be directed towards pre-incident identification and subsequent restraint of the perpetrator. But unless the world actually mimics Minority Report (2002) a Tom Cruise film where murderers are arrested and punished before they commit the offense; that is not possible. In a practical sense, however, these characterizations more insidiously carry the implication that little can be done by society to prevent the occurrence of these incidents.

Each time a school-based mass shooting occurs, it does so not only within the school itself, but also within a particular community and state. This research posits that these concentric geographic spaces provide an important contextual and environmental role in the occurrence of these incidents. A quantitative study is proposed which will begin with an aggregated look at school-based mass shootings for the past century and then transition to an in-depth look at a selected subset of shootings which have occurred within the past two decades. A contextual examination will be conducted including variable related to the following categories:

- Weapon (i.e. – type, method of acquisition)
- Perpetrator
- School
- Victim
- Geospatial and demographic characteristics of the school neighborhood
A geospatial analysis linked to policy enactments will be implemented using variables in the following conceptual categories:

- State policies on gun laws (methods of acquisition), sentencing and homicides; and
- Community geospatial analysis of homicide rate, leisure gun use, laws for methods for acquisition of guns, demographic characteristics

The study will conclude with a discussion of the public policy implications of the findings.