

Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting

The **Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting** occurred on December 14, 2012, in Newtown, Connecticut, United States, when 20-year-old Adam Lanza fatally shot 20 children between six and seven years old, as well as six adult staff members. Before driving to the school, he shot and killed his mother at their Newtown home. As first responders arrived at the school, Lanza committed suicide by shooting himself in the head.

The incident was the deadliest mass shooting at either a high school or grade school in U.S. history and the fourth-deadliest mass shooting by a single person in U.S. history.^[a] The shooting prompted renewed debate about gun control in the United States, including proposals to make the background-check system universal, and for new federal and state gun legislation banning the sale and manufacture of certain types of semi-automatic firearms and magazines with more than ten rounds of ammunition.

A November 2013 report issued by the Connecticut State Attorney's office concluded that Lanza acted alone and planned his actions, but provided no indication why he did so, or why he targeted the school. A report issued by the Office of the Child Advocate in November 2014 said that Lanza had Asperger's syndrome and as a teenager suffered from depression, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder, but concluded that they had "neither caused nor led to his murderous acts." The report went on to say, "his severe and deteriorating internalized mental health problems... combined with an atypical preoccupation with violence... (and) access to deadly weapons... proved a recipe for mass murder"^[18]

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Perpetrator

Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting



Police at the scene of the shooting

Location	Sandy Hook Elementary School Newtown, Connecticut, U.S.
Coordinates	41°25′12″N 73°16′43″W﻿ / ﻿ ^[1]
Date	December 14, 2012 9:35 a.m. – 9:40 a.m. ^{[2][3][4]} EST (UTC−05:00)
Target	Students and staff at Sandy Hook Elementary School
Attack type	School shooting, murder–suicide, matricide, spree shooting
Weapons	Bushmaster XM15-E2S rifle with ten 30-round magazines Glock 20SF handgun ^{[5][6][7][8][9]}
Deaths	28 total; 27 at the school (including the perpetrator) and the perpetrator's mother at home ^{[10][11]}
Non-fatal injuries	2 ^[12]
Perpetrator	Adam Lanza ^{[13][14]}

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Background

As of November 30, 2012, 456 children were enrolled in kindergarten through fourth grade at Sandy Hook Elementary School.^[19] The school's security protocols had recently been upgraded, requiring visitors to be individually admitted after visual and identification review by video monitor. Doors to the school were locked at 9:30 a.m. each day after morning arrivals.^[20]

Newtown is in Fairfield County, Connecticut, about 60 miles (100 km) from New York City.^[21] Violent crime had been rare in the town of 28,000 residents; there was only one homicide in the town in the ten years before the school shooting.^[22]

Under Connecticut law at the time,^[23] the 20-year-old Lanza was old enough to carry a long gun, such as a rifle or shotgun,^[24] but too young to own or carry handguns.^[25]

Events

Murder of Nancy Lanza

Some time before 9:30 a.m. EST on Friday, December 14, 2012, Lanza shot and killed his mother Nancy Lanza, aged 52, at their Newtown home.^[35] Investigators later found her body clad in pajamas, in her bed, with four gunshot wounds to her head.^[36] Lanza then drove to Sandy Hook Elementary School in his mother's car.^{[35][37]}

Mass shooting begins

Shortly after 9:35 a.m., using his mother's Bushmaster XM15-E2S rifle and ten magazines with 30 rounds each,^{[5][6][7][8][9]} Lanza shot his way through a glass panel next to the locked front entrance doors of the school.^{[38][39][40][41]} He was wearing black clothing, yellow earplugs, sunglasses,^[42] and an olive green utility vest.^[8] Initial reports which had stated that he had been wearing body armor were incorrect.^[43] Some of those present heard the initial shots on the school intercom system, which was being used for morning announcements.^[20]

List of casualties

Killed:

Perpetrator's mother

Nancy Lanza, 52, (shot at home)^[26]

School personnel

Rachel D'Avino, 29, teacher's aide^[27]

Dawn Hochsprung, 47, principal

Anne Marie Murphy, 52, teacher's aide^[28]

Lauren Rousseau, 30, teacher

Mary Sherlach, 56, school psychologist

Victoria Leigh Soto, 27, teacher

Students

Charlotte Bacon, 6^[29]

Daniel Barden, 7

Olivia Engel, 6

Josephine Gay, 7

Dylan Hockley, 6

Madeleine Hsu, 6

Catherine Hubbard, 6



Red circle: Sandy Hook Elementary School
Black circle: Lanza household

Principal Dawn Hochsprung and school psychologist Mary Sherlach were meeting with other faculty members when they heard, but did not recognize, gunshots. Hochsprung, Sherlach, and lead teacher Natalie Hammond went into the hall to determine the source of the sounds and encountered Lanza. A faculty member who was at the meeting said that the three women called out "Shooter! Stay put!" which alerted their colleagues to the danger and saved their lives.^[44] An aide heard gunshots. A teacher hiding in the math lab heard school janitor Rick Thorne yell, "Put the gun down!" (Thorne survived).^[45] Lanza killed both Hochsprung and Sherlach.^[46] Hammond was hit first in the leg, and then sustained another gunshot wound. She lay still in the hallway and then, not hearing any more noise, crawled back to the conference room and pressed her body against the door to keep it closed.^[47] She was later treated at Danbury Hospital.^{[46][48]}

A nine-year-old boy stated that he heard the shooter say: "Put your hands up!" and someone else say "Don't shoot!" He also heard many people yelling and many gunshots over the intercom while he, his classmates, and his teacher took refuge in a closet in the gymnasium.^[49] Diane Day, a school therapist who had been at the faculty meeting with Hochsprung, heard screaming followed by more gunshots. A second teacher, who was a substitute kindergarten teacher, was wounded in the attack. While she was closing a door further down the hallway she was hit in the foot with a bullet that ricocheted. Lanza never entered her classroom.^{[12][50][51]}

After killing Hochsprung and Sherlach, Lanza entered the main office but apparently did not see the people hiding there, and returned to the hallway.^[41] School nurse Sarah (Sally) Cox,^{[52][53]} 60, hid under a desk in her office. She later described seeing the door opening and Lanza's boots and legs facing her desk from approximately 20 feet (6.1 m) away. He remained standing for a few seconds before turning around and leaving. She and the school secretary Barbara Halstead called 9-1-1 and hid in a first-aid supply closet for as long as four hours.^[54] Janitor Rick Thorne ran through hallways, alerting classrooms.^[55]

Classroom shootings

Lanza then entered a first-grade classroom where Lauren Rousseau, a substitute teacher, had herded her first grade students to the back of the room, and was trying to hide them in a bathroom, when Lanza forced his way into the classroom.^[50] Rousseau, Rachel D'Avino (a behavioral therapist who had been employed for a week at the school to work with a special needs student), and fifteen students in Rousseau's class were all killed. Fourteen of the children were dead at the scene; one injured child was taken to a hospital for treatment, but was later declared dead.^[47] Most of the teachers and students were found crowded together in the bathroom.^[56] A six-year-old girl, the sole survivor, was found by police in the classroom following the shooting.^[47] The surviving girl was hidden in one of the corners of the classroom's bathroom during the shooting.^[57] The girl's family pastor said that she survived the mass shooting by remaining still, and playing dead. When she reached her mother, she said, "Mommy, I'm okay, but all my friends are dead." The child described the shooter as "a very angry man."^{[58][59]} A girl hiding in a bathroom with two teachers told police that she heard a boy in the classroom screaming, "Help me! I don't want to be here!" to which Lanza responded, "Well, you're here," followed by more hammering sounds.^[60]

Chase Kowalski, 7
Jesse Lewis, 6
Ana Márquez-Greene, 6
James Mattioli, 6
Grace McDonnell, 7
Emilie Parker, 6
Jack Pinto, 6
Noah Pozner, 6
Caroline Previdi, 6^[30]
Jessica Rekos, 6
Avielle Richman, 6
Benjamin Wheeler, 6
Allison Wyatt, 6

Perpetrator

Adam Lanza, 20 (suicide)

Wounded:

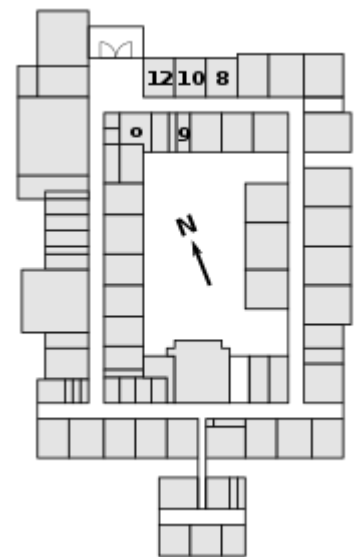
Natalie Hammond, 40, lead teacher

Deborah Pisan^[31]

Sources:^{[32][33][34]}

Lanza next went to another first-grade classroom nearby; at this point, there are conflicting reports about the order of events. According to some reports, the classroom's teacher, Victoria Leigh Soto, had concealed some of the students in a closet or bathroom, and some of the other students were hiding under desks.^[50] Soto was walking back to the classroom door to lock it when Lanza entered the classroom.^[61] Lanza walked to the back of the classroom, saw the children under the desks, and shot them. First grader Jesse Lewis shouted at his classmates to run for safety, and several of them did. Lewis was looking at Lanza when Lanza fatally shot him.^[62] Another account, given by a surviving child's father, said that Soto had moved the children to the back of the classroom, and that they were seated on the floor when Lanza entered. According to this account, neither Lanza nor any of the occupants of the classroom spoke. Lanza stared at the people on the floor, pointed the gun at a boy seated there, but did not fire at the boy, who ultimately survived.^[63] The boy got up and ran out of the classroom and was among the survivors.^[60]

A *Hartford Courant* report said that six of the children who escaped did so when Lanza stopped shooting, either because his weapon jammed or he erred in reloading it.^[50] Earlier reports said that, as Lanza entered her classroom, Soto told him that the children were in the auditorium. When several of the children came out of their hiding places and tried to run for safety, Lanza fatally shot them. Soto put herself between her students and the shooter, who then fatally shot her.^[64] Anne Marie Murphy, the teacher's aide who worked with special-needs students in Soto's classroom, was found covering six-year-old Dylan Hockley, who also died.^{[65][66]} Soto and four children were found dead in the classroom, Soto near the north wall of the room with a set of keys nearby.^{[47]:14} One child was taken to the hospital, but was pronounced dead.^{[47]:14} Six surviving children from the class and a school bus driver took refuge at a nearby home.^[67] According to the official report released by the state's attorney, nine children ran from Soto's classroom and survived, while two children were found by police hiding in a class bathroom.^{[47]:14} In all, 11 children from Soto's class survived.^[62] Five of Soto's students were killed.^[68]



Floorplan of Sandy Hook Elementary; Classrooms 8 (Rousseau / D'Avino), 10 (Soto / Murphy) and 12 (Roig) are labeled along with the main office (o) and Conference Room 9 (Hochsprung / Sherlach / Hammond)

Survivors

First grade teacher Kaitlin Roig, 29 years old, hid 14 students in a bathroom and barricaded the door, telling them to be completely quiet to remain safe.^{[69][70]} It is believed that Lanza bypassed her classroom, which was the first classroom on the left side of the hallway; possibly because, following a lockdown drill weeks earlier, Roig had failed to remove a piece of black construction paper covering the small window in her classroom door. Lanza may have assumed that Roig's classroom was empty because the door was closed and the window covered.^[50]

School library staff Yvonne Cech and Maryann Jacob first hid 18 children in a part of the library the school used for lockdown in practice drills. Discovering that one door would not lock, they had the children crawl into a storage room, where Cech barricaded the door with a filing cabinet.^{[10][49][71]}

Music teacher Maryrose Kristopik, 50, barricaded her fourth-graders in a tiny supply closet during the rampage.^[72] Lanza arrived moments later, pounding on the door and yelling, "Let me in," while the students in Kristopik's class quietly hid inside.^[73]

Two third-grade students, chosen as classroom helpers, were walking down the hallway to the office to deliver the morning attendance sheet as the shooting began. Teacher Abbey Clements pulled both children into her classroom, where they hid.^[74]

Laura Feinstein, a reading specialist at the school, gathered two students from outside her classroom and hid with them under desks after they heard gunshots.^[75] Feinstein called the school office and tried to call 911, but could not connect due to lack of reception on her cell phone. She hid with the children for approximately 40 minutes, at which point law enforcement came to lead them out of the room.^[76]

Shooter's suicide

The police heard the final shot at 9:40 a.m.; they believe that it was Lanza shooting himself in the lower rear portion of his head with the Glock 20SF in classroom 10.^[77] Lanza's body was found wearing a pale green pocket vest over a black polo shirt, over a black T-shirt, black sneakers, black fingerless gloves, black socks, and a black canvas belt.^{[77][78]} Other objects found in the vicinity of Lanza include a black boonie hat and thin frame glasses. The Glock was found, apparently jammed, near Lanza, and the rifle was found several feet away from him.^[77] A 9 mm SIG Sauer P226, which was not fired during the incident, was found on Lanza's person.^[79]

Immediate aftermath

Authorities determined that Lanza reloaded frequently during the shootings, sometimes firing only 15 rounds from a 30-round magazine.^[80] He shot all but two of his victims multiple times.^{[81][82]} Most of the shooting took place in two first-grade classrooms near the entrance of the school.^[83] The students among the victims totaled eight boys and twelve girls, all either six or seven years old,^[84] and the six adults were all women who worked at the school. Bullets were also found in at least three cars parked outside the school, leading police to believe that he fired at a teacher who was standing near a window.^{[50][80]} When police interviewed survivors, a teacher recalled hearing Lanza curse several times, as well as say such things as, "Look at me!" and "Come over here!" and "Look at them!"^[60]

Police response

The first call to 911 was around 9:35 a.m. Newtown 911 police dispatch first broadcast that there was a shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary (SHES) at 9:36 a.m., about 30 seconds after they received the first call.^[85] Connecticut State Police (CSP) were dispatched at 9:37 a.m.^[69] Newtown police arrived at the school street at 9:39 a.m., approximately four and a half minutes after the 911 call, and Connecticut State Police arrived at the school street at 9:46 a.m. Newtown police first entered the school at 9:45 a.m., approximately ten minutes after the first 911 call and approximately 14 minutes after the shooting started. This was approximately five minutes after the last shot was heard.^[47] No shots were fired by the police.^{[3][86]}

The Newtown police and Connecticut State Police mobilized local police dog and police tactical units, a bomb squad, and a state police helicopter.^[87] Police

locked down the school and began evacuating the survivors room by room, escorting groups of students and adults away from the school. They swept the school for other shooters at least four times.

At approximately 10:00 a.m., Danbury Hospital sent extra medical personnel in expectation of having to treat numerous victims. Three wounded patients were evacuated to the hospital, where two children were later declared dead.^[88] The other was an unidentified adult.^[12]

The New York City medical examiner dispatched a portable morgue to assist the authorities.^[20] The victims' bodies were removed from the school and formally identified during the night after the shooting.^{[89][90]} A state trooper was assigned to each victim's family to protect their privacy and provide them with information.

On December 4, 2013, seven 911 calls relating to the shooting were made public.^[91]

First response timeline ^[47]	
Time	Event
9:35 a.m.	Shooter is believed to first enter SHES.
9:35:39 a.m.	First 911 call to Newtown Police is received.
9:36:06 a.m.	911 dispatcher broadcasts shooting at SHES.
9:37:38 a.m.	Connecticut State Police dispatched to SHES.
9:39:00 a.m.	First Newtown police arrives behind SHES.
9:39:13 a.m.	Two more Newtown officers arrive at SHES.
9:40:03 a.m.	Last shot heard. Believed to be shooter's suicide.
9:42:39 a.m.	Newtown police reports shooter's car license plate.
9:44:47 a.m.	Newtown police officers enter SHES.
9:46:23 a.m.	Connecticut State Police arrive at SHES.
9:46:48 a.m.	Connecticut State Police enter SHES.

Investigation

On-site

Investigators did not find a suicide note or any messages referring to the planning of the attack.^{[78][92]} Janet Robinson, superintendent of Newtown schools, said she had not found any connection between Lanza's mother and the school in contrast to initial media reports that stated Lanza's mother had worked there.^{[10][93]} Police also investigated whether Lanza was the person who had been in an altercation with four staff members at Sandy Hook School the day before the massacre. It was presumed that he killed two of the four staff members involved in the altercation (the principal and the psychologist) and wounded the third (the lead teacher) in the attack; the fourth staff member was not at the school that day.^[94] The state police stated that they did not know of any reports about any altercations at the school.^[95]

Police sources initially reported Lanza's sibling, Ryan Lanza, as the perpetrator. This was likely because the perpetrator was carrying his brother's identification, Ryan told The Jersey Journal.^[96] Lanza's brother voluntarily submitted to questioning by New Jersey State Police, Connecticut State Police, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Police said he was not considered a suspect, and he was not taken into custody.^{[37][97][98]} Ryan Lanza said he had not been in touch with his brother since 2010.^{[99][100]} Connecticut State Police indicated their concern about misinformation being posted on social media sites and threatened prosecution of anyone involved with such activities.^[101]

A large quantity of unused ammunition was recovered inside the school along with three semi-automatic firearms found with Lanza: a .223-caliber Bushmaster XM15-E2S rifle, a 10mm Glock 20SF handgun, and a 9mm SIG Sauer P226 handgun.^[5] Outside the school, an Izhmash Saiga-12 shotgun was found in the car Lanza had driven.^{[5][7]}

On March 28, 2013, court documents released from the investigation showed that the school shooting had occurred in the space of less than five minutes with 156 shots fired. This comprised 154 shots from the rifle and two shots from the 10mm pistol. Lanza fired one shot from the Glock in the hallway and killed himself with another shot from the pistol to the head.^{[102][103]}

Off-site

Shortly after the shooting, police announced that Lanza used the rifle to kill the victims at the school.^[104] At a press conference on December 15, Dr. H. Wayne Carver II, the Chief Medical Examiner of Connecticut, was asked about the wounds, and replied "All the ones that I know of at this point were caused by the long weapon."^{[10][105][95]} When asked if the children suffered before dying, Carver replied by stating that "If so, not for very long".^[106] Carver, whose office autopsied the victims and who personally performed seven, said the injuries were "devastating" and that parents identified their children from photographs to spare them the sight. All the child victims were first graders, and all were killed with the Bushmaster X15. Carver said the bullets used were "designed in such a fashion the enegy is deposited in the tissue so the bullet stays in."^{[10][84]}

Investigators evaluated Lanza's body, looking for evidence of drugs or medication through toxicology tests.^[107] Unusually for an investigation of this type, DNA testing of Lanza was utilized.^{[108][109]} The results of the toxicology report were published in October 2013, and stated that no alcohol or drugs were found in his system.^[110] Lanza's autopsy showed no tumors or gross deformities in his brain.^[111]

Lanza removed the hard drive from his computer and damaged it prior to the shooting, creating a challenge for investigators to recover data.^[112] At the time of publication of the final report, it had not been possible to recover data from it.^[78] Police believe that Lanza extensively researched earlier mass shootings, including the 2011 Norway attacks and the 2006 West Nickel Mines School shooting at a one-room school in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. Police found that Lanza had downloaded videos relating to the Columbine High School massacre other shootings and two videos of suicide by gunshot.^[113]

Details of the investigation were reported by law enforcement officials at a meeting of the International Association of Police Chiefs and Colonels held during the week of March 1, 2013. An article published in the New York Daily News on March 17, 2013, provided purported details of this report by an anonymous law enforcement veteran who had attended the meeting.^[114] The source stated that

the investigation had found that Lanza had created a 7-by-4-foot sized spreadsheet listing around 500 mass murderers and the weapons they used, which was considered to have taken years of work and to have been used by Lanza as a "score sheet".^[114] On March 18, 2013, Lt. Paul Vance of the Connecticut State Police responded that the information from this meeting was "law enforcement sensitive information" and considered the release to be a leak.^[115]

The March 28 documents also provided details on items found at Lanza's home, including three samurai swords, a newspaper article about the Northern Illinois University shooting, and a National Rifle Association certificate.^[102] The NRA denied that Adam Lanza or Nancy Lanza were members and reporters noted that the NRA site provides training certificate completion templates for courses offered by NRA Certified Instructors.^[116] A gun safe was found in a bedroom and investigators found more than 1,400 rounds of ammunition and other firearms.^[117] At home, Lanza had access to three more firearms: a .45 Henry rifle, a .30 Enfield rifle, and a .22 Marlin rifle.^{[118][119][120]} These were legally owned by Lanza's mother who was described as a gun enthusiast.^{[121][122]} According to Time, authorities also found a photograph of Lanza holding a gun to his head at his home following his death.^[123]

According to *The New York Times*, law enforcement officials commented that Lanza would spend most of his time in his basement doing solitary activities. According to the same officials, it also appeared that Lanza "may have taken target practice in the basement".^[124]

Final reports

State Attorney's report

The final report of the State Attorney summarizing the investigation into the shooting was published on November 25, 2013. It concluded that Adam Lanza had acted alone, and that the case was closed. The report noted that "[Lanza] had a familiarity with and access to firearms and ammunition and an obsession with mass murders, in particular the April 1999 shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado." The report did not identify a specific motive for the shooting, stating, "The evidence clearly shows that the shooter planned his actions, including the taking of his own life, but there is no clear indication why he did so, or why he targeted Sandy Hook elementary school."^{[125][126]}

On the question of Lanza's state of mind, the report noted "significant mental health issues that affected his ability to live a normal life and to interact with others, even those to whom he should have been close... What contribution this made to the shootings, if any, is unknown as those mental health professionals who saw him did not see anything that would have predicted his future behavior." The report found no evidence that Lanza had taken drugs or medication that would have affected his behavior, and observed, "'Why did the shooter murder twenty-seven people, including twenty children?' Unfortunately, that question may never be answered conclusively, despite the collection of extensive background information on the shooter through a multitude of interviews and other sources."^{[78][127]}

On December 27, 2013, police released thousands of pages of documents pertaining to the investigation. In accordance with law, the names of victims and witnesses were redacted or withheld. The summary report included information about items found on Lanza's computer equipment, including writings and material about previous mass shootings.^{[128][129]} A former teacher of Lanza's noted that he exhibited antisocial behavior, rarely interacted with other students, and was obsessed with writing "about battles, destruction and war."^[130]

Report of the Office of the Child Advocate

The Report of the Office of the Child Advocate concluded: "There was not one thing that was necessarily the tipping point driving Lanza to commit the Sandy Hook shooting. Rather there was a cascade of events, many self-imposed, that included: loss of school; absence of work; disruption of the relationship with his one friend; virtually no personal contact with family; virtually total and increasing isolation; fear of losing his home and of a change in his relationship with Mrs. Lanza, his only caretaker and connection; worsening OCD; depression and anxiety; profound and possibly worsening anorexia; and an increasing obsession with mass murder occurring in the total absence of any engagement with the outside world. Adam increasingly lived in an alternate universe in which ruminations about mass shootings were his central preoccupation."^[131]

The authors also noted that despite multiple developmental and mental health problems, Lanza had not received adequate mental health treatment. They wrote: "It is fair to surmise that, had Lanza's mental illness been adequately treated in the last years of his life, one predisposing factor to the tragedy of Sandy Hook might have been mitigated^[132]

The report also tentatively disagreed with the conclusions of the State Attorney about why Lanza targeted Sandy Hook. They noted that "According to the FBI, shooters are likely to target places or people that are familiar to them... The elementary school may have been targeted because he could overpower people, a dynamic that is very important for mass shooters as they do not want to be thwarted".^[131]

Perpetrator

Adam Peter Lanza (April 22, 1992 – December 14, 2012) and his mother, Nancy Lanza, lived in Sandy Hook, 5 miles (8 km) from the elementary school.^[133] He did not have a criminal record.^{[13][134][135]} He had access to guns through his mother, who was described as a "gun enthusiast who owned at least a dozen firearms".^{[136][137][138][139]} She often took her two sons to a local shooting range, where they learned to shoot.^{[140][141]} Lanza's father has said that he does not believe Nancy feared Adam. She did not confide any fear of Adam to her sister or to her best friend, slept with her bedroom door unlocked, and kept guns in the house where she lived with Adam.^[142]

Education

Lanza attended Sandy Hook Elementary School for four and a half years.^[143] He started at Newtown Middle School in 2004,^[144] but according to his mother was "wracked by anxiety".^[145] She told friends that her son started getting upset at middle school because of frequent classroom changes during the day. The movement and noise was too stimulating and made him anxious. At one point his anxiety was so intense that she took him to the emergency room at Danbury Hospital. In April 2005, she moved him to a new school, St. Rose of Lima, where he lasted only eight weeks.^[146]

At age 14, he went to Newtown High School where he was named to the honor roll in 2007.^{[98][147]} Students and teachers who knew him in high school described Lanza as "intelligent but nervous and fidgety". He avoided attracting attention and was uncomfortable socializing. He is not known to have had any close friends in school.^[133] Schoolwork often triggered his underlying sense of hopelessness and by 2008, when he turned 16, he was only going to school occasionally.^[148] The intense anxiety Lanza experienced at the time suggests his autism was exacerbated by the hormonal shifts of adolescence.^[148] He was taken out of high school and home-schooled by his mother and father. He earned a GED.^[149] In 2008 and 2009, he also attended some classes at Western Connecticut State University.^[150]

Developmental and mental health problems

Lanza presented with developmental challenges before the age of three. These included communication and sensory difficulties, socialization delays, and repetitive behaviors. He was seen by the New Hampshire "Birth to Three" intervention program and referred to special education preschool services.^[151] Once at elementary school, he was diagnosed with a sensory-integration disorder.

Adam Lanza	
Born	Adam Peter Lanza April 22, 1992 Exeter, New Hampshire, U.S.
Died	December 14, 2012 (aged 20) Newtown, Connecticut, U.S.
Cause of death	Self-inflicted gunshot wound
Alma mater	Western Connecticut State University
Occupation	None
Parent(s)	Peter Lanza (father) Nancy Lanza (mother)
Motive	Inconclusive
Details	
Date	December 14, 2012 c. 9:35 a.m. – c. 9:40 a.m.
Location(s)	Newtown, Connecticut, U.S.
Target(s)	Students and staff at Sandy Hook Elementary School
Killed	28
Injured	2

Sensory-processing disorder does not have official status by the medical community as a formal diagnosis but is a common characteristic of autism.^[152] His anxiety affected his ability to attend school and in 8th grade he was placed on "homebound" status. This is for children who are too disabled, even with supports and accommodations, to attend school.^[153]

When he was 13, Lanza was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome by a psychiatrist, Paul Fox.^[154] At 14 his parents took him to Yale University's Child Study Center, where he was also diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder. He frequently washed his hands and changed his socks 20 times a day, to the point where his mother did three loads of laundry a day.^[155] He also sometimes went through a box of tissues in a day because he could not touch a doorknob with his bare hand.^[156]

Lanza was treated by Robert King, who recommended extensive support be put in place and prescribed the antidepressant Celexa. He took the medication for three days. His mother Nancy reported: "On the third morning he complained of dizziness. By that afternoon he was disoriented, his speech was disjointed, he couldn't even figure out how to open his cereal box. He was sweating profusely ... it was actually dripping off his hands. He said he couldn't think ... He was practically vegetative".^[157] He never took the medication again.^[158] A report from the Office of the Child Advocate found that

Yale's recommendations for extensive special education supports, ongoing expert consultation, and rigorous therapeutic supports embedded into (Lanza's) daily life went largely unheeded.^[151]

In a 2013 interview, Peter Lanza said he suspected his son might have also suffered from undiagnosed schizophrenia in addition to his other conditions. Lanza said that family members might have missed signs of the onset of schizophrenia and psychotic behavior during his son's adolescence because they mistakenly attributed his odd behavior and increasing isolation to Asperger syndrome.^{[150][142][159][160][161]} Because of concerns that published accounts of Lanza's autism could result in a backlash against others with the condition, autism advocates campaigned to clarify that autism is a brain-related developmental disorder and not a mental illness.^[162] The violence Lanza demonstrated in the shooting is generally not seen in the autistic population^[163] and none of the psychiatrists he saw detected troubling signs of violence in his disposition.^[157]

Lanza appears to have had no contact with mental health providers after 2006. The report from the Office of the Child Advocate stated: "In the course of Lanza's entire life, minimal mental health evaluation and treatment (in relation to his apparent need) was obtained. Of the couple of providers that saw him, only one — the Yale Child Study Center — seemed to appreciate the gravity of (his) presentation, his need for extensive mental health and special education supports, and the critical need for medication to ease his obsessive-compulsive symptoms".^[153]

Investigators found Lanza was fascinated with mass shootings, most notably the Columbine High School massacre and the Northern Illinois University 2008 shooting. Among the clippings found in his room, there was a story from *The New York Times* about a man who shot at schoolchildren in 1891. His computer contained two videos of gunshot suicides, movies that showed school shootings and two pictures of Lanza pointing guns at his own head.^{[164][165]}

This only came to light after Lanza died, because he never permitted others to access his bedroom, including his mother. Lanza had also taped over the windows with black plastic garbage bags to block out sunlight.^[166] He had cut off contact with both his father and brother in the two years before the shooting and at one point communicated with his mother, who lived in the same house, only by email. A document titled "Selfish", about the inherent selfishness of women, was found on Lanza's computer after his death.^{[142][167]}

Final months

According to a report by the Office of the Child Advocate in Connecticut in November 2014, Lanza may have suffered from anorexia as a teenager. The authors wrote that "Anorexia can produce cognitive impairment and it is likely that anorexia combined with an autism spectrum disorder and OCD compounded Lanza's risk for suicide".^[168] They also noted that at the time of his death, Lanza "was anorexic (six feet [180 cm] tall and 12 pounds [51 kg]), to the point of malnutrition and resultant brain damage".^[169]

He was also living in almost total isolation in his room, spending most of his time on the internet playing *World of Warcraft* and other video games. The report stated that he "descended" into a world where his only communication with the outside world was with members of a cyber-community, "a small community of individuals that shared his dark and obsessive interest in mass murder".^[170] Although his mother was present, he only communicated with her via email.

In the weeks before the killings, Lanza's mother was considering moving him to another town.^[171] She planned to purchase a recreational vehicle for him to stay in so that potential purchasers could see the house without disturbing him.^[172] The Report of the Child Advocate stated that:

In the wake of Mrs Lanza's stated plan to move out of Sandy Hook in 2012, and perhaps stimulated by fears of leaving the "comfort zone" of his home, Adam planned and executed the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012.^[173] His severe and deteriorating internalized mental health problems were combined with an atypical preoccupation with violence. Combined with access to deadly weapons, this proved a recipe for mass murder".^[174]

James Knoll, a forensic psychiatrist at SUNY, was consulted about what motivated Lanza to kill. Knoll states that Lanza's final act conveyed a distinct message: "I carry profound hurt — I'll go ballistic and transfer it onto you".^[175]

Responses

President Barack Obama gave a televised address on the day of the shootings, saying, "We're going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this, regardless of the politics."^[176] Obama expressed "enormous sympathy for families that are affected".^{[177][178][179]} He also ordered flags to be flown at half-staff at the White House and other U.S. federal government facilities worldwide in respect of the victims.^[180] On December 16, Obama traveled to Newtown where he met with victims' families and spoke at an interfaith vigil.^[181]



Play media

Obama's address in reaction to the shooting

Dannel Malloy, the Governor of Connecticut, addressed the media the evening of the shootings near a local church holding a vigil for the victims, urging the people of Connecticut to come together and help each other. Malloy said, "Evil visited this community today, and it is too early to speak of recovery, but each parent, each sibling, each member of the family has to understand that Connecticut, we are all in this together, we will do whatever we can to overcome this event, we will get through it."^{[22][182]} Hundreds of mourners, including Malloy, attended vigils in various churches in Newtown.^{[183][184]} On December 17, Malloy called for a statewide moment of silence and church bells to be tolled 26 times at 9:30 a.m. on December 21, exactly one week after the school shooting.^[185]



A makeshift memorial on Berkshire Road in Sandy Hook

Arne Duncan, the U.S. Secretary of Education, said: "... our thanks go out to every teacher, staff member, and first responder who cared for, comforted, and protected children from harm, often at risk to themselves. We will do everything in our power to assist and support the healing and recovery of Newtown."^[186]

The day after the shootings, Lanza's father released a statement:

Our hearts go out to the families and friends who lost loved ones and to all those who were injured. Our family is grieving along with all those who have been affected by this enormous tragedy. No words can truly express how heartbroken we are. We are in a state of disbelief and trying to find whatever answers we can. We too are

asking why. We have cooperated fully with law enforcement and will continue to do so. Like so many of you, we are saddened, but struggling to make sense of what has transpired.^[187]

Leaders from many countries and organizations throughout the world also offered their condolences through the weekend after the shooting.^[188]

President Obama honored the six slain adults posthumously with the 2012 Presidential Citizens Medal on February 15, 2013.^[189] President Obama said "And then when Dawn Hochsprung, and Mary Sherlach, Vicki Soto, Lauren Rousseau, Rachel D'Avino, Anne Marie Murphy -- when they showed up for work at Sandy Hook Elementary on December 14th of last year, they expected a day like any other -- doing what was right for their kids; spent a chilly morning readying classrooms and welcoming young students -- they had no idea that evil was about to strike. And when it did, they could have taken shelter by themselves. They could have focused on their own safety, on their own wellbeing. But they didn't. They gave their lives to protect the precious children in their care. They gave all they had for the most innocent and helpless among us. And that's what we honor today -- the courageous heart, the selfless spirit, the inspiring actions of extraordinary Americans, extraordinary citizens."^[190]

Sandy Hook conspiracy theories have become social phenomena, despite overwhelming contemporary coverage of the incident.^[191]

Gun control

The Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting prompted renewed debate about gun control in the United States, including proposals for making the background-check system universal, and for new federal and state legislation banning the sale and manufacture of certain types of semi-automatic firearms and magazines with more than ten rounds of ammunition.^[192]

Within hours of the shooting, a We the People petition was started asking the White House to "immediately address the issue of gun control through the introduction of legislation in Congress,"^{[193][194]} and the gun control advocacy group the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence reported that an avalanche of donations in the hours after the shooting caused its website to crash.^[195] Five days later, President Obama announced that he would make gun control a "central issue" of his second term,^[196] and he created a gun violence task force, to be headed by Vice President Joe Biden.^[197] On January 16, 2013, Obama signed 23 executive orders and proposed 12 congressional actions regarding gun control.^[198] His proposals included universal background checks on firearms purchases, an assault weapons ban, and a high-capacity magazine ban limiting capacity to 10 cartridges.^{[199][200]}

On December 21, 2012, the National Rifle Association's Wayne LaPierre said gun-free school zones attract killers and that another gun ban would not protect Americans. He called on Congress to appropriate funds to hire armed police officers for every American school and announced that the NRA would create the National School Shield Emergency Response Program to help.^[201] After LaPierre's press conference, the Brady Campaign asked for donations to support its gun control advocacy and asked NRA members "who believe like we do, that we are better than this" to join its campaign.^[202] On January 8, 2013, former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who was shot and injured in a 2011 shooting in Tucson, launched the gun control group Americans for Responsible Solutions with a specific aim of matching or exceeding the fundraising capabilities of the NRA and similar groups.^[203]

On January 16, 2013, New York became the first U.S. state to act after the shooting when it enacted the Secure Ammunition and Firearms Enforcement (SAFE) Act.^[204] On April 3, 2013, Connecticut General Assembly passed a 139-page^[205] major gun-control bill with broad bipartisan support.^[205] Governor Dannel P. Malloy signed the bill on the same day.^[206] The bill requires universal background checks (background checks for all firearm purchases),^[207] a high-capacity magazine ban banning the sale or purchase of ammunition magazines capable of holding more than ten rounds of ammunition like those used in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting,^[208] created the first registry in the United States for dangerous-weapon offenders, and added over 100 types of gun to the state's assault weapons ban.^[205] Pro-gun groups had rallied outside the Capitol to protest prior to the signing^[205] and challenged it in court. Federal judge Alfred Covello ruled in January 2014, to uphold the law.^[209]

On April 4, 2013, Maryland also enacted new restrictions to their existing gun laws.^{[210][211]} Ten other states had passed laws that relaxed gun restrictions.^[212]

Legislation introduced in the first session of 113th Congress included the Assault Weapons Ban of 2013^{[213][214]} and the Manchin-Toomey Amendment to expand background checks on gun purchases.^{[215][216]} Both were defeated in the Senate on April 17, 2013.^[217]

Video games

A renewed debate about the effects of violent video games on young people began soon after the shooting due to news reports suggesting Lanza frequently played violent video games.^{[218][219][220]} Wayne LaPierre, CEO and Executive Vice President of the National Rifle Association, publicly blamed video games for the shooting, specifically targeting the free online game *Kindergarten Killers* created by Gary Short.^[221]

Police found numerous^[222] video games in the basement of Adam Lanza's home, which was used as a gaming area. The final report into the shooting by the State Attorney, published in November 2013, noted that "[Lanza] played video games often, both solo at home and online. They could be described as both violent and non-violent. One person described the shooter as spending the majority of his time playing non-violent video games all day with his favorite at one point being *Super Mario Bros.*"

The report described his liking for *Dance Dance Revolution*, which he played frequently for hours with an acquaintance at a movie theater in Danbury which had a commercial version of the game, and also played the game at home.^[78] *Dance Dance Revolution* is a non-violent exercising game where "the user is required to move their feet rhythmically in response to video cues". According to the Report by the Office of the Child Advocate, Lanza would play the game for hours on end using it as a distraction from his inner turmoil. The report said "he would whip himself into a frenzy, a behavior consistent, possibly, with a need to contain anxiety-producing impulses and thoughts. There were days when he would not do anything else but *Dance Dance Revolution*".^[223]

The final report by the State Attorney did not make a link between video games and the motive for the shooting.^{[78][224]} However, the Report of the Child Advocate said "video game and internet addiction appear to be 'highly comorbid with several other psychiatric disorders' including anxiety depression, and obsessive compulsive challenges".^[225]

Impact on the community

2013

The school was closed indefinitely following the shooting, partially because it remained a crime scene.^[226] Sandy Hook students returned to classes on January 3, 2013, at Chalk Hill Middle School in nearby Monroe at the town's invitation. Chalk Hill at the time was an unused facility, refurbished after the shooting, with desks and equipment brought in from Sandy Hook Elementary. The Chalk Hill school was temporarily renamed "Sandy Hook".^{[227][228][229]} The University of Connecticut created a scholarship for the surviving children of the shootings.^[230]

On January 31, the Newtown school board voted unanimously to ask for police officer presence in all of its elementary schools; previously other schools in the district had such protection, but Sandy Hook had not been one of those.^[231]

On May 10, a task force of twenty-eight appointed members voted to demolish the existing Sandy Hook Elementary school and have a new school built in its place. The \$57 million proposed project was sent to the Newtown Board of Education for approval, to be followed by a public ballot.^{[232][233]} In October 2013, Newtown residents voted 4,504–558 in favor of the proposed demolition and reconstruction, to be funded by \$50 million in state money.^[234] Demolition began on October 25^[235] and was completed in December 2013 at a cost of nearly US\$1.4 million.^[236]



Roses featuring images of victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting

After the town clerk's office was inundated with requests from the media,^[237] Connecticut House of Representatives Republican Dan Carter introduced legislation that would restrict access to public information available under the Freedom of Information Act.^[237] On June 5, both houses (Senate and House of Representatives) of the Connecticut state legislature passed a bill modifying the state's Freedom of Information Act in order to "prevent the release of crime-scene photos and video evidence from the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre and other Connecticut homicides, concerned such records would be spread on the Internet." The bill then went on to Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's desk for his signature. The bill creates a new exemption to the state's Freedom of Information Act. The release of photographs, film, video, digital or other visual images depicting a homicide victim is prevented if such records "could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of the personal privacy of the victim or the victim's surviving family members."^[238]

2014

In March 2014, the Newtown city officials announced the design for the new Sandy Hook Elementary School.^{[239][240]} The only remnant of the original school would be its flagpole.^[239]

A few days later, the Newtown-Sandy Hook Community Foundation released results of a survey with over 1,600 respondents. Among other inquiries, the survey asked residents what should be done with balance of the US\$11 million in donations that had been received since the incident in 2012.^[240] The majority of responses said that money for mental health counseling and other family expenses should be the top priorities. A few responses suggested that some of the money should be used to purchase and tear down the shooter's family home in order to replace it with a park or wildlife sanctuary.^[240] Jennifer Barahona, the foundation's executive director, was quoted as saying, "That's not something we're considering at this time. It's really outside of our scope."^[240]

On October 21, building site preparation work began on the new Sandy Hook Elementary School.^[241] project updates and progress were posted on a dedicated website.^[242] Citing security and privacy reasons and out of respect for the families of victims, no ground breaking ceremony was held.^[241] Construction was scheduled to begin in March 2015 with the school expected to open by December 2016.^[243]

In December, it was announced that the town of Newtown will acquire the property and home of Nancy Lanza at no cost.^[244] The property at 36 Yogananda St. was part of the Lanza estate, to which surviving son Ryan Lanza is the sole heir. Lanza's attorney, Kenneth Gruder, arranged for the transfer through a series of transactions so that probate records would not show the city acquiring the property from the Lanza family. Gruder said the notoriety of the home had made it essentially unsaleable.^[244]

On December 15, 2014, nine of the families (plaintiffs) affected by the shooting filed a lawsuit against the manufacturers (defendants) of the Bushmaster AR-15 style rifle used in the school attack.^[245] Also named in the suit is Camfour, a distributor of firearms, and the now-closed East Windsor store, Riverview Sales, where the gunman's rifle was purchased. In January 2015, attorneys for the Bushmaster company petitioned to have the lawsuit moved to Federal court because, although the shooting took place in Connecticut, they are located in North Carolina.^[246] In February 2015, attorneys representing the victim's families made a motion to move the lawsuit against the manufacturer of the Bushmaster rifle back to state court.^[247] On April 14, 2016 a Connecticut court denied the defendants a motion to summarily dismiss the case,^[248] the defense filed a second motion for dismissal a month later.^[249] On October 14, 2016, the defendants' motion to strike (dismiss) the complaint (lawsuit) was granted. The judge ruled the complaint was not valid per Federal and Connecticut laws. The plaintiffs indicated they would appeal the ruling.^{[250][251]}

2015

On January 21, 2015, Newtown Legislative Council voted unanimously to demolish the house where Nancy and Adam Lanza lived, and to keep the land as open space.^[252] The demolition was completed on March 24, 2015.^[253] Also in January, the families of two of the first-graders who died in the shooting filed a lawsuit against the city of Newtown and the Newtown Board of Education alleging inadequate security at the school.^[246]

In February 2015, the family of one of the victims, Victoria Soto, applied for trademark protection for her name. The reason for this was to help prevent others from misusing Soto's name on social media and for the benefit of the memorial fund set up in her name. The victim's sister, Jillian, stated that fake social media accounts existed using her sister's name to promote conspiracy theories about

the shooting.^[254]

In March, it was announced that parents of children and teachers killed in the shooting had filed lawsuits against the estate of Nancy Lanza. The suits are based on a claim that she did not properly secure her firearms, which allowed her son, a person with mental health issues, to gain access to them. The attorneys representing the families said Lanza is believed to have had homeowners insurance on her home worth more than \$1 million and they are seeking compensation based on that.^[255]

2016

In July 2016, the new Sandy Hook Elementary School was unveiled and parents were shown around the building. The new school is on the site of the building where the shooting took place, which was demolished and rebuilt with a state grant of around \$50 million.^[256]

2018

On April 17, 2018, radio host and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones was sued for defamation by three parents whose children were killed in the shooting. Prior to this, Jones said that the Sandy Hook shooting was "completely fake" and a "giant hoax" perpetrated by opponents of the Second Amendment.^[257] Jones claims he later believed the shooting was real.^[258] On May 23, 2018, six more families sued Jones for his claims.^[259]

Legal action

Nine families (plaintiffs) of the 26 victims of the shooting filed a class action lawsuit in Connecticut against Bushmaster, Remington Arms and others (defendants) seeking "unspecified" damages,^[260] claiming an exemption in the 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act which would normally disallow such a suit.^{[261][262]} The plaintiffs allege that the XM15-E2S is only suitable for military and policing applications, and Bushmaster inappropriately marketed the firearm to civilians.^[262] On April 14, 2016 a Connecticut court denied the defendants a motion to summarily dismiss the case,^[263] with lawyers for the defense filing a second motion for dismissal a month later.^[260] On October 14, 2016, the defendants' motion to strike (dismiss) the complaint (lawsuit) was granted. The judge ruled the complaint was not valid per Federal and Connecticut laws. The plaintiffs indicated they would appeal the ruling.^{[264][265][266][267]}

See also

- List of attacks related to primary schools
- List of school-related attacks
- List of school shootings in the United States
- Gun violence in the United States
- List of rampage killers (school massacres)

Notes

- a. The 2007 Virginia Tech shooting^[15] the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting^[16] and the 2017 Las Vegas shooting were deadlier.^[17]

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 - Sandy Hook Final Report
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