

# Congress considers taking Colorado student tipline national

Safe2Tell is credited with helping save kids' lives in Colorado. Now Congress is considering helping expand the program nationwide.

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Across the country, school districts have sought federal grants to fund revamped security and training, as well as to start crisis intervention teams.

Meanwhile, students regularly undergo active shooter and lockdown drills, and it's all aimed at trying to prevent another tragedy.

Everyone is expected to be vigilant at all times. The mantra is: "If you see something, say something."

"The kids are the detectors," said John Nicoletti, a public safety psychologist who has helped develop threat assessment teams for schools around the country. "They're out there, they are going to see things to begin with, so kids need to be trained on what to look for and how to report it."

In Colorado, a statewide program called Safe2Tell gives students a place to report any threatening or suspicious behavior anonymously and expect that an adult will act on the tip.

**VIDEO** | [See a short animation showing how Safe2Tell works](#)

Safe2Tell is a program that is constantly monitored and takes in tips through phone calls, an online form or a mobile app. Tips are seen by law enforcement, which gets involved if it's appropriate, and sent to the affected schools, where they are investigated. In some cases, students are able to share photos or videos posted online, including threats from classmates against the school or other students – threats Nicoletti described as "broadcasts."

"If somebody broadcasts they are about to do that, believe them and take action," Nicoletti said.

During the first two months of this school year, Safe2Tell Colorado received 59 tips related to a planned school attack. Often, multiple students will see or hear the same threatening message, and Safe2Tell can receive many tips about the same incident.

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"Any kind of a planned school attack, that kind of goes directly to law enforcement and they are involved," said Richard Payne, the security director for Douglas County Schools.

In Douglas County, students can use Safe2Tell or another anonymous reporting tool called “Text-A-Tip” which allows kids to send a text message directly to law enforcement when they think something is wrong.

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During the last school year, “Text-A-Tip” received more than 1,100 reports about students in the Douglas County School District who were allegedly using drugs and alcohol, were victims or perpetrators of bullying, who may have been planning a school attack or attempting to hurt or kill themselves.

In each case, the tip was received by the sheriff’s department and the district’s safety and security team, which then investigated to determine whether it was credible and acted on those that were.

“The key is identifying situations early,” Payne said. “Studying school planned attacks early.”

The district couldn’t say how many planned school attacks might have been prevented, but in at least one notable case from 2015, deputies and school administrators received an anonymous tip about a young woman attending Mountain Vista High School who was possibly planning to hurt herself.

Later, investigators learned the student and a classmate had planned what appeared to be an attack on the school, including researching the purchase of guns. Both girls were taken into custody.

One was sentenced to five years in the Department of Youth Corrections [after pleading guilty to conspiracy to commit murder](#). The other was sentenced to [three years in the youth corrections system](#).

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Far more common than threats regarding planned school attacks are threats of suicide.

Since Douglas county launched the Text-A-Tip program in 2009, sheriff’s officials believe they have stopped at least 27 suicides.

In one recent incident, Payne remembers responding to such a tip.

“We were able to get law enforcement to respond to the house and actually intervene with a girl that was in crisis which saved her life,” Payne said. “If it saves one life, then it’s a success.”

Threats of suicide were the single largest category of tips to Safe2Tell across the state.

During August and September 2018, Safe2Tell Colorado received 432 tips regarding suicide threats, although it’s possible many of those were duplicates.

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“We are saving kids’ lives every single weekend, on Safe2Tell, and that’s the value of Safe2Tell,” said Brian Ewert, the superintendent of Littleton Public Schools.

“And some weekends, it can be absolutely overwhelming,” Ewert said.

“It takes a safety and security team, it takes mental health professionals and it also takes a close partnership with law enforcement depending on the particular Safe2Tell call.”

In part because of the success of programs like Text-A-Tip and Safe2Tell in Colorado,

U.S. Reps. Mike Coffman (R-Colo.) and James Himes (D-Conn.) have co-sponsored a bill that would provide grant money to help states establish an anonymous 24-hour monitored program, like Safe2Tell, that would alert law enforcement of potential threats in schools.

“I believe, in Colorado, we have a real success story,” Coffman told 9NEWS. “Safe2Tell is an extraordinary program and I think the rest of the country needs to take a look at it.”

The Colorado Legislature has required Safe2Tell to analyze the tips and create an annual report detailing the number of tips that are received about a single incident, and to provide the public with more information about how tips are handled. The first report [will be made public by Jan. 2019.](#)