ORA TANNER

ERICA GREENE
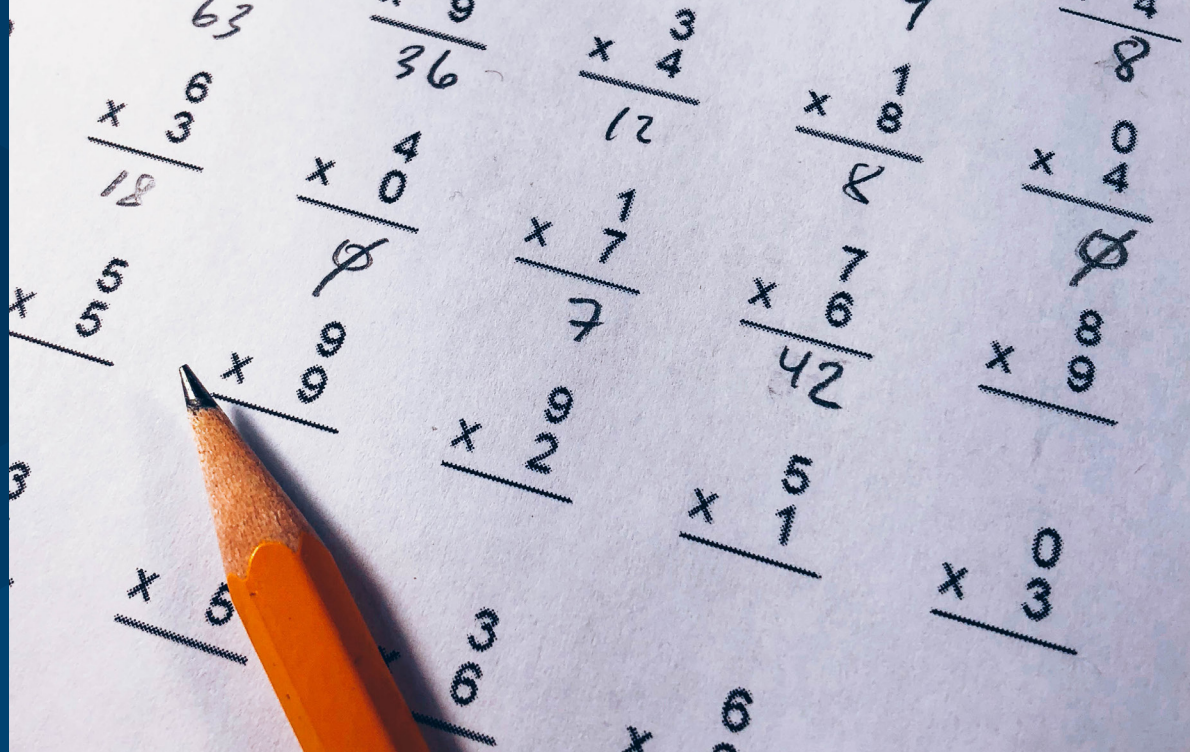
Data-Driven School Safety Systems in Florida

Ensuring accountability, transparency and fairness in the safety of Florida's students and families

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Florida lawmakers legislated a central database called the Florida Schools Safety Portal (FSSP), pulling student information from disparate data sets. The portal intends to flag warning signs in students who may undertake mass school shootings and intervene before they act.

However, preventing school shootings through data is fraught with ethical and technical risks, including a lack of data quality and the potential for biases across multiple levels of predictive algorithms. This project recommends that procedures be established to prevent prejudices against student groups that are disproportionately impacted by digital surveillance technologies and increased policing, and guidelines be developed that will maintain transparency and accountability to the public as to how the FSSP will operate.

THE PROBLEM

The Florida Statewide Threat Assessment Database Workgroup was formed to make recommendations for technical aspects of the FSSP. While the group consists of representatives from several state agencies, it is unclear whether technical experts who create fair systems were included. Without the technical expertise to consider ethical issues, such as feasibility, data quality and algorithmic biases, tools like the FSSP can harm students and families, particularly groups already disproportionately impacted by increased policing and surveillance.

> *How might we provide accountability, transparency, and fairness in the Florida School Safety Portal?*
> *How can we ensure this system keeps students safe and not cause harm?*

THE SOLUTION

Bringing experts into the design, development and deployment of school safety systems can mitigate potential technical problems. Specifically, experts could address the lack of data available to accurately model school shootings. Additionally, they could implement data quality procedures to ensure proposed databases are "cleaned" and made accurate before use. Experts could also set up procedures to prevent possible biases at all stages of predictive algorithms usage, including biases in existing datasets, biases codified into algorithms, and observation biases in threat assessors who view student data. To protect students, policymakers must be transparent with the details of how the FSSP operates and be held accountable to ensure that it will be fair to all students.